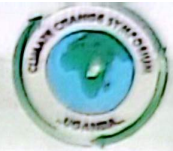
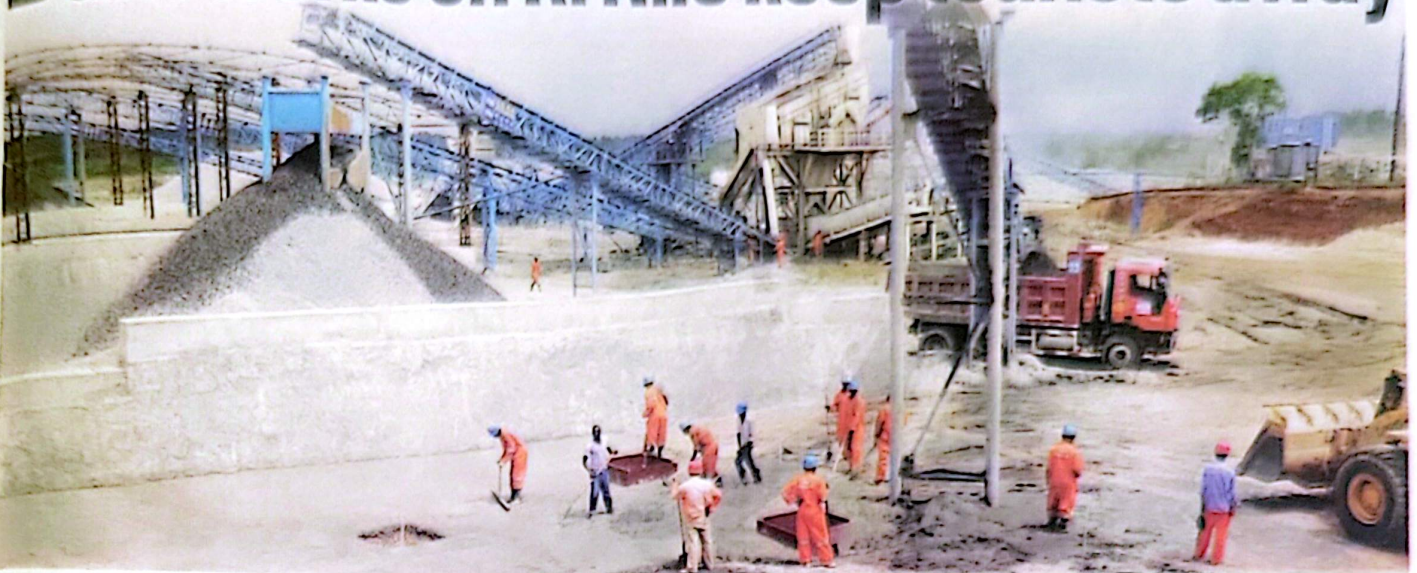


WHY INDUSTRIALISATION? In a country where agriculture employs 68 per cent of the population, President Museveni has pushed for increased power generation to attract industrialisation. Between 1990 and 2005, the natural forest estate outside protected areas reduced by 35 per cent (from 3.46 million hectares in 1990 to 2.3 million hectares in 2005). A 2017 sector report put the current forest cover at only 9 per cent.



Dam works on R. Nile keep tourists away



Cost. The dam construction is set to disrupt activities such as swimming, fishing and transporting tourists at the gushing waters of River Nile. However, government promises to routinely monitor the dam to minimise further impacts, writes **Paul Tajuba**

Tony Owori guides tourists to the massive frothy waves that collide and turn violently at Nile Special Falls, a few kilometres from Kalagala Falls on River Nile for what may be the last time.

Owori and others, who have been doing this business and sailing on the gushing water, unfortunately will have to relocate their trade or quit.

"Our children will not see some of these falls, and we are left with months [to leave]," Owori, 21, says.

Kiyindi and Nile Special Falls where Owori has been running his business, are some of the falls that will be submerged by the ongoing 183mw Isimba Dam under construction in Kayunga District. China International Water and Electric Corporation (CWE) is constructing the dam at a tune of \$500 million (about Shs1.3 trillion).

According to the government, the environment impact assessment report on the effects of the dam on the surrounding areas, the gushing water that creates a clattered sound heard metres away, is no more.

"You cannot expect to eat an omelette and then think of sparing the eggs," the National Environment Management Authority (Nema) executive director, Dr Tom Okurut, says of the dilemma that played out before government violated an agreement between Uganda and the World Bank stopping further construction of dams in near Kalagala Falls Sites (KFS).

"Our government made a decision to provide power to transform Uganda. That is why they took a decision to construct Isimba shortly after Bujagali," Dr Okurut says.

Kalagala Falls Sites was established pursuant to the Indemnity Agreement signed between Uganda and the World Bank, as part of the requirement for the attainment of a loan to finance Bujagali hydropower project in July 2007.

The offset was to ensure protection of its natural habitat, biodiversity and the cultural, spiritual and environment values. The falls on the Nile create a memory experience for tourists.

"Just like the government decided to drill oil in Queen Elizabeth Park, the government knew it would affect tourism, so what we are doing is such that rafters' livelihoods are not lost, but the people of Uganda get electricity," Dr Okurut says.

He adds that those who will be affected will be compensated and the agency will routinely monitor the dam to minimise further impacts.

But was the government's decision to violate the indemnity agreement and construct Isimba Dam in the range of 36.5 kilometres downstream of Bujagali necessary?

In 2011, government commissioned a study premised on verifying the "advantage of hydropower

NOTE

Losses. According to a government Nema Environment Impact Assessment report, Isimba Dam construction will result in loss of the Nile Bank Central Forest Reserve (CFR) by 1.68 per cent (11.9 hectares), loss of rapids and falls by 28.6 per cent (2 rapids) and Island groups by 57.14 per cent (4 Groups Island).

On tourism business. "There will be a loss of 40-50 per cent tourism business traction in the Victoria Nile," the impact assessment report reads in part.

developments on the Victoria Nile between conceivable alternative energy sources". The study, done by Japan International Cooperation Agency, compared geothermal, diesel engine, solar thermal, wind power, biomass and nuclear power and hydropower, with the latter being ranked the best.

After the study, seven candidate hydropower projects; Kalagala, Isimba, Karuma, Oriang, Ayago, Kiba and Murchison were identified and evaluated from various standpoints including "technical, economic, environmental and social ones".

Since then, three hydropower projects -Ayago, Karuma and Isimba- have been selected as prospective hydropower projects.

Mr Moses Otim, the head of environment at the ministry of Energy, says there was limited option of increasing electricity in the country's power without encroaching on some of the beautiful natural resources.

The dream of the country, Mr Otim says, is to have universal power coverage by 2040, something that cannot be attained if such energy potentials are not exploited.

"If you look at Vision 2040, electricity for all, we shall need 41,000 megawatts but we have 900 megawatts," he says.

The country's electricity coverage is currently at 20 per cent. In the Vision 2040, the government has lined up industrial parks, the Standard Gauge Railway and Rural Electrification programme which will all need a lot of power, Mr Otim says.

For instance, he says the ministry projection for the energy demand of Iganga Industry park will be 43mw, Standard Gauge 300mw, Namanywa Industrial park 100mw, Luzira Industrial Park 60mw, Sukulu Phos-

Energy. Construction works at Isimba dam on River Nile. Many businesses are expected to be relocated or collapsed. FILE PHOTO

phates Project, a fertiliser industry in Tororo 200mw, Mukono industry park 90mw and Rural Electrification Project 130mw.

"Karuma and Isimba will be swallowed up and we need to get other energy urgently," Mr Otim says. However, in pursuit for electricity, the environment will be at the losing end.

Mr Otim says had the Energy ministry decided not to construct Isimba in that particular spot, expected power capacity would be 41mw and this would be visible for the country to pay back the construction loan in 15 years.

Impact

"For us to make economic sense of this project, a section of Kalagala offset has to go. There are things we can mitigate on site like monitoring fish diversity, migration patterns," he says.

"The proposal we have is that Kalagala offset areas will be extended to towards Bujagali about 2.5 kilometres, there will be tourism in areas, infrastructure among others."

Isimba Dam construction, according to a government Nema Environment Impact Assessment report, will result into the loss of about 289 hectares, a representative of about 22.6 per cent of the geographical KFS, areas popular with tourists.

The findings indicate that there will be a 56.1 per cent free flowing river length loss (5.7KM) and an increase in the lentic (still water) habitat by 1242 per cent (288.89 hectares)

"[There will be] inundation (flooding) of 4715 per cent of existing wetlands (21.52 hectares) and inundation of 33.75 per cent existing woodlands (2.15 hectares)," Mr James Baamabe, the acting director energy resources in Energy ministry, observes.