

NFA to use beekeeping to protect Mabira forest

BUIKWE

By Jeff Andrew Lule

As part of the strategies to protect the Mabira Central Forest Reserve, the National Forestry Authority (NFA), in partnership with Nature and Livelihoods (NL), have introduced beekeeping among other income-generating ventures to residents adjacent to the forest.

The move comes at time the Government is in the process of opening forest boundaries to avoid encroachment on the reserve.

The initiative is funded by the Makate Foundation from the US through NL under the \$160,000 (about sh580m) three-year project.

NL is a non-profit organisation working to sustain biodiversity using approaches that integrate livelihood improvement with nature conservation.

While handing over the beehives in Waswa and Mabango villages in Buikwe district, the NL director, Dr William Olupot, said they first identified the most affected areas of the forest and engaged the adjacent communities.

A total of 60 beehives with bees were given out.

"After a thorough study, we realised beekeeping was the best option to help these people to raise income without destroying the forest in a bid to get timber and charcoal for sale," he noted.

The groups were taken through two weeks training in beekeeping. The initiative is to be supervised by NFA.

Olupot noted that Mabira is



Olupot (right) handing over some of the machines to be used in beekeeping

a big water catchment area for Lake Victoria and hosts many distinct species, ranging from fauna and flora that must be conserved for eco-tourism.

A joint water and environment sector review report released last year showed that 4,755 hectares of Mabira forest were degraded or understocked while only 1,500 hectares of those were under restoration.

Mabira is a rainforest measuring 300sqkm, stretching through Mukono, Buikwe and Kayunga districts. It has been protected as Mabira Forest Reserve since 1932.

Olupot cited the rare Mangabey monkey, which

BETWEEN THE LINES

■ Mabira is a rainforest measuring 300sqkm, stretching through Mukono, Buikwe and Kayunga districts. Last year's environment report also noted that the country's forest cover had reduced from 11% to 9% in just two years. The report highlighted deforestation as the key challenge to Uganda's forest cover.

was only discovered in Mabira forest, saying it needs to be protected, among others, for

tourism purposes. "As NL, we believe in approaches that can improve the livelihoods of those living around the forests and promote conservation at community level," Olupot said. "If you do not provide solutions to the problems of the communities, you can never solve the problem," he added.

They have also introduced other ventures to the communities, such as poultry, piggery and trained several groups in conservation.

The forest sector manager, Michael Oja, said they still face the problem of illegal timber cutting in different parts.



Oja and Olupot showing one of the bamboo trees introduced into Mabira forest in conjunction with the Kingdom of Buganda. Photos by Jeff Lule

"Many of these communities are poor. That is why we decided to partner with NL to introduce projects that can help them raise income without destroying trees," he said.

NFA, Buganda partnership
Oja disclosed that NFA had a memorandum of understanding with the Buganda Kingdom to promote a culture of conservation through promoting bamboo planting.

"Buganda gave us 1.1ha of land to demonstrate bamboo planting in the community

for people to take it up as a business. We realised bamboo is a better alternative to trees," he noted.

Oja explained that bamboo can be used for many ventures such as furniture, decoration and is resistant to termites and other common pests.

Forest cover drops

Last year's environment report noted that the country's forest cover had reduced from 11% to 9% in just two years.

The report also went ahead to highlight deforestation as the key challenge to Uganda's forest cover.