



Mabira Giveaway to Reduce Water Levels

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The proposed conversion of 7,100 hectares of Mabira Central Forest Reserve to a sugarcane plantation will cause a reduction in water retention capacity of the watershed.

"And subsequent water flow to the lakes and rivers in the region will be hampered. This will contribute to the already declining water levels in the lakes and rivers," reads an October 2006 Government technical report that was compiled by a team instituted by Prime Minister, Prof. Apolo Nsibambi.

The report says the forest will be severely affected because of its topographical and biological characteristics.

President Yoweri Museveni has insisted the government will give part of Mabira to Sugar Corporation of Uganda, (Scoul). Scoul say they want the 7,100 hectares in order to increase their sugar production from the current 50,000 tonnes to 100,000 tonnes.

Mabira covers 29,964 hectares of tropical moist forest and was gazetted in 1932 to protect the hills from erosion. It's a catchment area for various rivers, streams and swamps that originate and pass through it.

It is 52km on Kampala-Jinja highway in central Uganda and 20km north of Lake Victoria's shoreline.

BBC on December 13 reported that Africa's water basins are rapidly drying up. Satellite information gathered by the Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (Grace) mission indicate that water levels have drastically reduced in three years.

The Grace mission is a pair of satellites that go over the earth detecting alterations in mass through observing tiny variations in gravitation pull. The satellite report says most African basins like the Congo, Zambezi and Nile have dried up within the period.

The Grace report says that 334 cubic km of water have been lost from land. And, this is 'almost as much as' what was used by all Africans within the period.

The Government report on Mabira says that soil erosion and deposition of silt will increase in Sezibwa and Musamya rivers that drain through the forest into Lake Kyoga. Mabira forest is one of the forests that form a ring that protects Lake Victoria and is important to both River Nile and Lake Kyoga watersheds. The report says that the land that Scoul wants captures 3,905,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. It says that each hectare of the forest's biomass has absorbed an estimate of 550 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

Over the last 50 years, it has been observed that the world is increasingly warming due to changes in the climate system. Government's report says if Mabira is converted, there will be a reduction in the carbon sequestration capacity between Kampala and Jinja, where most industrial activities are and many of gases are emitted.

The report indicates there will be rainfall fluctuations, affecting economic activities in local communities. The re-allocation will make Uganda lose its 'unique ecosystem' and biodiversity in the forest and increase forest encroachment.

"It will not be possible to maintain the designated Strict Nature Reserves because they will be exposed to human use. Thus one key critical biodiversity site in Uganda's network will be lost forever.

Encroachment of the remaining part of the forest will be difficult to control since the government will be seen to be allowing one company to grow an agricultural crop but denying the local people access to grow these same crops."