

MUBENDE

By Jeff Andrew Lule
and Agnes Nantambi

Forest encroachers turn into conservationists

Kalwana sub-county in Mubende district has got a new breath of life after recovering its greenery. Both Namwasa Central Forest Reserve and a privately owned land in the area are now a meld of eucalyptus and pine trees.

The Mityana and Mubende sector manager of the National Forestry Authority (NFA), Alex Tumwesigye, said the forest reserve had been degraded by the same encroachers who are now spearheading the tree planting campaign in the area.

"About 60% of the reserve was encroached on and degraded for 12 years. NFA found it costly to restore the forest because of the encroachers and, thus, gave a licence to New Forest Company to invest in tree planting. That is why we have a new green environment today," Tumwesigye explained.

He made the remarks during a tour of the restored area, which was attended by New Forest Company officials; the Minister of Water and Environment, Sam Cheptoris; the chief executive officer of NFA, Michael Mugisha; other NFA officials and district leaders.

New Forest Company was given 5,267 hectares in 2005. Of that, 1,158 hectares has eucalyptus trees on it, while pine trees cover 4,109 hectares.

The chief executive officer of the New Forest Company, Patrick Mugenyi, said by



Cheptoris planting a tree at Forest High School. The school was built by New Forest Company, which was licensed to plant trees in Namwasa Central Forest Reserve in Mubende district. Photo by Jeff Andrew Lule

the time they embarked on planting trees in 2005, a big chunk of the forest reserve had been extensively degraded and encroached on.

"We first trained and

sensitised the residents about the importance of trees. They were hostile, but we supported them to resettle after eviction," he said.

Mugenyi said some of the

encroachers were also given jobs in the sawmill factory and in the forest reserve as New Forest Company workers to plant and look after the trees, while others started planting

their own trees.

The factory now employs 136 permanent staff and 400-800 casual staff. The company has also supported the community to build Forest High School in

Kikwandwa, which has over 500 students, a primary school in Netulidde and a clinic.

Mugenyi said they intend to start harvesting trees after 15 years, when they are mature enough.

They have supported Mubende-Bukakiiikama Savings and Credit Co-operative Society (SACCOS), which was formed by former encroachers to start various agriculture ventures, such as growing coffee and maize. The company has also supported them in establishing a maize mill.

The chairman of the SACCOS, William Bakashisha, said the company gave them sh1.2b, which they used to secure another piece of land to relocate to.

"We bought 573 hectares at sh600m and 453 households were resettled. We invested the rest of the money in other projects and used the returns to secure land for the 449 people who had not yet been resettled," Bakashisha noted.

Cheptoris thanked the forestry company for restoring the forest and creating jobs for the people.

The company also has branches at Luwunga in Kiboga and Kirinya in Bugiri districts, where they have planted trees.

"This is a bright spot in the dark world of degradation. We have been battling encroachers, but what we have seen has given us new hope that we can reverse the situation," Cheptoris said.