

# Adjumani steps up efforts to restore degraded forests

Reports show Uganda lost nearly 50 percent of its forest cover between the 1950s and 1990s, followed by another 10 percent loss in the 2000s.

BY MARKO TAIBOT

**A**djumani, a district grappling with the loss of its forest cover and effects of climate change, will host the national celebrations to mark World Environment Day next year.

Mr Tony Acidria, the senior environment awareness officer at the National Environment Management Authority (Nema), last week said Nema adopted a rotational hosting model in 2023 to ensure all regions of the country have an opportunity to showcase local environmental challenges and innovations.

"We have been to the eastern region around Mt Elgon, the central region, and recently to the Kigezi Sub-region. This time, we specifically targeted Adjumani because of the refugee presence in the district and the environmental impacts associated with hosting large populations," he said last Tuesday.

Mr Acidria added that Uganda's environmental indicators are at a crisis point.

"At the national level, if you look at the environmental curve, I would say we have moved from a downward trend to a flat one," he said.

Mr Acidria said Uganda lost nearly 50 percent of its forest cover between the 1950s and 1990s, followed by another 10 percent loss in the 2000s. Only in recent years has the country recorded a modest 2 percent increase in forest cover due to efforts to reclaim the deforested areas.

A similar pattern exists for wetlands where almost 60 percent have been destroyed over several decades. Recent restoration efforts have led to a small recovery of approximately 2 percent.

"That slight increase is important, but it cannot erase the massive loss of forests and wetlands over the last half century. These challenges remain



A man loads charcoal onto a truck in Itirikwa Sub-county, Adjumani District last year. PHOTO/MARKO TAIBOT

countrywide," Mr Acidria added.

Local data from Adjumani's forestry department paints an even grimmer picture.

Mr Francis Ojja, Adjumani District forest officer, said charcoal production remains the biggest driver of forest degradation.

In the last decade alone, he said, more than 2,000 acres of private natural forests have been cleared.

"Between 2011 and 2016, we lost 500.8 acres. Between 2019 and 2023, another 688.5 acres were destroyed. If we fail to regulate charcoal production, we are projecting a loss of more than 8,000 acres by the end of this year," Mr Ojja warned.

He added that charcoal production in the district has surged drastically. From 2,448 metric tonnes produced between 2011 and 2016, equivalent to more than 20,000 bags, the volume rose to 3,060 metric tonnes between 2019 and 2023.

"Shockingly, 70 percent of this charcoal is transported outside the district, indicating a commercial-scale operation beyond local household use," Mr Ojja added.

While enforcement has been

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Despite the worrying trends, Uganda is making progress. The National State of Environment Report 2024 shows that forest cover has risen from 9 percent in 2015 to 12.7 percent. Plantation forests have more than tripled in size, from 32,225 hectares to 107,608 hectares, supported by increased tree planting on reserves and private land.

strengthened, the Adjumani District forest officer said there are loopholes in the law.

"There is a need for a district ordinance to reinforce the National Tree Planting Act, which does not clearly define operations on private forests," Mr Ojja said.

In response, the district, together with various partners, has launched a tree-planting campaign to help restore lost vegetation.

Activists said hosting the World Envi-

ronment Day 2026 will help spotlight Adjumani's ecological struggles.

Mr Williams Amanzuru, the team leader of Friends of Zoka, said the event offers a vital platform to draw national attention to the degradation of Zoka Central Forest Reserve and the rampant illegal charcoal trade.

"This is an opportunity to raise greater awareness of the depletion of Zoka and the massive illegal charcoal trade ravaging our district every day," he said.

Mr Amanzuru urged communities to adopt conservation habits, including reducing waste, saving water and energy, choosing sustainable transport and planting trees.

He also emphasised that long-term ecological health depends on sustained action and strong political will.

Mr Wilbert Ikilai, the manager for environmental education and advocacy at Nema, said: "The region is experiencing increased heat waves, prolonged drought, unreliable rainfall, floods, and declining air and water quality. If we do not take action, we shall all suffer the consequences, whether through disease, malnutrition, or lack of clean and sufficient water," he said.