
[Uganda: Deforestation, corruption and the false solution of plantations](#)

The acting commissioner for forestry, Deo Byarugaba, said a recent study by the forestry department revealed that indiscriminate logging and charcoal burning had destroyed hundreds of square miles of forest land.

Following the alarming rate of deforestation, and a public outcry that most vehicles carrying timber had army and police escorts, President Yoweri Museveni in May appointed Capt. James Okello as commandant of a Forest Produce Monitoring Unit (FPMU), charged with empowering the forestry staff which falls under the Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment. The swift activities of FPMU has since found out that those perpetuating the racket also include forestry officials, police, district councils, MPs, Movement leaders and Internal Security Organisation (ISO) personnel.

Among top government officials whose vehicles or employees were recently cited in the timber/firewood deal were the energy and mineral development minister, Syda Bbumba and justice and constitutional affairs minister Janat Mukwaya.

Military officers who have recently been either directly involved or whose vehicles and employees were implicated are the commandant of the Nakasongola-based UP-DF motorised brigade, Col. Samuel Kawagga and Reserve Force commander Lt. Gen. Salim Saleh's aide, Lt. Col. Kagezi.

Forestry officials said the district with the worst forest destruction record is Mukono and it has been established that most of the logs in the timber sheds there had been illegally acquired. Sources said FPMU found difficulty in arresting illegal timber dealers in Mukono because some said they were encouraged to continue with the trade by government officials.

However, the solution coming from Byarugaba is as worrisome as the problem: "The way forward is to commercialize tree planting. My department is now looking for investors to plant trees for value. We allocate land to prospective investors who grow trees and harvest them for sell," he declared.

What Byarugaba appears to ignore is the existing experience regarding the impacts of tree plantations. Norwegian carbon sink plantation projects --which began to be implemented in Uganda in 1996-- have implied the eviction of hundreds of village people to make way for plantation trees. One of those projects implied the occupation of between 80,000 and 100,000 hectares of land by pines and eucalyptus (see WRM Bulletin N° 35).

Within that context, commissioner Byarugaba's declarations appear to be paving the way for further foreign investments in the plantation sector. Tree plantations will not only not solve the existing problems, but will generate new impacts on forests, water, soils, biodiversity and people. It is therefore absurd to portray them as a solution to the real problem of deforestation. But maybe Byarugaba has a reason?

Article based on information from: "Ministers, Army Bosses Named in Timber Scam", Emmy Allio and Felix Osike, New Vision (Kampala), August 25, 2003, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200308250672.html>

