

Water crisis hits west as river levels drop

MBARARA

By Abdulkarim Ssengendo

The scorching heat which started early May has left thousands of residents of Mbarara and Isingiro districts in despair as the water levels in River Rwizi, their only source of water, continues to drop.

The most affected are those living in raised areas and raised buildings in the two districts.

Over 400,000 people who only depend on water from National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), which is pumped from River Rwizi are affected. These people live in Mbarara Municipality, Kaberebere and Nyarubungo in Isingiro district, Rugando in Rwampara, Bwizibwera and Bubare sub-county in Kashari South, Rubaya and Biharwe in Mbarara municipality.

Emmanuel Ekanya, the general manager of NWSC Mbarara, said the daily water supply in the mentioned areas has reduced to nine million litres from the previous 13 million litres.

He is worried that the problem could worsen if there is no immediate intervention. He said water levels in all the other sources that pour water into the river have also dwindled.

"We have not had rain since the beginning of May. Because of this, the water level in River Rwizi, which is the only source of water for people here, has gone down. We are not able to supply enough water to our customers," Ekanya said.

The shortage is also affecting livestock farmers, especially those in Kashari, who largely depend on piped water for their animals.

Haji Abas Kazibwe, the LC3 chairman of Kakoba division, said people in his area have



Exposed pipes as a result of the falling water levels. Photo by Abdulkarim Ssengendo

The problem is linked to encroachers who diverted the river to create space for cultivation

resorted to fetching water at night.

Ekanya explained that some of their abstraction pipes are now hanging over the river and have to be sunk deeper in order to extract water.

He is, however, worried that with the water levels continuing to drop, they might not have enough to extract because they cannot sink the pipes any

further. Most boreholes and springs have also dried up.

"The situation is going to be worse. This river is the only source of water. The dry spell has started very early and it is likely to go on for three months," Ekanya warned.

Possible causes

Ekanya attributed the reduction of the water levels in

River Rwizi to the destruction of wetlands and other water sources that used to feed it.

"People have continued to cultivate close to the riverbanks and to carry out commercial activities, such as brick laying, which have a negative impact on the survival of the river," he said.

Last week, Jeconius Musingwire, the western region NEMA focal person, revealed that over 200 wetlands in south western Uganda face extinction if encroachers are not stopped.

According to Musingwire, more than half of these wetlands have totally been degraded. They are in the districts of Mbarara, Ntungamo, Ibanda,

Mitooma, Kanungu, Kisoro, Kabale, Kiruhura, Isingiro and Kabale.

He noted that River Rwizi, has been diverted from its original path to create space for cultivation.

Mbarara district chairman Capt. J.B. Tumusiime Bamuturaki and the resident district commissioner, Capt. Martha Asiimwe, have declared war on wetland encroachers.

"We must resort to using an iron hand if we are to realise the full restoration of wetlands. In Mbarara, we gave out several warnings, but people are adamant and have continued destroying

VOX POPS

Tobius Rwengabo
The issue of water is becoming a big problem in our town.

We need strict measures to eliminate all those killing River Rwizi, which is our only water source.



Felly Bebuuze

It is high time NEMA and the Government got serious. All water sources that pour into River

Rwizi are drying up, but nothing is being done. Only the poor are being chased away from the wetlands yet the very rich who own chunks of land in wetlands are not touched.



wetlands," Tumusiime said.

What is being done

Ekanya said they are planning to sink boreholes to supplement piped water.

He said they have started works at Kabale water works, to desilt the water and carry out damming using sand bags to get some reasonable amount of water.

According to Ekanya, a project to pull water from River Kagera will soon start.

He advised people to use the little water they get sparingly and those who are able to install overhead tanks at their residences to do so.