

Entebbe residents protest dumping of garbage near L. Victoria

BY JACINTA M KANNYANGE

WAKISO. At Nkumba Dumping Site in Katabi Town Council, Entebbe Municipality, the air feels thick and oppressive, carrying a stench that settles deep into your nostrils.

Even before the heaps of garbage come into view, the smell announces itself sharp, sour, and unmistakably putrid.

It is a blend of rotting food, damp waste, burnt plastic, and stagnant water, all fused into a single, suffocating odour.

Under the sun, the piles of garbage slowly decompose, releasing waves of heat that intensify the smell. Flies swarm in dark clusters.

Occasionally, a breeze sweeps through, but instead of relief, it spreads the stench further into nearby homes and pathways.

The odour clings stubbornly in the air, making it hard to breathe. It seeps into clothing and lingers long after you leave, refusing to be forgotten.

For those who live nearby, it has become an unavoidable part of daily life. People walk quickly past, covering their noses.

This has now forced them to raise an alarm over what they describe as illegal dumping of garbage at Katana waste site.

The Nkumba dumpsite, which started receiving waste after the collapse of Kiteezi Landfill in Kampala, was reportedly meant to operate temporarily. However, residents say garbage trucks continue to dump waste at the site months

later, raising fears about environmental contamination, especially because the dumping area lies close to Lake Victoria.

For many locals, daily life has changed drastically since the dumping began.

"We used to have fresh air, but now it is hard to even breathe," says Mr Jamal Besweri, a resident.

He adds that garbage trucks come between 9pm and 4am, adding that locals no longer sleep because of the noise and the smell caused by the prolonged illegal dumping of garbage.

According to residents, the site initially received waste from Nabugabo before other waste disposal companies joined in. Previously, only trucks from Entebbe Municipality dumped waste there, reportedly two to three trucks per day. But since the crisis at Kiteezi, the number of trucks arriving at the site has increased.

The impact is being felt across several nearby zones, including Bukolwa Central, Kavundira, and Apollo Zone.

Rainy weather

Ms Judith Zimbe Nabikindu, another resident living close to the dumpsite, says the stench worsens during rainy weather.

"When it rains, the smell becomes too much. Flies hover around our homes and it is difficult to maintain hygiene. Sometimes when the garbage is levelled, the smell spreads even further," she says.

Residents also fear that contaminated runoff (leachate) from the dumpsite may be flowing directly into Lake Victoria.

"They dump garbage and extend it towards the lake, when it rains, the dirty water flows straight into Lake Victoria," Besweri says.

NEMA, ACTIVISTS SPEAK

The Executive Director of Nema, Mr Akankwasha Barirega, said Entebbe Municipality still uses Nkumba site as their land fill even though they received a stop notice from Nema as the overall regulator.

He adds that the location of the waste management facility is totally wrong. "It's near a sensitive ecosystem and the municipality must find alternative," he says.

Mr Henry Mbowe, a climate change activist, blames the failure to enact policies that could guide the proper management of waste at the different dumpsites.

"There is lack of proper guidance in the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and other entities on how waste should be managed," he says.

Mr Denis Yub, a human rights activist and sociopolitical commentator, says the government ought to learn from what happened in Kiteezi. He expressed concern over leachate polluting the lake.

He says because of the pollution concerns, many households have stopped using nearby water sources and now rely on piped water from the National Water and Sewerage Corporation or harvested rainwater.

Accordingly, the situation has also affected property values in the area. Several residents say they have been forced to sell their land at reduced prices due to the smell and environmental concerns.

"Some people have sold off their plots and others have failed to find buyers because land has lost value," Besweri adds.

Theft

In addition to the environmental challenges, locals report a rise in theft in the area, which they associate with the influx of people working around the dumpsite. Besweri being one of the site managers, says he has lost some properties ranging from installation wires, wheelbarrows and cement at times.

Despite the hardships, some community members say the waste site has also created limited economic opportunities. A number of residents earn income by sorting garbage delivered by trucks.

However, many say the costs of coping with the pollution are becoming too high. "Every day we have to buy pesticides and air fresheners, an air freshener costs about Shs18,000, and pesticides are dangerous because in the long-run they can cause health complications," Ms Nabikindu says.

Local leaders acknowledge the concerns but say efforts are underway to

find a sustainable solution.

Mr Vincent Nsubuga, the secretary for information of Apollo Zone in Bukolwa Central, says authorities are considering new waste management initiatives.

"Garbage has been a big challenge, some people complain while others benefit from sorting and recycling it. Those who live close to the dumpsite are the ones feeling the impact," he says.

He reveals that there is a company which has expressed interest in setting up a facility to convert garbage into briquettes and manure. According to Nsubuga, local leaders plan to hold consultations with residents before the project begins.

"We want to meet with the community and agree on whether the factory can be installed. With time, we hope the issue of garbage will be properly managed," he says.

However, locals say there is no hope for the dumping site to be halted, some residents wonder why the garbage is brought to the location at night, alleging underhand dealings.

They also accuse regulators, including the National Environment Management Authority (Nema), of failing to take action despite repeated complaints.

"We have brought Nema officials here two times but nothing has been done," Besweri says.

Community members are now calling on government and municipal authorities to implement a clear waste management plan, enforce environmental laws and protect Lake Victoria from pollution.