

Activists say learners at higher education institutions should learn to care for nature regardless of their respective courses. They also argue that climate change should not be a subject left for environmentalists and conservationists but for all citizens.

BY DAN WANDERA

Several climate change mitigation ideas have mooted and implemented, with varying levels of success.

Stakeholders have now made a decision to integrate climate change mitigation into the higher education curriculum.

Climate activists argue that the integration of climate resilience teaching into the curriculum could go a long way in lessening the effects of climate change.

"I believe that climate change is not understood by many people, but a deliberate effort that ensures that learners at higher education institutions learn to care for nature regardless of their respective courses, is a good idea. Climate change resilience should not be a subject left for environmentalists and conservationists but a citizen responsibility. This includes the young and old," Dr Phelmon Natembeya Gizamba, a conservationist and founder of Nature for All Global Resilience Initiative (NAGRI) tells *Daily Monitor*.

Dr Natembeya adds: "We have a generation where a section of the population is very disconnected from reality. Like at the higher institutions of learning, some students could be forced to believe that caring for the environment should be left for the agriculturalists, forestry and environment science students. This is very wrong. I hope that the basis for integrating climate resilience teaching in the curriculum for higher education institutions is to bring on board all students and the teaching staff. We should be able to see results from the way the university compound, lecture rooms, farms respond to climate resilience."

Under the Strengthening Teaching and Research for Climate Resilience and Green Energy Transitions in Universities, Soroti University, a public university in eastern Uganda and Ndejje University, a private and Church-founded university in central Uganda will be beneficiaries of the European Union (EU) funded three-year project. The EU has earmarked a co-funding grant of Shs1.66b for the project.

The discussions encompass several aspects targeting enhancement of climate change education into the normal life of a student, teaching staff and the communities through outreach programmes to conserve the environment.

Mr Johnson Bebwa Ssemanda, a climate actor and conservationist based in the greater Luweero area, clarifies that while efforts targeting sensitisation of the population about the dangers of environmental degradation are ongoing, it is disturbing that sections of the different communities are careless and do not care about conservation.

"I believe that, possibly, climate resil-

# Soroti, Ndejje varsities to teach mitigation of climate change



Trees cut down for charcoal burning at Buzirandulu Forest Reserve in Butuntumula Sub-county, Luweero District, in 2023. PHOTO/ DAN WANDERA

ience, once integrated into the curriculum as proposed, will demand that all students become climate resilience actors and change agents. The students represent a bigger section of the community. The climate resilience outreach could create another impact," he says.

Mr Mark Kiprop, a Bachelor of Sustainable Agriculture and Extension student at Ndejje University, says climate change resilience awareness should be a duty for all people at different levels of society.

He explains that integrating climate resilience into the curriculum should

not only be for universities but at the different learning levels to create impact.

"Have a course unit in climate change adaptation and mitigation as part of my general course. But I also believe that all the other students should be ambassadors of climate change mitigation and adaptation. But this should be carefully crafted to ensure the message is received positively to create impact," he tells *Daily Monitor*.

Calling for climate resilience action, climate activists say it must begin at one's doorstep and extend to other areas of the society.

## What it means

Prof Robert Ikoja Odongo, the vice chancellor of Soroti University, one of the institutions chosen to pilot the climate change integration into the curriculum, believes that part of the interventions will be ensuring its campuses are greened, including the lecture halls, among other spaces, while taking into account the many other actions that translate to nature conservation.

"We should incubate ideas, technology and create a future which is sustainable. We need to have impactful actions on the ground for not only the university

but the community through outreaches. If it is planting trees, we must understand which type of trees to plant," he said at a recent inception meeting for climate change integration into the curriculum on November 21.

Dr David Talengera the Dean of the Faculty of Environment and Agriculture at Ndejje University, says since Ndejje and Soroti universities are located within the cattle corridor areas of Uganda, characterised by prolonged dry spells, climate resilience actions should be intensified.

"We were not chosen by mistake, but we are the right group for the project," he adds.

Apart from teaching and creating awareness through the different projects and outreaches, Ndejje University has the opportunity to enhance sustainable and renewable programmes.

Rev Canon Prof Olivia Banja, the Ndejje University vice chancellor, says realigning the courses with climate change realities should be the way to go. "For Ndejje, we are blessed with enough land that is enabling us to venture into sustainable farm practices, forestry and renewable energy resources," she reveals.

The universities are not working in isolation but in partnership with several other stakeholders.

These include the National Agricultural Organisation (NARO), the Research and Education Agency (REA), the European Union Commission, the University of Pavia in Italy, and the Polytechnic Institute of Porto in Portugal.

## FOREST COVER LOSS

Conservationists in Uganda say the sudden change in the rainfall patterns, prolonged dry spells, and rising temperatures beyond the normal degrees are greatly impacting the way of life.

The intense floods in parts of the country, crop failure as a result of low rainfall amounts or dry spells, are partly blamed on human interference with the environment.

One of the major drivers of climate change in the country has been identified as deforestation. Uganda's forest cover has dropped from 24 percent in 1990 to 12 percent in 2021, according to the National State of the Environment Report 2022 that is published by the National Environment Mana-

gement Authority (Nema). The report added that an estimated 73,000 hectares of forest are lost annually, mainly due to agricultural expansion, human settlement and fuelwood extraction.

According to data from the Uganda Environment Atlas, also published by Nema, it is estimated that at least three million hectares of forest cover were lost between 1990 and 2021.

The 2025 Global Forest Resources Assessment report, published by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, shows that Uganda has lost nearly half of its forest cover since 1990. It indicates that Uganda's forest area has significantly declined from 4.55 million hectares in 1990 to 2.37 million hectares in 2025. This repre-

sents a loss of about 48 percent in 35 years.

Without deliberate engagements through climate mitigation measures, climate activists, among other stakeholders, fear that Uganda could lose more of the natural ecosystems, including the water sources and forest cover, by 2030 at a fast rate. The activists are advocating for the increased use of renewable energy sources to reduce the number of trees cut for firewood and charcoal.

Climate activists and proponents of the Strengthening Teaching and Research Capacities in recently established Universities (STRCU) believe that integrating climate resilience products in the existing undergraduate curricula will enhance climate education.