

Waterborne diseases on the rise as water crisis hits Kakumiro

Worrying. According to medical statistics at Mpasana Health Centre II, at least two typhoid and dysentery cases are recorded daily at the facility.

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KAKUMIRO. A water crisis has hit Kakumiro District, making it hard for residents to access safe and clean water.

The situation has forced residents to consume unsafe water, hence exposing their lives to preventable illnesses such as typhoid and dysentery, which are now on the rise.

The acute water shortage has been attributed to the continuous unchecked encroachment and total destruction of wetlands in the district. This has led to the drying up of water sources, including ponds and boreholes.

The most affected area is Mpasana Sub-county where residents have destroyed most of the wetlands to establish farms, settlement, fish ponds and sand excavation.

Mr Gerald Minane, a resident of Bujaaja village in Mpasana Sub-county, said their only water pond, which was dug by the sub-county administration last year, has dried up because of destruction of a nearby swamp.

Mr Minane and several other residents have to trek a distance of more than five kilometres to fetch water from Mpongo swamp, which is on the Kakumiro-Kyankwanzi district border.

Ms Saverina Mwiza, another resident, said the drying up of the village ponds is forcing hundreds of residents to use the only functioning borehole in the area.



Non-functional. A man walks past a disfunctional borehole in Bujaaja village, Mpasana Sub-county recently. PHOTO BY ALEX TUMUHIMBISE.

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SAVERINA MWIZA, RESIDENT OF BUJAJA VILLAGE IN MPASANA SUB-COUNTY

"Sometimes we don't bathe or cook because of the water shortage. One has to stand for at least two hours in the queue at the borehole before getting water. We want the government to intervene," Ms Mwiza said.

She added that several boreholes in the area are no longer functioning.

According to medical statistics at Mpasana Health Centre

II, at least two typhoid and dysentery cases are recorded daily at the facility.

All these preventable illnesses are being attributed to the continuous use of unsafe water by residents.

Mr Obed Tushabowe, the Kakumiro District general purpose committee chairperson, who is also the district councillor for Mpasana Sub-county, told *Daily Monitor* in an interview early this week that they are planning to dig more boreholes in the area and rehabilitate the dysfunctional ones this financial year.

Ms Grace Bataringaya, the Kakumiro District vice chair-

THE LAW ON WETLANDS

Section 36 (1) of the 1995 National Environment Act states that no person shall reclaim or drain any wetland; construct, place, alter, extend, disturb any wetland by drilling or channel water in a manner that has or is likely to have adverse effect on the wetland. However, people can apply for wetland user permits through the National Environment Management Authority.

person, said there is need to provide piped water to people in areas prone to water shortage like Mpasana Sub-county.

"We visited health centres in the areas with the district health officer and found out that people are commonly suffering from typhoid, which is associated with the use of water contaminated with faeces," Ms Bataringaya said.

Early this year, the district authorities passed a resolution to have all wetland encroachers evicted but this is yet to be done.

Futile fight

Mr Godfrey Barugahare, the Kakumiro District secretary for production and natural resources, said the fight against wetland encroachment has hit a dead end as there are some people who are selling pieces of land in wetlands.

The problem, according to Mr Barugahare, has been cited in areas of Kisiita, Katikaara and Mpasana sub-counties in Bugangaizi East Constituency.

"The vice of selling land in wetlands is being fuelled by local council leaders who are signing documents of selling land even when they know they are doing it illegally," Barugahare said.

The most affected wetlands are Kabale, Muringa, Mpongo, Nkusi, Kamusere, Mabengere and Mwitambo.