Mukono police officers on the spot over illegal sand mining

Issue. District authorities say the police officers have failed to enforce a directive issued on illegal sand mining activities in the area.

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MUKONO. Top police officers in Mukono District risk facing disciplinary action over alleged failure to halt illegal sand mining in Wasinga village, Mpunge Sub-county.

The police officers are accused of allegedly defying a directive by the Mukono Resident District Commissioner, Rtd Maj David Matovu, to curb illegal sand mining in Wasinga village.

This has created suspicion as the police officers are alleged to be conniving with the illegal miners.

The uncontrolled sand mining in the area has since caused the diversion of Mukono-Nsanja-Mpunge-Kiziru road thus inconveniencing motorists.

The activity, according to the district council, threatens the existence of wetlands in the area.



Controversial. Miners load sand on a truck at a mining site in Wasinga village, Mpunge Sub-county in Mukono District. PHOTO BY JESSICA SABANO

Obligation

According to Kampala Metropolitan police spokesperson Emilian Kayima, the officers were supposed to implement the directive since it was in public interest and their failure to do so is a sign of indiscipline.

"The Police Professional Standards Unit will investigate this matter and punish those found culpable," Mr Kayima said by telephone on Wednesday.

Mr Kayima added: "The road is a public good and individual interests should not supersede those of the public."

In his letter dated May 20, addressed to the Mukono District police commander, Mr Rogers Sseguya, which *Daily Monitor* has seen, Maj Matovu asked the police to stop the illegal sand mining in the area.

"I did my part and if they [police] failed to execute their mandate for one reason or another, they should be held responsible," Mr Matovu said during an interview recently.

But Mr Sseguya defended his officers in a June 21 letter, saying they carried out the necessary action and arrested illegal sand miners.

" ... in an operation that police carried out with the district chairperson, Mr Andrew Ssenyonga, materials used in sand mining were confiscated and the culprits charged with unlawful removal and interference with the planned feeder road," Mr Sseguya said.

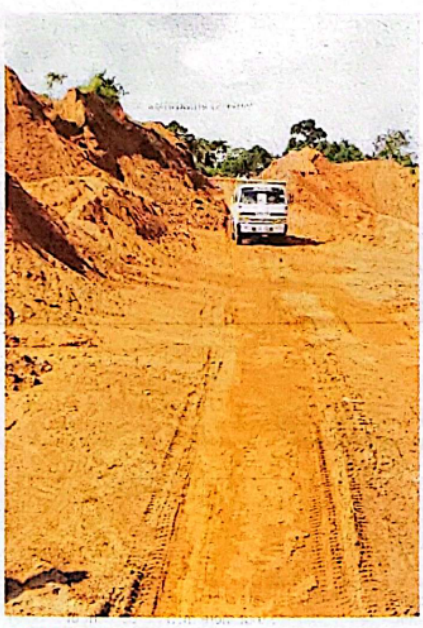
However, he said the complainant in this matter, whom he did not name, failed to record a statement over unknown reasons.

Petition

Being dissatisfied with the way Mr Sseguya had handled the matter, Mr Matovu later petitioned the commander of Kampala Metropolitan Police, Mr Frank Mwesigwa, seeking his personal intervention.

He said the issue of illegal sand mining in the area had reached an alarming level and caused wrangles among district leaders.

"I wish to draw your attention to the above matter which has made the entire district a laughing stock. I request your personal intervention in a rather outstanding and complicated matter which is beyond my capacity to resolve," Mr Matovu said in his July 27 letter.



Affected. Part of the Mukono-Nsanja-Mpunge-Kiziru road that has been diverted due to the illegal sand mining in the area. PHOTO BY JESSICA SABANO

KEY ISSUES

Defiance. The police officers are accused of allegedly defying a directive by the Mukono Resident District Commissioner, Rtd Maj David Matovu, to curb illegal sand mining from Wasinga village. safety. The councillors also recommended that Mengo Rainbow Primary School, which is located near the sand mining site, be relocated to prevent the pupils from falling into the deep holes that have been dug by miners.

According to the district speaker, Mr Emmanuel Mbonye, for a road to be diverted, council has to first pass a resolution pronouncing itself on the matter, but this was not the case.

Diversion of road

Mr Mbonye said by 2012, the Mukono-Nsanja-Mpunge-Kiziru road had no diversion, but when excavation of sand was extended to areas closer to the road, there was a diversion made without council's approval.

Recently, the district councillors called for investigations into allegations that some top district officials are engaged in illegal sand mining in Wasinga village.

The councillors also recommended that Mengo Rainbow Primary School, which is located near the sand mining site, be relocated to prevent the pupils from falling into the deep holes created by sand miners.

Currently, sand mining has become a lucrative business especially in peri-urban areas due to the high demand in the construction sector where it is used to make concrete.

Dangers

Environmentalists have continuously raised concern over the increasing sand mining activities in major swamps across the country, warning that excessive excavation of sand in wetlands will spark off serious ecological disasters.

According to environmental experts, excessive sand mining is a threat to bridges, river banks and nearby structures.

It also affects the adjoining groundwater system resulting into the destruction of aquatic habitat.

Mr Collins Oloya, the commissioner for wetlands, said the environment and natural resources department, which is responsible for wetlands conservation in the country, is understaffed and poorly funded-something that has affected their operations.

Voices



"I wish to draw your attention to the above matter which has made the entire district a laughing stock. I request your personal intervention in a rather outstanding and complicated matter which is beyond my capacity to resolve,"

RTD MAJ DAVID MATOVU, MUKONO RESIDENT DISTRICT COMMISSIONER

"The Police Professional Standards Unit will investigate this matter and punish those found culpable,"

EMILIAN KAYIMA, KAMPALA METROPOLITAN POLICE SPOKESPERSON

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