Mass evictions start as govt reclaims wetlands

BY PAUL TAJUBA & JOSEPH KIGGUNDU
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Evicted. Some of the encroachers vacate the Lubigi wetland after authorities demolished their houses and razed plantations on Thursday. PHOTO BY JOSEPH KIGGUNDU

KAMPALA. Government has sealed off Lubigi wetland, north east of Kampala, days after hundreds of encroachers were evicted for carrying out illegal activities in protected area.

Part of the wetland had been turned into a taxi park, farms, and homes among others activities.

More than 600 families have been evicted in the ongoing four-day eviction exercise, which started on Thursday.

The Wakiso District Wetlands officer, Ms Stella Nalumansi, said the future of restoring Wakiso wetlands has started and all people should know that the exercise is still going on.

The mass evictions supported by environment police, seek to reclaim what was once part of the natural beauty that characterised Uganda as the Pearl of Africa for centuries.

Importance of wetlands

Wetlands are biodiversity havens, acting as breeding grounds and habitat for aquatic animals, including birds, fish, papyrus used for craft industry, tourism purposes and other wildlife.

Mr Wilberforce Wanyana, a senior wetlands supervisor in the Ministry of Water and Environment, told *Saturday Monitor* that the evictions seek to prevent the wetlands from extinction, and announced that after reclaiming Lubigi, the focus will turn to Kinawataka and Nakivubo wetlands starting next week.

"This is line with Cabinet directive of cancellation of titles in wetlands. We want to repose our land [wetlands belong to government] and the exercise is not limited to Kampala or Wakiso [districts]," Mr Wanyama told this newspaper yesterday.

"We have mapped out the most degraded areas and Kampala and Wakiso top the list. We issued warning letters to degraders to leave but some did not comply," he added.

Mbale, Bushenyi and Luweero are other districts where the ministry, with the help of Environment Police, is evicting encroachers.

In January, the Environment ministry ordered 11 villages in Lubigi wetland to voluntarily leave within 21 days or be forced out.

The Nema spokesperson, Ms Naomi Namara, said the operation has come in the right time because all encroachers were given notice to vacate the place but they refused.

Wetlands play critical roles of filtering, retaining and controlling floods.

They also influence rainfall formation, act as habitant for aquatic life and provides raw materials for craft industry. But Uganda is fast-losing the much needed natural capital mainly for farming activities, setting up industries and homes, among others. Statistics from ministry indicate that Uganda is left with less than 10 per cent wetland coverage. Urban centres, mainly Wakiso, Kampala and Mpigi, are the most affected.

In 2014, Cabinet passed a resolution to cancel all titles in wetlands attained after the 1995 Constitution. Government records estimate the titles Kampala, Wakiso and Mukono districts alone to be having 17, 000 land titles.

A recent study by the Ministry of Water and Environment entitled: The Wetland Atlas for Kampala, Wakiso and Mukono, indicates disconsolate future, not only for the aquatic life but the country at large. The report lists more than 30 wetlands facing excruciating pressure that may result into extinction if encroachers are not stopped soon.

ku-Rubona.

In Southern region, the affected roads are; Kabale-Katuna, Kabale-Kisoro, Katuna-Rubaya-Muko, Kisoro-Nyabwishenya-Nteko, Rubuguri-Katojo, Katojo-Kihihi, Rutobo-Kamwezi, Kabale-Kisoro, Butobere-Muyumbu-Rwamucucu and Hamurwa-Kerere-Kanungu.

The Director of roads and bridges Mr Samuel Muhoozi, said the author ity will construct new bridges, whic are expected to last for more than 10 years compared to the old bridges th were swept away.

RAMADHAN TIP
BY AL-MAHDI SSENKABIRWA

Tying the knot during Ramadhan

Although weddings in Ramadhan are not common, there is nothing in Islam tha forbids getting married dur this holy month.

Although the issues are m cultural, the most obvious issue is the fact that one not eat or drink from daw dusk. Along with that, ma couples have to refrain fr [sexual] intercourse duri the same hours. For the couple, if they feel they control themselves and this will not be an incor venience, there is noth wrong tying the knot d Ramadhan. Some pec want to take advanta this blessed month a married and for othe seem too much an ir nience.

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