

300,000 trees to be planted

The degrading activities in Bugisu Sub-region have resulted in recurring calamities such as landslides, floods, loss of tree cover, displacement, and death. It is for this reason that the Bakhana Bamasaba Association will plant 300,000 trees in 800 primary and secondary schools in a bid to conserve the environment.

BY DAVID WANDEKA

The Bakhana Bamasaba Association (BBA), launched last year by a group of professional women from the Bugisu Sub-region, has started an initiative of planting over 300,000 trees in 800 primary and secondary schools and communities where river banks and hills have been degraded.

The degrading activities have resulted in recurring calamities such as landslides, floods, loss of tree cover, displacement, and death.

The BBA is using the girl-child in schools to plant the trees and encouraging the girls to spread the same message to their communities, compelling their parents to plant trees. Besides conserving the environment, the association is also addressing issues of education, health, and life skills among the girls in the sub-region.

Jane Wakikona, a public health expert in the Ministry of Health (MoH) and secretary general of the BBA, reveals that they are targeting girls because they are future mothers of the nation.

"We are assured that girls can take the tree-planting message to different communities. Women are still a strong pillar when it comes to environmental protection in this region. Our five-year strategic plan focuses on environmental

protection, education, health, and life skills for young girls in schools," she says.

Wakikona notes that the environment has been destroyed by human activities, which include deforestation and poor farming methods.

"We need to restore and protect our environment so that the soils can be productive. The region is prone to floods and landslides because the soil is very fragile due to overarming. This means it can easily be washed away during heavy downpours," she explains.

When topsoils are washed away, agricultural production in the area is severely affected, having repercussions on household income and education. In the past, before the current population boom, the sub-region was densely populated

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Irene Muwanguzi Wasike, an enterprise development specialist at the Parish Development Model Secretariat and the president of BBA



Linas Nasimiyu, the Mbale City education officer, with pupils of Musoto Primary School. PHOTOS/ DAVID WANDEKA



by tree cover. Today, that is rapidly disappearing as trees are cut down to create more agricultural land and for fuel.

"We have several cases of teenage pregnancy due to the high school dropout rates. BBA is encouraging girls to stay in school and position themselves in education," Wakikona adds.

Irene Muwanguzi Wasike, an enterprise development specialist at the Parish Development Model Secretariat and the president of BBA, says the association was launched after the realisation that the number of professionals in the region had reduced.

"We want to bridge the gap and act as role models to young girls. We want women to come back home and demonstrate the advantages of tree-planting. Historically, the Mt Elgon area was very fertile and sustained communities for generations. However, today, landslides are killing people," she says.

Wasike notes that besides schools, the association is targeting degraded areas along river banks and hills with restoration activities.

"We grew up seeing our mothers fetching firewood. They were the custodians of the environment. We can teach our children that firewood can be collected sustainably without destroying the environment. Girls are going to be change agents in this region," she explains.

Cause of environmental degradation
Wasike blames the environmental degradation in the Bugisu Sub-region on poverty, which has led to people depending on the environment for survival, leaving it bare.

in Bugisu sub-region



"Most of the riverbanks have been degraded, leading them to burst their banks during the rainy season. The strong natural trees that used to protect the riverbanks have been cut down for firewood and charcoal," she says.

Wasike also blamed negative cultural mindsets that encourage the subdivision of land among children as inheritance.

"Land fragmentation is a key contributor to environmental degradation. We need to embrace communal land ownership if we are going to succeed in developing the region. We worry that if the environment is not restored over the course of the next ten years, our people will continue to die in landslides," she warns.

Due to the persistent landslides in the region, entire communities have died or been displaced and relocated to other districts.

Brenda Hadondi, the deputy headteacher of Mbale Senior Secondary School, says that the idea of planting trees in schools is timely because several schools cut down old trees in their compounds and have failed to replace them.

"Several schools do not have shade trees. The natural trees that remain are used as classrooms in schools with limited space for learning," she says.

The Bugisu Sub-region has suffered calamities of floods and landslides, in which some schools have been affected and closed by the government due to the students' safety.

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Members of Bakhana Bamasaba Association handing over sanitary pads to girls at Mbale Senior Secondary School.

IMPORTANCE OF TREE PLANTING

Tree planting restores the environment by sequestering carbon, improving air/water quality, preventing erosion, and rebuilding biodiversity through habitat creation, acting as a vital climate solution that also supports human health and local economies.

By absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen, trees fight climate change, while their roots hold soil, filter pollutants, regulate water cycles, and provide shelter for countless species, making ecosystems healthier and more resilient.

Key environmental restoration benefits

Carbon sequestration: Trees absorb atmospheric carbon dioxide during photosynthesis, storing it in their wood, roots, and soil, thus reducing greenhouse gases.

Air quality improvement: They filter pollutants like nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide from the air, releasing clean oxygen, which improves public health.

Soil and water conservation: Roots bind soil, preventing erosion, while canopies reduce heavy rain impact, and roots help filter water, reducing runoff and protecting watersheds.

Biodiversity and habitat: Forests provide essential homes, food, and shelter for over 80 percent of terrestrial species, restoring ecosystems and supporting biodiversity.

Climate regulation: Trees cool urban areas through shade and transpiration, lowering temperatures and reducing energy needs, while also influencing rainfall patterns.

Flood control: They act like sponges, absorbing excess water and releasing it slowly, preventing floods and landslides.

Economic and social well-being: Restored forests offer sustainable resources, create green jobs, support eco-tourism, and improve mental health.

By planting trees, especially in degraded areas, we help reverse deforestation and build resilient, functional ecosystems that benefit both nature and people.

Source: Internet

