

BY ALEX ASHABA

FORT PORTAL. More than 5,000 residents in North Division, Fort Portal City, are now relieved following the launch of a Shs425 million water supply project in their communities.

The construction of the Butebe Water Supply System was commissioned last Friday. The project, being implemented by Join For Water with support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation in partnership with the Ministry of Water and Environment, is expected to be completed within six months.

Once completed, the system will provide safe and reliable water to about 6,000 people from about 1,000 households across five water-stressed villages: Nyakarongo, Rwenkuba, Ibonde, Kiguma, and Butebe.

The construction works, which are being undertaken by CAIFU Engineering Consult Limited, a Ugandan firm, will include development of the water source, installation of pipelines and distribution networks, construction of storage reservoirs, installation of pumps and supporting infrastructure, as well as implementation of environmental protection measures.

Hope as Shs425m project targets water-stressed Fort Portal villages

Mr Deo Bagonza, the village chairperson of Nyakarongo-Rwenkuba, noted that the area has long been underserved by the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), forcing several residents to depend on unsafe water sources.

"Very few people here have access to piped water from NWSC. Many of us rely on water from the Mugunu wetland, which is contaminated, or from shallow wells. We hope that after the construction, our people will finally have access to safe and clean water," he said.

Mr Isaiah Ndungo, the country coordinator of Join For Water, explained that the Butebe Water Supply System is part of a broader Integrated Water Resources Management programme being implemented in the Mpanga River Catchment.

"The programme aims to enhance water security, protect catchment ecosystems, and improve sustainable ac-

cess to safe water for communities. Together with our partners, we are working to protect and restore wetlands, which are essential for ecological balance. These wetlands act as natural water filters, help control floods, and support groundwater recharge," Mr Ndungo said.

Mr Ndungo added that upon completion, the project will be handed over to the NWSC for management and long-term sustainability.

Mr Ronald Katungi, a supervisor at NWSC, said the parastatal is currently serving 137,549 people in Fort Portal City. "It is true that in Fort Portal City we still face challenges, as some communities are not yet served with safe water. The system we are using is old, dating back to the 1990s. Ideally, we should be supplying about 13 million litres of water per day, but we are currently only able to supply four million litres. This leaves us with a deficit of nine million litres daily," he explained.

Mr Katungi added that efforts are underway to address the shortfall through system upgrades and ongoing water projects across the city, many of which are nearing completion.

North Division Mayor Joseph Mashuhuku acknowledged that water coverage in the city, particularly in his area, remains low.

He attributed this to the lack of funding for water extension services.

"This division was annexed to Fort Portal to form the city. Previously, when we were under Kabarole District, we used to receive grants for water extension. However, this funding stopped when we became part of the city. As a result, many areas remain underserved, and some existing water sources are no longer functional," Mr Mashuhuku said.

He noted that partnerships with non-governmental organisations have helped extend water services to some communities. However, he raised concerns about inconsistent service from the national water utility.

"Even in areas connected to the system, water supply is sometimes unrelia-

ble, and in some cases, the water is dirty," he added.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 aims to ensure universal access to safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030. But achieving this target will require increased investment in water infrastructure and sanitation facilities, protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems, among others.

Mr Hillary Mutabazi from the Ministry of Water said several communities across Uganda remain underserved, even as the 2030 deadline approaches for universal access to safe water.

"Access to safe water is still a challenge, including in Fort Portal. While we are implementing several infrastructure projects across the country, for last 3 years, the national coverage has been 69 percent," Mr Mutabazi said.

He said as the ministry continues to invest in infrastructure to increase water coverage, there is a need for communities to protect and conserve wetlands that once destroyed, will directly affect water quality.

6,000
LOCALS TO
BENEFIT