



Community members at a tree nursery which supplies seedlings to farmers living close to the Bundongo Forest in Western Uganda for forest restoration.

PHOTO CREDIT: LOMINDA AFEDRARU

Project gives communities smart options to keep off forest land

Lominda Afedraru

Bugoma Central Forest Reserve in Uganda's Bunyoro Kitara region is a key water catchment area and migratory corridor for wildlife.

It is a source of several rivers, including Nguse, Ngemwa, Lyalo, Rwemiseke, Rutowa, Bubwa, Wake, Sonso, and Waisoke, which flow into Lake Albert.

A tropical natural forest, it is rich biodiversity, including the endangered chimpanzees.

But its environmental utility has come under threat amid human encroachment for settlement and conversion of part of the forestland into farmland.

A 2023 World Bank report showed that the forest cover declined by 75.2 percent and wetland cover by 70.3 percent between 1995 and 2017.

The negative impact of the encroachment is already being felt in Kikube and Kagadi districts, which have been suffering water scarcity due to prolonged droughts.

Riverbank degradation is accelerating soil erosion and soil loss is currently at 69,800 tons per year.

Gerald Tumwine, the programme manager for the Integrated Mechanism for Protection and Adaptation to Climate Change Threats (IMPACT), a forest management project, says high demographic pressure on farmland in areas around the water catchment is fuelling encroachment.

The five-year project co-funded by the Jane Goodall Institute in





A forest land in Western Uganda where humans have encroached on the forested land leaving it with scattered trees

PHOTO CREDIT: LOMINDA AFEDRARU



Uganda and the Austrian government seeks to restore the forest cover and wetlands and riverbank ecosystem around the catchment and promote efficient energy use.

It is being implemented in collaboration with Ministry of Water and Environment and the local governments in Kikube and Kagadi districts.

The local communities are being sensitised to diversify their sources of livelihoods, respond to the effects of climate change and manage the available farmland better.

Through tree planting, 1,765 hectares of degraded river banks and forest zones in the Nkusi river catchment will be restored and 3,990 hectares of woodlots established.

About 4,000 farmers in the catchment area will be trained on climate-smart agricultural practices, including providing them with climate-resilient inputs.

In addition, about 10,000 farmers will be supported to access micro irrigation systems and 14,000 households will receive timely

information about climate change through early warning systems every quarter.

Farmers will be sensitised to adopt conservation agriculture by practising crop rotation, intercropping, mulching and minimum tillage.

Communities will be engaged on climate change through awareness programmes on community radio stations

About 3,000 school children will be educated on climate change through demonstration gardens.

To promote efficient energy use, 7,500 households will be trained on improved cook stove production and five community groups equipped to market produced briquettes. This will enable them to avoid cutting trees in the forest reserve as source of energy.

Twenty-five water sources will be rehabilitated to benefit 4,500 households.

The Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom, which considers Bugoma part of its heritage, has also joined the efforts to restore the forest.

The kingdom, jointly with National Forestry Authority, is planting traditional tree species such as mahogany and Mvule on the forest reserve.

Dr Peter Apell, the programme director at Jane Goodall Institute, said that his team has implemented similar programmes with the help of the Austrian government since 2017.

In the previous programmes, which were implemented in the districts of Hoima, Masindi, Bulisa, Kibaale and Kyangwali refugee settlement camp, over 10,000 benefited from improved agriculture technologies.

Ann Mugisha, the Natural Resources officer in Kikube district, said the government is promoting alternative livelihood sources, including bee keeping, to discourage communities from encroaching on forest reserve.

Honey processing equipment has been installed for the Kikube community at the town council headquarters.

In Kagadi, land has been allocated for farmers to grow crops and establish woodlots ■