



On duty. One of the sand mining sites operated by Porch Group at at Bukolwa village, Nkumba Parish in Katabi Town Council, Entebbe Municipality. PHOTO BY JOSEPH KIGGUNDU

Sand mining firm defies Nema directive

Defiant. Nema had stopped Porch Group from mining sand at the shores of Lake Victoria, accusing the company of violating environmental guidelines.

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AMOUNT OF MONEY THAT WAKISO DISTRICT LOSES ANNUALLY IN ILLEGAL SAND MINING IN THE AREA, ACCORDING TO DISTRICT AUTHORITIES

BACKGROUND

Booming business. Wakiso, one of Uganda's fastest growing districts, is one of the areas where excessive sand mining is taking place due to the booming construction industry, making it a lucrative business, especially in peri-urban areas due to the swiftly growing construction sector where it is used to make concrete.

Environmentalists have recently 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 a serious ecological disaster.

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ENTEBBE: A sand mining firm, Porch Group, at Bukolwa village, Nkumba Parish in Katabi Town Council, Entebbe Municipality, has defied National Environment Management Authority's (Nema) directive halting their activities.

According to a letter dated October 5, issued by Nema executive director Dr Tom Okurut addressed to the managing director of Porch Group, the wetland user permit issued to the firm had been violated.

The accusations

Porch Group, according to Dr Okurut, had extended their sand mining activities deep into the wetland around Lake Victoria beyond the permitted 15 acres as conditioned in the permit number NEMA -/RP/LA/WT/511, which was issued to the company on September 28, 2016.

Porch Group was granted a two-year permit to carry out sand mining at the shores of Lake Victoria on an area of 15 acres in Katabi Sub-county in Wakiso District. The permit was supposed to expire on September

28, 2018.

When *Daily Monitor* visited the site this week, it was discovered that workers of Porch Group were still operating and trucks were seen parked at the site, loading sand. The site is adjacent to Entebbe Municipality garbage dumping site.

Mr John Patrick Balenzi, of the company directors, denied receiving Nema notice stopping their activities. He said they would contact Nema and engage them on the matter.

"We have not received a notice regarding the withdraw of our operation permit. If they (Nema) have withdrawn it, it is really bad because we have invested a lot of money into this business," he said.

He added: "They should let us know what wrong we have done and since there are financial implications involved, it means losses to our company."

When contacted, the Nema spokesperson, Ms Naomi Karekaho, said both letters - one suspending sand extraction activities of Porch

Group and another recalling their permit, were sent to the company and described their denial as a ploy to continue with the illegal activities.

"We wrote to them long time ago and asked them to stop their activities and I am surprised that they are denying receiving our letters," Ms Karekaho said.

According to Nema, the sand mining company was, among other things, supposed to ensure that there is no extension of the sand mining activities into the wetland in the neighbourhood beyond the permitted area of 15 acres, mitigate any adverse impacts of sand mining, including restoring the degraded wetlands, put in place a sand deposition yard for draining the sand before loading it onto trucks, and ensure that there is no sale of

wet sand for transportation on all feeder and major access roads. However, according to Nema, all these guidelines have not been followed.

This is the second sand mining firm in the same area to be stopped by Nema after discovering their activities were dangerous to the environment.

Others rejected

Recently, Nema also rejected a proposal by a Chinese company to excavate sand on the shores of Lake Victoria at Kawuku in Nkumba Parish, Wakiso District.

The company, Mango Tree Group Ltd, has since last year been on the spot for allegedly engaging in illegal sand mining activities in the area. The company directors had sought official clearance from Nema to conduct commercial sand mining at three sites on the lake shores at Nkumba, next to Kimi Island in Mukono District and near Kavejanja-Buus Island, Wakiso District.

But Nema insisted that the company's activities have a negative impact on the eco-system on the lake shores, which would consequently affect the communities around the Entebbe peninsula.

Mr Emmanuel Kintu, a resident of Kasanja village in Wakiso District, said the investor had scooped all the sand on the shores rendering it dangerous for residents to walk or swim in such areas.

What they say...

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BALENZI, ONE OF THE
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NAOMI
KAREKAHO, NEMA
SPOKESPERSON