

Government to evict wetland encroachers, spend sh100b

By Nelson Kiya

Environmental activists have called on the Government to protect Uganda's water from further pollution and waste.

They said Uganda's water from lakes, rivers, swamps and other water pools was under attack from mainly man-led activities.

The activists made the appeal during a function to launch the water and environment week (March 19 to March 23) yesterday, under the theme, "Water and environment a catalyst for achieving a middle income status by 2020". The function was hosted at the water resource directorate in Entebbe.

The team leader energy and environment at the United Nations Development Programme, Onesmus Muhwezi, challenged Uganda to address the concern of more water being polluted and wasted.

He cited activities such as clearing the water catchment areas like forests, swamps, sand mining in lakes and rivers.

Activities of sand mining have mostly been witnessed in and around Lake Victoria. This has resulted in outcry from sections of leaders and activists.

He called for increased protection of water bodies, forests and wetlands, so as to reduce the cost of purifying the water in the country.

The state minister for water, Ronald Kibuule, revealed that the water tables of Uganda had dwindled from 78% to



Ssekandi (centre) and Ronald Kibuule (left), visit an exhibition stall during the first Uganda Water and Environment Week at the directorate of water resources in Entebbe. Photo by Julius Luwemba

approximately 43%.

Dr Fred Muhumuza, an economist, warned that the dwindle in Uganda's water tables presented a great economic challenge as the country pursued the middle income status.

He said the increased economic activities in the areas of modern agriculture, manufacturing, value addition, mining, among others, would need more water for production.

Kibuule also said the Government would evict thousands of encroachers who have reclaimed wetlands

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ The World Water Day, celebrated on March 22, focuses attention on the importance of universal access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in developing countries.

for human activities. He said the Government was embarking on the campaign to re-establish wetlands.

Kibuule said the UN, through its environment-friendly organs, had committed \$24,000 (about sh88b) to support Uganda's adoption to environmental and climate protocols demand.

He said other partners had committed over sh21b to support Uganda's resilience to promote and protect the environment.

Kibuule said the restoration of the wetlands would involve promotion of wetlands-friendly activities such as ponds fish farming.

The Vice-President, Kiwanuka Ssekandi, said water and environment remained Uganda's key life and promoting development.

Ssekandi said: "Access to clean and safe water and improved sanitation facilities are pre-requisites to a healthy population and, therefore, have direct impact on the quality of life and productivity of the population."

He said Uganda needs more water for industries, hydropower generation, agriculture, marine transport, fisheries, waste discharge, tourism, and environmental conservation.

Ssekandi said the Government, with support from its partners, was committed to ensuring accessibility to clean, quality and quantity water to both rural and urban areas.

He said Uganda had made significant gains in the provision of water to the population at 72% in urban areas, while at 68% in rural areas.

The week from March 19 to March 23 will raise awareness on water and environment resources, celebrate 25 years of adoption of integrated water resource management in Uganda and the launch of a water resource institute in Entebbe.

There will be showcasing of innovations, technologies and developments in water and environment sector among other.