

Districts register decline in revenue from landing sites

MASAKA

By Dismus Buregyeya

Leaders from greater Masaka districts and the fishing community have been asked to appreciate the operations against illegal fishing for better revenue collections.

The call was made by the Masaka deputy resident district commissioner, Joseph Ssekasamba, while responding to the concerns from district leaders over the operations, which have paralysed revenue collections at the affected landing sites.

This was during a two-day residential training workshop for district leaders from Kyotera, Masaka, Kalangala, Rakai and Kalungu, organised by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and the Information and National Guidance Directorate at Garden Courts in Masaka on Tuesday.

The Masaka district secretary for production, Haji Jamil Miwanda, had earlier said operations by the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) marine unit, especially at the landing sites, had severely affected revenue from fishing, plunging the district into a financial crisis.

"The majority of the landing sites in Masaka where we used to collect revenue were closed by the UPDF marine operations. We are financially limping," he said.

Miwanda said efforts to re-open the affected landing sites have not been fruitful. However, Ssekasamba said the affected landing sites were operating illegally.

"Those landing sites did not have toilets and other related sanitation requirements for the fishing business," he said.

Ssekasamba said some of the closed landing sites were serving as hideouts for criminals. He said many criminals and other illegal migrants from DR Congo, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya and Sudan were residing at the landing sites.

He said the use of illegal fishing gear at key breeding grounds for fish was rampant in fishing areas which are not gazetted. He said the people who were displaced by the UPDF operations should relocate to the authorised fishing landing sites.

Ssekasamba said the operation of fishermen and boats would be restricted to make the fishing business productive.



Fishermen who were evicted from fishing sites. Inset are the impounded vehicles

ON THE GROUND

■ The Masaka district secretary for production, Haji Jamil Miwanda, had earlier said operations by the Uganda People's Defence Forces marine unit, especially at the landing sites, had severely affected revenue from fishing, plunging the district into a financial crisis.

"We do not want the lake to be overwhelmed by fishermen and boats, we must guard against the depletion of fish stocks," he said.

Ssekasamba said the revenue from the affected landing sites in Masaka and neighbouring districts would improve after the trade in immature fish is eliminated. He said so far, two fish processing factories which had closed due to the scarcity of fish, had re-opened.

He said the markets which were promoting trade in immature fish, especially in the DR Congo had been isolated as a result of the UPDF's operations against illegal fishing.

The UPDF marine sector commander for southwestern region, Capt. Isaa Ewaga, said Masaka region was cited among the key routes for immature fish to the DR Congo market.

Over 100 vehicles transporting fish to DR Congo were impounded by the UPDF in Masaka and close to 200 culprits were arrested and prosecuted in Masaka Chief Magistrates' Court.

Dick Lukyamuzi, a political assistant of the Bukoto East MP, Florence Namayanja, said the impounded vehicles should be disposed of through a court process.

"We have information that the condition of the vehicles is deteriorating due to misuse and efforts by their owners to get them have been futile," he said.

Lukyamuzi said it was not proper for the UPDF to close landing sites and displace thousands of people without prior notice and an alternative plan.

He said the UPDF should have discussed with the district authorities and communities before the operation.

However, Ssekasamba said the operations officers were only answerable to the President.

"This is a directive from President Museveni for the UPDF marines to end the trade in immature fish. Even

the impounded vehicles will soon be auctioned," he said.

New Vision also learnt that some of the vehicle owners had received them after making written apologies and giving assurances that their vehicles would not be used for activities related to the illegal fish trade.

However, Capt. Ewaga said some of the vehicles whose ownership was being questioned were still being held.

The director of information and national guidance, Simon Mayende, said it was a crime for vehicles to be found transporting immature fish and illegal fishing gear and the auction is among the penalties provided for by the law.

He called for more sensitisation programmes for the communities and other stakeholders in the fishing sector, especially regarding the illegalities.

Mayende said the districts and Government would benefit from the fishing sector after the operations. He urged stakeholders in the fishing sector and the districts to embrace the initiative to eliminate trade in immature fish and use of illegal gear.

He said marine patrols on Lake Victoria should continue to