

PEOPLE ARE PLANTING TOMATOES WITHIN 200 METRES OF THE LAKE SHORES, WHICH IS IN BREACH OF THE LAW

# 10 arrested in wetland operation

KIRUHURA

By Agnes Nantambi

An environmental operation conducted on the shores of Lake Kacheera in the districts of Rakai, Lyantonde and Kiruhura has left 10 people arrested over encroachment on the lake's shores.

This was during a joint operation between the Environmental Police force, the local governments and headed by the Minister of Water and Environment, Sam Cheptoris.

It was aimed at assessing how much encroachment has been done on Lake Kacheera following a presidential directive to restore its degraded parts.

The President, during his campaigns, singled out Lake Kacheera as being one that had been greatly degraded and directed for its restoration.

"What we have found out is disheartening. The lake has been degraded badly, people are planting tomatoes on the lake shores, yet the law prohibits anyone to cultivate anything within 200 metres. However, everywhere we have gone, this has been violated," Cheptoris said.

"We visited the landing site, they are highly polluted and people are drinking unsafe water. It is unfortunate that our people, despite being sensitised by our technical team, still pollute the lake," he added.

"This is the beginning of a serious programme. I warn all encroachers; your days are numbered. You either leave the lake shores, wetlands and forests alone or we take drastic measures to ensure that you comply with the law," Cheptoris warned.



Water analysts, environmentalists, environmental police and Sam Cheptoris during the operation to clear the shores of Lake Kacheera. Photo by Agnes Nantambi

The minister warned his officers against conniving with encroachers, saying in forestry, a report implicating several officers working in NFA colluding with wrongdoers to destroy forests has been submitted to him.

Richard Musota, the team leader Victoria Water Management Zone, also the principal water officer in the Directorate of Water Resources Management, observed that catchments draining into Lake Victoria have been degraded.

## BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ Nicholas Magara, the regional wetland co-ordinator, said wetlands have been greatly degraded, especially in Kabale, Kisoro, Kanungu and Mbarara.

Victoria Water Management Zone, is responsible for overseeing the catchments that drain water into

lake Victoria by ensuring that the quantity and quality, as well as the allocation of water resources is done harmoniously for the social and economic benefit of every one.

Musota observed that the encroachment had led to poor quality of water due to human activity on the lake or the shores.

The Kiruhura district Police Commander Morrel's Byaruhanga, said the degraders were given several notices to vacate the lakeshores, but

## WHAT PEOPLE SAY

**Sarah Kajura, resident of Kacheera sub-county**

We support the Government in chasing away these people because the wetlands have been our grazing areas. Our animals are dying.

**Ariho Godfrey, resident Ruhukuuru village**

The presence of wetlands brings about rain. Their absence means death for us. We need these operations regularly to evict these encroachers.

**Francis Majuara, a resident Kacheera sub-county**

There is need to have technical staff at every sub-county because currently we are being sensitised.

**Proscovia Nantale Muganga resident Lwanga landing site**

Why are they terrorising only our sub-county?

turned a deaf ear.

"During this operation, many of them ran into the lake, but the few we have arrested with their equipment such as hoes water pumps and knapsprayers will be charged under the environmental laws. This should act as a lesson to others," he said.

The western regional wetland co-ordinator, Nicholas Magara, said western wetlands have been greatly degraded, especially in Kabale, Kisoro, Kanungu and Mbarara.