Locals join hands to save Gulu street trees

Eco talk. Gulu municipality officials are felling the trees to pave way for road expansion, a thing that has irked environmentalists and a section of locals.

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GULU. A section of Gulu District councillors, locals and environmentalists have intensified their fight to save street trees within the municipality from being felled.

Currently, Gulu Municipal authorities are felling street trees at Pece War Memorial Stadium in Pece Division to pave way for construction of a road.

The road is among 14 others to be constructed with funds from World Bank at Shs44 billion.

More than 20 mvule trees planted in the area during the colonial era have been earmarked for cutting.

But environmentalists have opposed the move saying it will affect the beauty of the municipality and the eco-system.

Ms Francesca Amony, the LC5 Councillor for Pece Division, told *Daily Monitor* in an interview last Monday that the decision to have the trees cut down was not discussed with the district councillors.

"We are surprised that municipal authorities are cutting down the trees minus informing us the councillors of Pece Division. These trees have given the town its beauty and saved the eco-system for more than 70 years, they cannot just be brought down like that," Ms Amony said.

She added: "It is not worth cutting down these historical trees for the road. The road plans can be revised to save the trees."

The district local council Speaker, Mr John Okwonga, said he was equally unaware of the exercise. He said they would investigate the matter.



No more. Some of the trees that have been cut in Pece Division, Gulu Municipality. PHOTO BY JULIUS OCUNGI

20

Trees. The mvule trees planted in the area during the colonial era have been earmarked for cutting.

"Those who planted these trees knew their importance, these trees are important for our environment and beautification. Instead of cutting them, we should plant more because our environment is under threat of degradation," Mr Okwonga said.

He also questioned where the proceeds from selling the timbers are being taken.

Mr Okwonga said the council plans to pass a bylaw that will stop the move.

Mr Moses Otema, a conservationist and resident of Pece Division, said the trees have been a habitat for various species of birds for many years, among them Marabou stork.

"I believe the municipal authorities should consider narrowing the road to save these trees. They are rare species that take many years to grow," Mr Otema said.

But the municipality mayor, Mr George Labeja, said development cannot be impeded and distorted in the name of saving trees that can be planted.

He added that they would proceed with felling them.

He said the municipal environmental officer had made assessment and found it necessary and environmentally "friendly" to cut down the trees.

"As Gulu municipality, we need development, and among them good roads. The trees being felled will be replaced by planting new ones. We care about the environment too," Mr Labeja said.

Last year, pressure from environmentalists helped save more than 40 trees that were earmarked for cutting to pave way for constructing the Gulu- Juba highway road.

Gulu District is already making strides in an effort to protect the environment from threats of desertification.

For the last two years, the district has been experiencing water shortages which environmentalists attribute to felling of trees for commercial charcoal burning and wetland encroachment.

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