



Affected. A boy stands near a wetland last week. Most wetlands in Otuke have been encroached upon by the locals due to population explosion. PHOTO BY BILL OKETCH

Otuke suffers heat wave as locals destroy environment

Effects. According to experts, the rate of climate change will be more rapid in future than it was previously due to high environmental degradation.

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OTUKE. Leaders in Otuke District have raised a red flag over the rising temperatures and strong dusty winds as a result of degradation of the environment.

The rise in temperatures and changes in the rainfall pattern is compounded by encroachment on wetlands and deforestation.

As a result of the destruction caused by the locals to the surrounding, Otuke District's agricultural production and productivity have been affected.

"Climate change is real," Mr Joshua Mabiya, the chief adminis-

trative officer of Otuke District acknowledges.

"All these drastic climatic changes that we are really experiencing and suffering from as a district is as a result of excessive cutting of trees. We are losing trees at a faster rate than we are getting new trees, and this is largely because of charcoal burning," he notes.

He highlighted the increasing vulnerabilities related to environmental degradation, climate variability, climate change, geological hazards and competition for scarce resources, points to a future where disasters could increasingly threaten 105,617 people living in Otuke.

The 2010 National Policy for Disaster Preparedness and Management policy statement puts the number of people affected by drought in Uganda in 2008 to 750,000, further indicating that landslides killed about 250 others in 2010 with more than 8,500 affected.

ISSUES

Protected. In Uganda, about 15,000 square kilometres or seven per cent of the country's dry land was protected forest reserves. Roughly 250 square kilometres of protected reserves were tree farms. In Otuke, forest covers are almost no more due to charcoal burning.

Price. A bag of charcoal is sold at Shs25,000 in the area.

Around that same period, floods affected more than 350,000 people.

As temperatures throughout East Africa rise, precipitation is expected to increase, along with the frequency and intensity of droughts, floods and heat waves.

Scientists predict that the rate of climate change will be more rapid than previously expected.

In Otuke, climate change is undeniably a big issue.

When Care International, a global humanitarian organisation, conducted a Climate Vulnerability Capacity Assessment in 2011, the community observed changes in their rainfall pattern.

The tool was administered to persons aged 12 to 15 years, 16 years to 24 years; 25 years to 45 years (the reproductive age bracket) and researchers held separate focused groups discussion. The locals told researchers that their indigenous knowledge on forecasting sometimes does not work well and even when they rely on scientific data sometimes, is not very accurate.

"Interestingly, those aged 65 years and above were able to tell us that when they were younger (30 plus years back), it was a different season. They would even predict when rain

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briefly

Parents advised

DOKOLO. Mr John Baptist Okello-Okello, the former LCS chairman of Dokolo District, has urged parents to ensure that children are well looked after during holidays. Mr Okello-Okello on Saturday said the practice of not giving children on vacation things to do breeds laziness and negative attitude towards work. He also urged parents to take good care of their children this festive season noting defilers and rapists often take advantage of such times to abuse children. [Frank Jean Okot]

Children accuse father

LIRA. The children of former Serere district police commander, Mr Jimmy Anthony Oyuku, have accused their father of selling family residential house and hence leaving them stranded. Mr Oyuku's eldest son, Lt Caesar Oyuku, on Saturday said their father sold the house without consulting them: "We agree our father acquired land, but we are saying he should give us some portion of the land so that we can build some structure that we can call home," he said. However, Mr Oyuku agreed he sold the area because by the time he bought the land his children were not yet born. [Patrick Ebong]

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Voices

"Interestingly, those aged 65 years and above were able to tell us that when they were younger (30 plus years back), it was a different season. They would even predict when rain would come back and they would predetermine how long it would last, and definitely what crops to grow but now, it is a different case,"

**MONICA ANGUPARU,
PROGRAMMES
DIRECTOR AT CARE
INTERNATIONAL**

"Previously, it used to be about two to three months but now, dry season extends to five months, and it is so devastating because the scorching sun takes away all that is in the garden if not yet ready for harvesting. This makes life very difficult,"

**JASPER OWANI, A
FARMER**

would come back and they would predetermine how long it would last, and definitely what crops to grow but now, it is a different case," says Ms Monica Anguparu, a programmes director in charge of disaster risk reduction with Care International.

Farmers say the seasons for planting have changed. Sometimes the rain comes but it is heavier at a short time and with negative consequences such as floods and when dry season sets in, it takes much longer.

"Previously, it used to be about two to three months but now, dry season extends to five months, and it is so devastating because the scorching sun takes away all that is in the garden if not yet ready for harvesting. This makes life very difficult," says a farmer, Mr Jasper Owani.

Encroachment

The Otuke Resident District Commissioner, Mr John Wafula, says: "Now that it is hot, people don't realise that this hot environment is brought about because of degradation of environment and encroachment on wetlands."

Mr Patrick Onyanga, the Otuke District forestry officer, explains that climate change is brought about by destruction caused to the environment.

In Uganda, about 15,000 square kilometres or seven per cent of the country's dry land was protected forest reserves. Roughly 250 square kilometres of protected reserves were tree farms. In Otuke, forest covers are almost no more due to charcoal burning.

Otuke District councilor Beatrice Anyait, says the locals engage in charcoal burning because they want quick money for buying alcohol. A bag of charcoal is sold at Shs25,000 in the area.

"Even if you give them two or three years to cut the trees, you will never get any change in those households," she says.

Mr Bosco Odongo Obote, the Otuke LC5 chairman, observes that changes in the district's rainfall have greatly affected food production in the