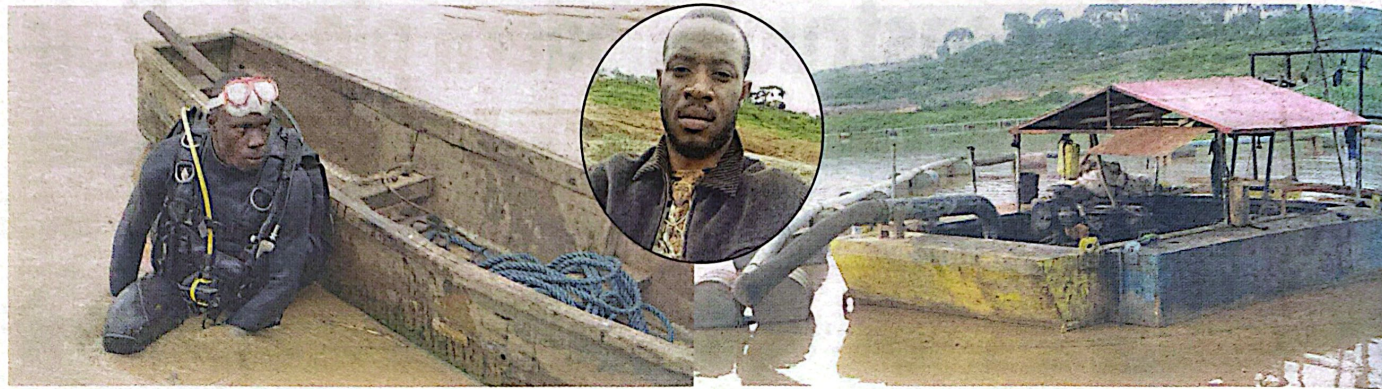




A Police diver ready to search for Kiddi's body. Right: One of the dredgers used in sand-mining Porch group. Inset: Kiddi. Photo by Julius Luwemba

Sand miner drowns while fleeing arrest

WAKISO

By Julius Luwemba

Jesie Kiddi, a manager of the embattled Nigerian sand mining company Porch Group, drowned in one of the water-filled trenches that were dug up during sand mining.

The tragic incident happened on Tuesday at Nkumba-Bwaise village, Katabi town council in Wakiso district. A team of Police officers from Entebbe Police Station, led by the officer in charge of environment, Sgt. James Odongo, had gone to stop the illegal sand mining.

"I was standing at the site, at around 4:00pm with two Nigerians who are in charge of mining, when Odongo came with other Police officers. Odongo was armed with a pistol and handcuffs. He started chasing the two managers, who ran towards the water," narrated John Mulumba, the area chairperson.

He added that one of the site managers only identified as Chinedu, took off his clothes and shoes, and dived into the water towards one of the dredgers which was stationed in the wetland. He managed to swim across and survived.

"Kiddi only took off his shoes and dived into the water but never made it to the dredger. We saw him crying for help, but we could not do much," Mulumba said.

Some residents who were present during the incident said when Odongo saw that the Nigerian had drowned, he and the colleagues got onto their motorcycles and sped off. Residents later recorded statements at Mpala Police Post, but Police marines only came the next day and retrieved the body, which was taken to Mulago mortuary.

The officer in charge of Mpala Police Post, Joseph Sekitoleko, said no charges have been preferred against Odongo.

Odongo refused to comment on the incident, referring this reporter to the public relations office of the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA).

There has been a bitter row between NEMA and Porch Group sand mining company due to violation of the agreed terms.

ON THE GROUND

John Mulumba, the area chairperson, said Kiddi only took off his shoes and dived into the water but never made it to the dredger. We saw him crying for help, but we could not do much



Residents gathered at the mining site to view Kiddi's body after it was retrieved from the water

Entebbe municipal council had earlier petitioned NEMA, claiming that Porch Group was destroying the wetland which was acting as a natural buffer to the solid waste from the nearby dumping site.

Just a day after Entebbe municipality had petitioned NEMA,

the environment body immediately suspended the mining licence it had issued to Porch Group. A few weeks later, the licence was cancelled indefinitely.

According to a letter of October 5 issued by NEMA executive director Dr Tom Okurut and addressed to the

managing director of Porch Group, the wetland user permit issued to the firm had been violated.

Okurut claimed Porch Group had extended their sand mining activities deep into the wetland around Lake Victoria, beyond the permitted 15 acres.