Leaders shy away as charcoal dealers deplete forest reserves

Afraid. Politicians are threatened by residents if they interfere in their charcoal burning business.

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KABERAMAIDO. Some leaders in Kaberamaido District have blamed their colleagues of failing to take action as charcoal dealers destroy forest reserves in the area for fear of losing elections.

Charcoal burners have so far destroyed about 400 hectares of Acogogwen Central Forest Reserve in Obur parish in the district, *Daily Monitor* has established.

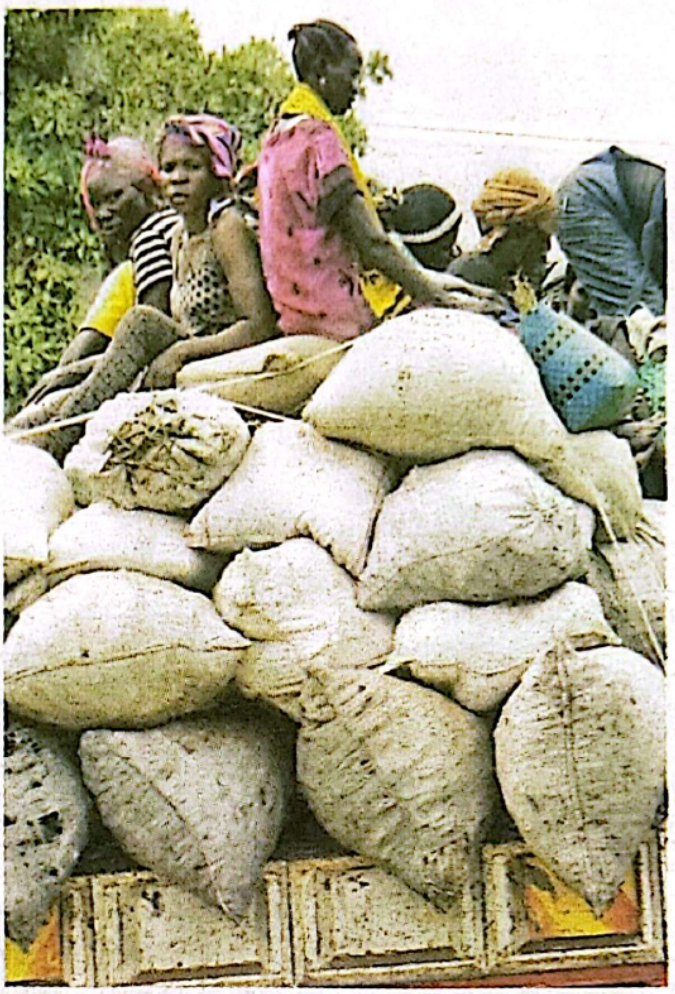
The forest is under the management of National Forest Authority (NFA) and stretches from the upland to the watershed areas connecting to Lake Kyoga.

Mr Joseph Edyau, the LC3 chairperson Bululu Sub-county, confirmed to *Daily Monitor* in a recent interview that communities have taken to threatening their leaders not to interfere as they cut down the forest, vowing not to vote for them if they are denied what they call their only source of livelihood.

"Its true people are threatening us to vote out those critical of the destruction of the environment. Most politicians have now shied away from enforcing the law against tree felling for fear of losing their seats," Mr Edyau said.

He said the environment officers charged with protecting the forests are very few and yet some of those available are too lazy to work.

Kaberamaido District Local



Heavy cost. Traders transport charcoal. Statistics indicate that 95 per cent of households in Uganda still use wood fuels as a main source of energy for cooking. PHOTO BY EDGAR BATTE

department, operating on a Shs600,000 budget allocation per quarter.

"As NFA, we try our best to arrest people destroying the forest, but you receive hundreds of calls from politicians and RDCs directing him to release them," MILTON AGABA, THE MANAGER NFA TESO SUB-REGION

He said charcoal in Acogogwen is ferried on lorries to various destinations by businessmen mostly from Mbale District.

into the creation of Ojalo -Nyare, a trading centre adjacent to Acogogwen forest reserve.

Several vehicles make stop overs at the trading centre to tap in on the lucrative undertaking, which they sell to other districts at a relatively high price.

A sack goes for Shs25,000 although the price is tripled when it is sold in upscale areas outside Kaberamaido.

Other central forest reserves under depletion includes: Atigo in Alwa Sub-county, Anyara, Amanamana.

Mr Milton Agaba, the manager NFA Teso sub-region, also attributes the problem to Kaberamaido's political heads, saying they have allowed the public to cut trees for charcoal production by politicising the matter.

600,000

AMOUNT OF MONEY NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT IN KABERAMAIDO HAS PER QUARTER.

According to Mr Agaba, Kaberamaido is the leading charcoal burning district in Teso, adding that its leaders do not cooperate with NFA to protect the few central forest reserves under the district.

He said NFA has leased at least 200 hectares of Acogogwen Central Forest Reserve to private tree planters and they have been instructed to cut the trees selectively while leaving some indigenous species. This is aimed at raising the new breed of trees for timber.

The district LC5 chairperson, Mr Albert Ejoku, however, denies any political interference, saying the biting poverty among residents has forced people to look for alternative means of survival.

The district forest officer, Mr Mathias Magambo, says they are drafting an ordinance aimed at creating an integrated forest sector.

The ordinance, he says, will facilitate the achievement of sustainable increase in economic, social and environmental

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