

Tom Okello Obong appointed National Forestry Authority boss

By Gerald Tenywa

The Minister of Water and Environment, Sam Cheptoris, has appointed Tom Okello Obong as the new executive director of the National Forestry Authority (NFA) on a three-year contract.

"I have got the letter from the minister," Okello said, when contacted by *New Vision* last evening, adding that the appointment takes immediate effect.

Okello emerged the winner in the final interviews conducted on March 14. He was followed by Apophia Atukunda while Tom Sengalama came third, according to sources who



New NFA boss Tom Okello

spoke to *New Vision* on condition of anonymity.

Two months ago, Gershom Onyango, the chairperson of the NFA board of trustees,

BETWEEN THE LINES

Okello will take over as the substantive executive director from Michael Mugisa, whose term of six years expired on January 31.

submitted the three names to Cheptoris.

Okello was vetted by security agencies and State House, giving him a clean bill to lead the forestry body.

He will take over as the substantive executive director of the body from Michael Mugisa, whose term of six

years expired on January 31.

Paul Buyera has been the acting executive director for NFA for the last four months.

After five years of reform, NFA was set up in 2004 to manage 506 central forest reserves countrywide.

The reserves include rich natural forests and big forest plantations. The reforms in the forestry policy and law also led to creation of two institutions managing forests.

The two bodies are the District Forestry Services (DFS) under local government and the Forestry Sector Support Department (FSSD) that is responsible for regulation of DFS and NFA.

First 100 days in office

Okello said his first task would be to stop illegal logging in forests. He also pointed out that the second task would be to identify stakeholders and build partnerships in order to bring all the actors together.

He said there was a need to revise the forestry law, because the current law on forestry was weak and could not deter illegal activities.

Challenges

The forest sector has inadequate manpower and financial constraints with FSSD and DIS being worst hit. The partnership between NFA and donors has also

declined following governance challenges.

In 1990, the forest cover was estimated at 24% of Uganda's total land area.

Currently, the forest cover is estimated to be less than 9% something that is leading to the increase in prices of timber, charcoal and silting of rivers and lakes.

While NFA manages only 15% of the forest estate in Uganda, the escalating deforestation is blamed on NFA.

UWA manages 15% of the forests under forest reserves while the rest of the forests are under Local Government reserves and private land.