

NEMA opposes sand mining

On January 10, Wakiso councilors led by the speaker, Simon Nsubuga, vowed to pass a resolution by January 30, endorsing sand mining activities in Lake Victoria to Mango Tree, a company backed by some Chinese investors.

This came on the heels of protests by the district chairperson, Matiya Lwanga Swanika, who argues that the resolution by the councillors needs to consider technical guidance from National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), which in September 2016, had objected to the proposal of sand mining in the lake due to ecological reasons.

NEMA, in a statement explained that the move would have adverse effects on the lake as scooping out sand from river/lake beds amounts to disturbance and is not only prohibited by the law but also leads to a quicker flow of water, leading to lower water levels and a decline in water quality and supply to surrounding ecosystems. Mango Tree had hitherto been granted an approval restricted to ship building.

According to the speaker, the councillors' motivation was 'not to lose revenue and jobs' while the district chairperson insists environmental concerns should be addressed.

This standoff in the public sphere is drawing in commentators and politicians alike on which should be considered a priority; poverty alleviation through pursuing economic needs on one side and the need for environmental sustainability on the other.

Current statistics reveal a decline of forest



cover from 24% of the total land cover in 1990 to 9% in 2017.

Wetlands were in 2016 estimated at 10.9% of the country's land cover, down from 15.6% in 1994. The encroachment on the banks and catchments of River Rwizi for mainly subsistence agriculture is threatening the source of water for many in western Uganda.

At the peak of the fishing industry in 2005, more than 20 factories were operating and according to available statistics, Uganda exported about 36,000 metric tonnes worth \$143m. By 2014, volumes had declined to about 14,000 metric tonnes worth about \$88m.

With less than 10 factories operating and reportedly below capacity, thousands of people lost their jobs. Indeed the unsustainable and indiscriminate fishing put so much pressure on the sector to crisis proportions that President Museveni had to institute a special Fisheries Protection Unit

(FPU) in January last year to fight illegal fishing on all major lakes in the country. Reports indicate that fish stocks are being restored.

NEMA working with the National Forestry Authority (NFA) is engaging communities in the Kidepo landscape (North eastern Uganda) in the protection and conservation of the Shea Butter tree (*Vitellaria Paradoxa*) a local indigenous tree whose nuts are used in the production of Shea butter, one of the most sought after ingredient in beauty products. Also sought for its nutritious oil and other medicinal purposes, the tree, which takes about 20 years to mature, is threatened with extinction from charcoal burning. The communities are realising that the value of the tree keeps on increasing as they mature.

Sustainable development takes into account the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The well-being of these three components (environment, society and the economy) is intertwined, not separate.

In this development model, human development goals are attained while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend.

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The writer is a senior information, education and communications officer of NEMA