

The initiative under Kitagata Water Catchment Protection Project that started in 2025 has seen 51.11 acres of wetlands restored.

BY RAJAB MUKOMBOZI

A community-based environment programme is succeeding in restoring degraded fragile ecosystems in the districts of Bushenyi, Mitooma and Sheema.

The initiative under Kitagata Water Catchment Protection project that started in 2025, has seen 51.11 acres of wetlands restored, 400 bamboo, 10,000 Calliandra and 125,800 trees planted in communities.

Mr Innocent Tumwesigye, the project manager, says the project was started after it was realised that enforcement alone was not giving results. It was then decided that engaging communities would offer a lasting solution.

"We started with sensitising communities and recruited 540 of them to be champions for this project. These members, together with our team, moved and engaged the larger communities including those that were engaged in depleting the environment such as sand miners and wetland encroachers," Mr Tumwesigye said.

He said with the help of local leaders, residents came to appreciate the importance of conserving the environment and have since become watchdogs who closely monitor who degrades wetlands or carries out illegal activities.

Mr Tumwesigye said when gabions were constructed under the project, swamps and grassland regenerated and the communities became excited and vowed to protect them.

"They started seeing wetlands as a resource, where they could get grass for mulching their gardens, pasture for their animals and fish. The local communities are now enforcing resto-

Initiative breathes life back into degraded environment

ration efforts and protecting the environment themselves," he said.

Mr Mabaati Mwebembezi Mabaati, the leader of sand miners in Kizinda-Kigoma Town Council, said after sensitisation, they now carry out controlled sand-mining, which does not destroy the environment.

"As we mine, we ensure roads and wetlands are not encroached on and the gullies are filled. We always seek guidance from authorities and we have guidelines. Whoever tries to breach these guidelines is stopped or reported to authorities," he said.

He said all miners are now required to plant trees in areas they operate from. He said the trees are supplied

Advantages. Farmers are being registered and sensitised to protect the catchment areas serving the Warugo, Kitagata Water treatment plants and Nyaruzinga, among other wetlands. Human activities such as brick-making, sand-mining, and wetland-encroachment are beginning to reduce,"

Hillary Igambiriine, Assistant RDC, Bushenyi.

free of charge to the miners.

Mr Posiano Azairwe, one of the local leaders implementing the project in Mitooma District, said what people lacked was sensitisation.

"Issues of environment do need force and enforcement alone. When technical people and leaders come to the grassroots, local people are capable of implementing projects and policies without wasting resources. People are now competing on who has planted more trees," he said.

The Sheema Resident District Commissioner, Ms Jane Asimwe Muhindo, said the project has proved that community engagement is the best tool in implementation projects.



Resident look on as gabions are constructed to stop soil erosion in Muhito, Sheem District. PHOTO/ MONITOR

"Community engagement breeds a sense of ownership. We have seen with this project that people have realised the importance of protecting the environment. The local communities can earn and our work on environmental conservation has been simplified," Ms Muhindo said.

Mr Hillary Igambiriine, the resident district commissioner for Bushenyi, commended the initiative for promoting environmental conservation.

"As part of this programme, farmers are being registered and sensitised to protect the catchment areas serving the Warugo and Kitagata Water treatment plants and Nyaruzinga, among other wetlands. Human activities such as brick-making, sand-mining, and wetland-encroachment are beginning to reduce because of this project," Mr Igambiriine said.

Ms Rose Kibirungi, the deputy chief administrative officer of Sheema District, highlighted the growing challenge of water scarcity across the Greater Bushenyi Sub-region, which she attributed to environmental degradation.

Mr Benedict Naturinda, the stakeholder mobilisation consultant of the project, said the project has had some challenges which include destruction of young trees by animals, bushfires and soil erosion.

The project is implemented by National Water and Sewerage Corporation in partnership with World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the World Bank.

Other participants include Cool wave Contractors, which constructed stone gabions and animal watering points; Keirere Green Africa Agency (KEGRA), which spearheaded restoration activities through tree-planting; and Cielo Country Inn Projects Ltd, which coordinated stakeholder engagement, community mobilisation, awareness creation and capacity-building activities.