



Climate change: Environmental degradation key challenge in 2018

KAROLI SSEMOGERERE > TALKING POINT

The slow death of Lake Victoria and rapidly reducing tropical rainforest biomass are the big stories of 2017. For the first time in years, the environment has begun rebelling against sustained abuse.

In a widely circulated news report in September, BBC reported warning signs in the world's second largest freshwater lake. The UPDF-Fisheries enforced ban on illegal fishing is several months old, but fishing stocks are yet to recover. The ban was implemented in the hope that fishing stocks would recover.

According to the BBC report, Lake Victoria would soon join the ranks of lakes without fish. It is also possible that the lake could join the leagues of poisoned waterways if the rate of dumping of effluents and untreated waste in the lake continues.

The Great Lakes region in the United States and Canada for years absorbed dangerous metallic compounds, PCBs wrecked havoc on female fertility, mental health turning upstate New York into a zombie region from which it has never fully recovered. The Rhineland region hosted one of the world's longest rivers the Rhine. For years the story was just one teaspoon of water from the river was enough to make you sick.

The rapidly growing seas of floating dead algae Mubiru seem not to have startled the public yet, but they are the most visible signs that the lake is slowly starting to wear a semi-permanent blanket that is killing all forms of life underneath it. For years, this algae, "mubiru" was seasonal blowing from Entebbe, Port Bell/Luzira and later Mawokota to the Ssese

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isles. It's now becoming a permanent feature in the islands' bays, which are important breeding grounds for fish. The introduction of fish farming aquaculture is a mitigation, but needs closer environmental scrutiny.

Fish farming is potentially lucrative given that the future of protein is fast growing protein, fish are far more efficient converters of food into mass than say cows, which burn most of their dry food intake from gravity in basic operations like sitting and standing up.

The story of rainforests is the same. Rainforests are a natural habitat for flora and fauna and important factories for rain. Aerial surveys over Mabira reveal continuing encroachment, these forests occupy just 1.6 per cent of land area.

Absent a financial settlement to compensate forest owners to maintain the remaining forests and a ban on charcoal, the remaining forests will completely disappear. Northern Uganda with its valuable timbers is the hardest hit. The land inquiry this year had heart-breaking stories of forests completely disappearing in the central and western regions.

The agricultural sector, which is 90 per cent rain-fed, has continued to thrive in the face of more unpredictable rains. Western Uganda suffered a prolonged dry spell in the summer, which has reduced the growing period of important cash crops like coffee.

Matooke, a major cashcrop in the west, now requires costly investment in mulching to retain moisture yet the same mulch quickly becomes a den of deadly pests and other organisms capable of causing great losses.

Christians associate Christmas with snow, frost or precipitation. The old Christians of the last century always refer to "akakuba ka Christmas"; the Christmas light drizzles which bowled the red earth as people went to Church to visit Christ in the manger.

This year the rains are sporadic but the hot spells are already on hand to announce a viciously dry January. Unheard before temperatures hit the country last year. Gulu, Ntungamo, Kasese, Soroti were all baking in record temperatures in the high 30s. In Kampala, the mercury hit 32-33C.

The effect of these higher temperatures felt over a period of time are going to reduce acreage sharply of fast growing legumes, cereals and even some perennial crops like coffee. As we sing Christmas, this special time of the year should be used to reflect on our stewardship of God's creation and what we are going to pass on to the next generation.

Merry Christmas.

Mr Ssemogerere is an Attorney-at-Law and an Advocate. kssemoge@gmail.com

29/35 8th Street, P.O. Box 12141
Kampala, Uganda

Phones 0312301100/1
Fax 041232369

Email editorial@ug.nationmedia.com
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