



## Enhancing the role and visibility of forests and the forest sector in Uganda's sustainable development



**F**orests according to FAO global forest resources assessment 2010, is defined as land spanning more than 0.5 hectares with trees higher than 5 meters, a canopy cover of more than 10% or trees able to reach these thresholds in situ. Forests among others perform the critical functions of sustaining production in agro ecosystems, energy sources, different land uses and environment quality, including climate. Seventeen percent of Uganda's total land area is forests. Over 60% of Uganda's forests are in land privately owned by individuals or institutions, and the remaining constitute central forest reserves (506 in total) managed by the National Forest authority and district forest reserves under the jurisdiction of local governments.



### Among other roles, forests:

- contribute up to 6% of the Uganda's Gross Domestic Product
- the sector employs about 100,000 people directly and another 750,000 indirectly
- provide the wood fuel which meets the energy needs of over 90% of the population
- enable the availability of hydroelectricity, the other important source of energy in Uganda
- are a source of economic products such as timber and construction poles
- provide raw materials for pharmaceutical, medicine, craft, the paper industry and others
- ensure food security especially for rural poor communities who depend on fruits and other wild edible plants
- are habitat to diverse species, Uganda's Albertine Forests are home to 39% of Africa's mammals, 51% (birds), 19% (amphibians), 14% plants and reptiles and, 79 globally threatened terrestrial vertebrates
- are habitat to pollinators necessary for maintaining

production in agro ecosystems

- provide resources upon which Uganda's tourism and hence foreign exchange is realized. Uganda Wildlife Authority revenues from tourism are approximately Uganda shillings 2.7 billion annually, a large proportion of it derived from forest based mountain gorilla tourism in the Bwindi Impenetrable and Mgahinga National Parks
- are a source of income for rural communities
- perform environmental services like; removing Green House Gasses such as carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and thus important in the fight against global warming, supporting rainfall formation, holding soil together thereby preventing soil erosion and landslides; and
- Provide educational services, including research.

### Despite the important economic and ecological roles Uganda's forests play:

- by the year 2005, up to 1,329,570 hectares of Uganda's forest land had already been deforested
- up to now, government plans to degazete some of the remaining forests around
- the biodiversity rich Albertine Forests are now facing degradation threats from activities in the emerging oil industry
- implementation of policies and law enforcement to stop deforestation remains poor in part due to inadequate funding to NFA, District Forest Service and other institutions mandated to manage forest resources in Uganda
- government has continually given low priority and funds to forestry in implemented development plans; less than 2% of 2010/2011 National Budget was allocated to Environment and Natural Resources under which the sector belongs
- emanating from these various problems, deforestation prevails and the projected per capita forest area decline is 0.1 ha by 2025 from 0.3 ha in 1991; and
- Planning for the entire sector is also still constrained, even the energy needs and actual potential from the sector is not yet well established because of lack of data.

### Nevertheless, Uganda is accredited to have some of the best policies underpinning forestry practices/developments that, if well implemented would secure sustainability of the sector.

- The 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, the National Forestry Policy (2001) and The National Forestry and Tree Planting Act, 2003 are the main legislative framework for the forestry sub-sector.
- The overall objective of the National Forestry Policy (2001) is an integrated forest sector that achieves sustainable increase in economic, social and environmental benefits from forests and trees by all the people of Uganda, especially the poor and vulnerable.

- Related sector laws and policies include among others the National Environment Act (CAP 53), Uganda Wildlife Act (CAP 200), Local Governments Act (CAP 243), the Land Act (CAP 227), The Leadership Code (CAP 168), the Gender Policy (1997), National Environment Management Policy (1994), the National Policy for the Conservation and Management of Wetland Resources (1995), The Wildlife Policy (1999) and The National Water Policy (1999).

### **The Uganda Forestry Policy (2001), commits government to:**

- support all landowners to manage and use their land in accordance with the Forests Act and other relevant laws
- hold forests in protected areas as Permanent Forest Estates and not to lease out or alienate any of the forestlands without the approval of Parliament
- promote profitable development of plantation forests
- promote development of well established and run forest industries
- enhance the rights of the forest adjacent communities to access and use resources in forest reserves by managing the resources together with NFA and local governments
- promote farm forestry and delivery of quality advisory services to tree farmers
- promote conservation of biodiversity in order to sustain the forest resource base and other products, and environmental benefits accruing from forests
- promote conservation and rehabilitation of watersheds to ensure sustained supply of adequate and clean water for domestic consumption, industrial development, production and generation of hydroelectricity
- promote urban forestry for beautification, environmental sanitation from industrial emissions and provision of tree products
- promote forestry research and training
- promote development and supply of quality tree seeds and seedlings for afforestation; and
- Set up a tree fund.

### **But to date:**

- debate to convert over seven thousand hectares of Mabira forest to Sugar cane and biofuel production is on going, the destiny Kalangala and Butamira forests faced and many others might
- inappropriate practices like pines and eucalyptus species monoculture are becoming prevalent, even promoted in government reforestation and afforestation programmes
- NFA programmes are mainly limited to Central Forest Reserves and yet deforestation is also high in forests owned by private individuals/institutions and or local governments, that in fact constitute over 60% of the total forest land in the country; and
- Tree fund provided for in the Forestry Policy is yet to

be implemented.

*With these and other problems, Uganda may not achieve its development goals pegged on forestry and also, targets set for related Millennium Development Goals unless, definitive interventions are undertaken. As members of the Natural Resources Committee and the Forum for Climate Change, allocate more of your debate time and priority to forestry, make decisions and use your mandate to compel*

### **Central Government to:**

- enforce laws stopping deforestation
- stop degazeting forests and carry out reforestation in degraded forest lands
- promote alternative sources of energy, other than biomass
- ensure efficient use of energy in all other sectors
- stop monoculture practices involving pines, eucalyptus and instead have appropriate species promoted in implemented reforestation, afforestation and agroforestry programmes
- functionalize the tree fund provided for in the 2001 Forestry Policy
- allocate more funds to the forestry sub sector; and
- Provide alternative sources of livelihoods to forest dependent communities

### **Local Government to:**

- allocate resources to and implement forestry programmes in district development plans
- involve communities in identifying, designing and implementing control measures against illegal activities in forests
- sensitize communities living adjacent to forests on the importance of forests conservation and involve them in the day to day management activities
- ensure that people realize tangible benefits from forest resources in their communities
- promote and support private, community, and farm forestry
- ensure proper establishment and maintenance of forest boundaries
- provide affordable germplasm- tree seeds and seedlings to rural communities
- Provide tree planting and management extension services to rural communities; and
- Subsidize rural fuel wood plantations.

### **Local communities in your constituencies to:**

- use appropriate harvesting methods and manage their forest resources
- transform wood into charcoal before use
- establish plantations and or woodlots in their farms, for charcoal instead of relying solely on forests
- produce charcoal in retorts and kilns; and
- Grow suitable tree species for wood fuel and other forest resources needs.

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