



Masaka RDC Joe Walusimbi (in blue checked shirt), Masaka DPC Henry Kintu (2nd right), and other officials inspect a forest reserve in Masaka District recently. PHOTO BY ALI MAMBULE

Masaka farmers, charcoal burners destroy forests

Illegality. The forest cover in Masaka District has been degraded by loggers, charcoal burners and farmers.

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MASAKA. When Caesar Ntale, a pineapple grower in Buwunga Sub-county, Masaka District realised the need for more land to expand his pineapple business, he sent brokers to identify more land in neighbouring villages for hire, where they found 20 acres of what they thought was free land at Bwami village.

Mr Ntale together with his other colleagues, approached the village chairperson, Mr Noordin Kagenda, who reportedly claimed ownership. They hired it from him at Shs8m for a period of five years.

"I paid Shs4.4m in cash before my boys could start clearing the land but they were stopped by a group of residents who called the police that arrested them," Mr Ntale narrated

to a village meeting convened by Masaka Resident District Commissioner (RDC), Joe Walusimbi recently. Also in attendance was area district police commander Henry Kintu and officials from Masaka District forestry department, National Forestry Authority (NFA) and Buganda Kingdom.

"I gave money to the LC1 chairperson who gave me permission to start work and I was supposed to clear the balance of Sh3.6m after surveying the land to confirm the boundaries," Mr Ntale told the meeting.

The 4,000-acre-forest land in question belongs to NFA and is part of Jubiya Forest Reserve.

When contacted, Mr Kagenda declined to comment about his alleged involvement in parcelling out forest land.

"Who is this? I don't know you," Mr Kagenda responded when our reporters contacted him before hanging up.

These are just a few cases of the many people who have encroached on forest reserves along Lake Victoria

shores in Bukakata Sub-county to carry out various activities, mostly cultivation of crops.

Mr Evans Katushaba, the area forest supervisor, stunned the meeting when he said he was not aware of encroachers on the forest reserve.

"I am not aware that the local leaders here had hired that forest reserve to pineapple growers since nobody consulted me over the same issue," Mr Katushaba said.

But the Masaka District Internal Security Officer, Mr Andrew Kandiho, rejected Mr Katushaba's claim, blaming him for the encroachment on the forest land.

He said: It's his responsibility to know since he is the area forest supervisor."

Both Mr Katushaba and Mr Ntale were arrested on RDC's orders.

"We cannot leave either of them (Katushaba and Ntale) behind because there is enough evidence to prove that they have massively encroached on the forest reserves,"

briefly

Expectant mothers in fear

MASAKA. Masaka Hospital is overwhelmed by the influx of expectant mothers, amid shortage of midwives, raising concern that it could fuel maternal mortality. Dr Senyondo Gonzaga, the head of the gynecology and obstetrics department, stresses that the hospital has only 20 midwives allocated to the department are not enough to effectively handle the large number of mothers registered at the facility. He also revealed that high influx of expectant mothers has piled pressure on shortage of space for post-delivery mothers. [Moses Muwulya]

Road users appeal to Unra

LUWEERO. Road users in Luweero District have appealed to the Uganda National Roads Authority (Unra) to replace vandalised road signs on the Kampala-Gulu highway. The drivers and boda boda riders, while attending a road user sensitisation meeting organised by Unra together with the traffic police in Luweero last week, claimed that the absence of road signs encourages road abuse hence cause accidents. Ms Sarah Namuhukire, a Unra official, said they are in the process of replacing all the vandalised road signs but called for vigilance among the users. [Dan Wandera]

ISSUES

The forest cover in Masaka District is 34,822 hectares.

30 per cent of the forest cover has been degraded by loggers for timber, charcoal burning and as well as getting land for growing pineapples and cabbages.

Encroachers have also cleared chunks of forest land to create space for construction of houses.

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Mr Kandiho said.

Mr Walusimbi said similar operations aimed at saving the remaining forests will be conducted in other parts of the district to evict all encroachers.

"Pineapple growing is everywhere on people's lips and that it is the major activity that is being carried out by those who destroy those forests," he said.

Mr Ntale denied knowing encroaching on the forest land to plant pineapples.

"We approached people who claimed to be land owners and later verified from area local leaders whether the land we want belongs to that person. It was the same procedure that I followed to get into the land at Bwami Village which I later learnt that it belongs to NFA," Mr Ntale said.

Mr Walusimbi asked local leaders to desist from giving away forest land for their own selfish interests.

"Whoever claims to have bought part of the forest land should ask for a refund now because we are soon destroying all what they have put up," Mr Walusimbi stressed.

Ms Mildred Nafuna, the NFA manager for Masaka, Rakai and Sembabule districts, said she had put a ban on issuing tree felling licences in the three districts.

"Whoever is cutting trees or carrying out farming in the gazetted forest reserves is doing it illegally. Their crops are going to be destroyed," Ms Nafuna warned.

She also denied allegations that NFA staff collude with unscrupulous people to destroy forests in the area.

According to a recent report by Food and Agricultural Organisation, 200,000 hectares are destroyed every year up from 92,000 hectares two decades ago.

The report says the rate at which forests are disappearing is faster than the rate at which the trees are being planted, which is estimated at only 7,000 hectares annually.

"I am not aware that the local leaders here had hired that forest reserve to pineapple growers since nobody consulted me over the same issue,"
EVANS KATUSHABA,
AREA FOREST
SUPERVISOR.

"Whoever claims to have bought part of the forest land should ask for a refund now because we are soon destroying all what they have put up," JOE WALUSIMBI, MASAKA RESIDENT DISTRICT COMMISSIONER.

briefly

Town clerk asked to resign

MASAKA. Masaka Municipal councillors have asked the town clerk to resign. Mr Muhamad Nfitumukiza, the Nyendo-Ssenyange Division town clerk is accused of failing to implement council decisions.

Parents urged

MITYANA. Mityana Diocese Bishop Samuel Stephen Kazir has urged parents of Bukoma Sub-county to...