Pests invade Sango Bay oil palm nursery

KYOTERA

By Dismus Buregyeya

Domestic and Nile rats have invaded the Sango Bay oil palm nucleus nursery in Kakuuto sub-county, Kyotera district, causing substantial damage to over one million seedlings.

Last year, elephants from neighbouring forest reserves along the Uganda-Tanzania border also raided the nursery, destroying close to 500 seedlings.

The rodents, originating from Programme Affected Persons (PAPS) homes situated within e nursery area, have posed a persistent threat to the oil palm programme and its investors, who are now calling for the demolition of the PAPS houses as a permanent solution.

Aron Kyabba, the palm nursery manager, confirmed that the team is implementing scientific control measures, including ring-fencing and spraying, to reduce damage.

"The rats raid and eat the nurseries and palm plants, damaging the stems. We need effective control to reduce losses. Ring-fencing and spraying countermeasures are being applied," Kyabba said during a field visit by the National Oil Palm Project (NOPP) Steering Committee on March 4.

Stakeholders, including OPP, agriculture ministry, Kyotera district authorities, security agencies, the programme co-operative trust, and out growers, have urged the Government to clear pending PAPS compensation.

Their evacuation would allow programme investors to safely remove the rats and rodents sheltering in the homes.

PROGRESS DESPITE THE PESTS

Kyotera RDC Appollo Mugume noted that encroachment had delayed the programme by two years.

Despite these challenges, the Sango Bay Oil Palm programme has established one of the world's largest nucleus nursery beds, creating over 20,000 job opportunities.

The agriculture ministry oversees 22,000 hectares allocated for oil palm investment by President Yoweri Museveni and the Cabinet.

Mwesigwa said the project has already employed about 200 casual labourers on the nursery bed and plans to create more jobs under seedling transplant and outgrower schemes.

"We are employing people, especially women and youth attached to the nursery project. Ultimately, the programme will provide 20,000 jobs," he said, adding that the project spends over sh50m per month on labour.

So far, the project has registered nearly 2,000 out-growers from 14 sub-counties in Kyotera and neighbouring Rakai district.

Plans are also underway to establish two oil palm mills in the Greater Masaka region to complement the Kalangala BIDCO project, requiring additional land.

Government regained possession of the Sango Bay estate land through a re-entry process initiated in 2011 after previous investors abandoned partial developments, including pine and eucalyptus plantations and overgrown sugarcane fields.

Local leaders and residents have welcomed the Government's renewed oil palm initiative.

Agnes Namusitwa, the Kyotera district council vice-chairperson, described the programme as a blessing for job creation and local revenue generation.

Bigada sub-county councillor Gertrude Nalule said she had prepared nine acres for the out-grower scheme.

"For me, I have already prepared nine acres for the out-growers' scheme. It's an opportunity I must utilise to become wealthy," she said, urging President Yoweri Museveni to support women through Savings and Credit Co-operatives in oil palm growing.

PHOTO BY DISMUS BUREGYEYA



National Oil Palm Project steering committee with a project out-grower during a field tour in Kakuuto

COMPENSATION

Last month, Government released a partial sh10b to compensate Programme Affected Persons (PAPS), with at least 700 individuals listed to benefit. About 600 PAPS have received partial payment so far. Programme liaison manager Ignatius Mwesigwa emphasised the urgency of settling outstanding payments.

Some PAPS still lack valid National ID cards, death certificates, or bank accounts, while others have relocated. Government had earmarked sh16.2b for PAPS compensation, managed jointly by the agriculture ministry and the lands ministry. Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja, who visited the project, assured that all beneficiaries would eventually be compensated.







