

# Fort Portal garbage chokes River Mpanga

**Concern.** The waste obstructs water flow and sometimes causes flooding.

BY ALEX ASHABA  
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

**KABAROLE.** Leaders in Fort Portal Municipality, Kabarole District, are grappling with heaps of garbage dumped in River Mpanga, which is obstructing water flow and causing flooding.

River Mpanga originates from Karagura hills in the Rwenzori Mountains and snakes through Fort Portal Town, Bunyangabu, Kyenjojo and Kamwenge districts before it empties into Lake George.

However, some residents dump their garbage directly into the river and when it rains, the waste material is carried downstream. On several occasions, the river has burst its banks. The situation is further compounded by many houses that have been constructed on the river banks.

Ms Robinah Birungi, a resident of Kagote A in West Division, says sometimes the water pumped from the river is contaminated, putting them at risk of contracting water borne diseases.

"The river is not protected from

**"The river is not protected from encroachment because as you can see it, people bathe from one side of the river and others wash their clothes, which is unhygienic,"** ROBINAH BIRUNGI, RESIDENT

encroachment because as you can see it, people bathe from one side of the river and others wash their clothes, which is unhygienic," Ms Birungi says.

For long, municipal leaders have devised measures of protecting the river from dumping but with no positive results.

In October 2016, the authorities banned the use of polythene bags in town as one way of protecting the river from garbage dumping but the polythene bags are still in use.

The town clerk, Mr Leonard Tumusiime, says the ban on polythene bags has not been effective because visitors and non-residents fail to dump them in garbage collecting points.



**Pollution.** Garbage floating on River Mpanga in Fort Portal Town recently. PHOTO BY ALEX ASHABA

"It is good to have a resolution as council banning the use of polythene bags in town but the problem is that the people who come to town with them dump them everywhere and make the town dirty," says Mr Tumusiime.

A wire mesh that had been erected at the Mpanga Bridge in Fort Portal Town to block plastic waste from sailing downstream was stolen by scrap dealers.

#### Municipal efforts

In August 2017, the municipal council resolved to stop all activities near the river such as car washing, vending and brick laying but seven months later, the same activities are still taking place on the river banks.

The National Water Sewerage Cooperation (NSWC), which pumps water from the river to more than 7,000 residents in municipality for domestic use, say pollution has

greatly affected quality of water from the river. The NWSC area manager, Mr Denis Muramuzi, says it is now very expensive for them to filter the polluted water from River Mpanga because they use more chemicals than before.

"Between 2010 and 2016, the chemical consumption at NWSC Fort Portal plant increased by 3.1 times, from 0.0120 units of water to 0.0375 units of water treated," Mr

Muramuzi says. "And it is all due to the increasing pollution levels on the river, which serves as our source of raw water supplying Fort Portal and Kabarole District, hence putting in measures to minimise pollution of our water source will help lower the cost of water treatment," he adds.

#### Campaign

The leaders are now devising ways of cleaning up the river since it is the source of water for residents and animals.

In 2016, the municipal council launched a campaign dubbed, "Keep Fort Portal Town Clean" so as to acquire tourism city status.

The campaign involves mobilising residents on the first Monday of every month to clean the town using rudimentary tools such as slashers to cut bushes around the river.

The mayor, the Rev Willy Kintu Muhanga, says the cleanup exercise has registered considerable success.

"We have demolished all illegal structures on River Mpanga banks at Mpanga market and what is left is to embark on cleaning the river to ensure that all dumped materials are removed," Rev Muhanga says. The council also instituted a group of five people responsible for cleaning River Mpanga weekly.

However, he adds that the cleanup campaign is being hampered by low revenue.

"If our local revenue increases, we are planning to have River Mpanga cleaned and the town at large because our town is known to be clean," Rev Muhanga said.

The mayor says in a bid to save the river, each division will contribute Shs150,000 every month for the cleanup exercise. Mr Steven Ruyonga, the councillor East Division, says: "If the river is not cleaned and maintained in good condition, the people around it may contract diseases."

#### IMPORTANCE

The recent Water Resource Assessment report shows that the water quality in River Mpanga downstream is heavily impacted by discharge of organic waste water. Further downstream, the water quality improves (due to the purification capacity of Kibale Forest). However in Kamwenge, the turbidity is one of the highest in the country. The river plays a key role in the existence and conservation of Kibale National Park.