

Deforestation and uganda essay



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Deforestation is the elimination of forest and woodland areas on the large scale. Deforestation emerged as a major problem because of large scale losses evident particularly in tropical regions. Evidence of deforestation dates back much further than modern times, owing to the fact that deforestation is also a natural process. Uganda is a small African country located in East Africa and is crossed by equator in the south. The location in the equatorial region, a number of lakes in the country and fertile soils has given Uganda a favourable climate and terrain for growth of tropical forests.

The tropical forests are mainly located in the central and south western parts of the country. These include the likes of Mabira forest located in Jinja district and Mpanga district forest reserve in Masaka district and Bwindi impenetrable forest in kabala district. Like most the African countries Uganda is a developing country with a large rural population dependent on nature for many of their needs. This makes forests in the country vulnerable to deforestation. Uganda's annual deforestation rate has climbed 21 percent since the end of the 1990s.

The country lost an average of 86, 400 hectares of forest—or 2. percent of its forest cover per year between 2000 and 2005. On a generational time scale, Uganda lost 26. 3 percent of its forest cover (1. 3 million hectares) between 1990 and 2005. This forest loss is directly threatening some of the highest concentrations of biodiversity in Africa: Uganda is home to more than 5, 000 plant species, 345 species of mammals, and types of 1, 015 birds. The very high rate of deforestation in Uganda has been attributed to a number of reasons ranging from the population explosion and the energy needs of the

population. The loss of forest cover has become focal point in conservation of biodiversity in the country.

Here are the causes of deforestation in Uganda. Uganda has experienced a very large growth of population in the recent years to an extent that Uganda has been ranked by the UNDP to have the fastest growing population in the world. The increase in population can be said to be the root cause of deforestation because it has an effect on all the other causes like settlement fuel etc. Most of the forests in Uganda are located around the Lake Victoria basin and this same region has the highest growing population in Africa. The population of the basin in Uganda increased from about 8. 57 million in 1960 to about 25 million in 2000.

This led to the need for land for the people to settle on and firewood and charcoal for fuel. These could only be provided by the encroachment and destruction of the forests. The population increase is very important cause of deforestation because the need of shelter, food and basic necessities render other uses of forests seem irrelevant to the people. It is a known that like other developing countries, most of Uganda's population is rural. This implies that most of the people depend on wood and other natural products for their energy needs as 92 percent of Ugandans depend on forest products for their cooking, lighting etc.

This has placed a large amount of pressure on the remaining forests which a being cut down without restraint to feed the energy hungry population of the country. And to make matters worse the alternative fuel sources like hydro electric power and fossil fuels have recently experienced upward spikes in

their prices. This has made fuel from the forests not only easier to attain but also the most affordable source undermining calls by the conservationists and the government for people to change to other energy sources.

Commercial logging to get timber for construction and other needs is another leading cause of deforestation in Uganda. The urban areas in east Africa are experiencing a construction boom due to the high infrastructural growth and this has made commercial logging very profitable. This commercial logging has encouraged the cutting down of the forests most especially in western Uganda which is very rural and not monitored by the forest authorities. This has also led to the replacement of tropical indigenous species with fast growing species like eucalyptus trees effectively removing the biodiversity of the forests.

Commercial logging is accompanied by corruption as it has been found that many of these logging operations are run by high ranking military officials in the country. The Forest Produce Monitoring Unit (FPMU) a taskforce appointed by the president charged with empowering the forestry staff found members from the forest authority, police, army and ISO were involved in the illegal logging racket. All this has led to the unchecked destruction of the countries forests and thus deforestation.

Most of the people in Uganda depend on agriculture as a primary source of income directly or indirectly and this means land is needed to sustain the agricultural life style of the people. This has led to deforestation in that forest lands are usually fertile and most suitable for agriculture, making encroachment of forests to grow crops unavoidable. The growing of

commercial cash crops like sugarcane, tea and coffee has lead to deforestation as plantations are usually set up in fertile soils of forest areas.

A prominent example was Kakira sugar works attempt to acquire a piece of mabira forest land in Mokono to expand their sugarcane plantation but this was stopped by public outcry. But usually forest land is sold by the government in the name of investor encouragement essentially turning forest land into farm land. Over grazing and the search for pastures for livestock has lead to destruction of forests most especially in eastern and western parts of the country where livestock raring and nomadism are prominent. Forests and woodlands in their nature do not make good pasture as the flora mainly consist of trees which livestock do not eat.

So the trees are usually cut down to make way for the growth of suitable pasture lands which are more beneficial to the way of life than the forest. This destroys the forest a habitat to very many species to create land which favours survival of few domestic species and this is detrimental to the conservation of the forest biodiversity. In the urban areas like Kampala the standard of life has improved creating a wealthier middle class who have created a need for better homes in suburban areas outside the city centre.

This has led to the rapid growth of the real estate market as many housing estates are being set up and this leads to the cutting down of forests and trees to create land on which the estates a set up on. Deforestation is also carried out in order to provide services like roads, electricity, water and shops for the people in these areas to utilise. Since these estates have

become very profitable and employment to a large number of people the government is reluctant to stop these estates from taking up forest land.

This ends up frustrating any conservation efforts for these forests near urban areas. Political instability of Uganda through the decades has been a contributing factor to the deforestation in the country. In times of insecurity and war most efforts to conserve forests and woodlands are abandoned as these areas usually act as hide outs and battle grounds for insurgents in the country. In Luwero district where most of the fighting of the NRM liberation struggle occurred much of the forest cover was destroyed.

These groups usually use the forest areas to grow food, provide shelter and wood for fuel and in an attempt to drive out the rebels the government destroys the forests through burning and cutting down of the trees. All these factors put together have made political instability a major cause of deforestation in Uganda which has had political instability since the 1960s. Industrial development and urbanisation has become a leading cause of deforestation. The government has come up with a policy to eradicate poverty through encouraging investment in the industrial sector and this has given sector top priority in the country.

This has lead to leasing of forest land to investors setting up industries and these industries come with urbanisation as schools hospitals, roads and other utilities used by the industrial employees leading to the further clearing of forests to provide the needed land. An example an area where industrialisation has led to deforestation in the recent years is in Namanve in Mokono district a forest area which the government as demarcated as an

industrial area and this has caused the forest reserve to shrink in size as companies like coca-cola have set up factories there.

As it can be seen there are numerous causes for the loss of Uganda's forest cover in through the decades and this destruction of forests has not gone unnoticed and without consequences. The deforestation has largely caused a number of negative effects that can no longer be ignored not only by conservationists but by the government and the general public. These effects are either affecting the people directly or indirectly and they include the following. Desertification is one of the prominent causes of deforestation in many parts of Africa.

The cutting down of forests leads to loss of water catchment areas, soil degradation and other factors that have lead to forest and woodland areas to turn to semi arid areas. This has mainly been observed in Karamoja and other parts of eastern Uganda which were predominantly woodland and savannah but now arid areas with unpredictable rainfall seasons. This has dramatically affected the lifestyle the people living in these areas as can be seen by the recent famines and droughts in the area, lack of pastures and water for the livestock of the nomadic people of Karamoja and Teso.

This has caused the government to send millions in the food aid to the famine struck regions and building of water dams and no financial price can be placed on the lives lost due to the desertification of these regions.

Deforestation has led to the reduction in levels of the water table and distortion of rainfall patterns mostly in areas which had a high forest cover like the central and western parts of the country.

This reduction of levels of the water table has caused bore holes essential source of safe and clean water to people in rural areas and this makes people to resort to unsafe water sources like surface streams leading to spread of water borne diseases like cholera. Also the reduced water levels and rainfall caused a fall in the Lake Victoria water levels which caused insufficient generation of electricity at the Owen falls dam in Jinja which led to a year of constant power outages.

These power outages caused many industries to close or spend a lot of money on alternative energy and this led to a slow down in economical growth, unemployment and losses in billions of shillings. Forests are considered by some conservationists to be keystone ecosystems in other words conserving forests leads to conservation of not only the many species that inhabit the forests but the many other species in the different ecosystems.

Forests have been known to be a habitat for many organisms and so the deforestation in Uganda has led to habitat loss for many bird and primate species reducing the country's biodiversity as many of these species are now endangered. The most common example is the mountain gorillas of western Uganda which are endangered and had almost reached extinction because their habitats were being cut down. This loss of habitat also has an effect on tourism which has become a major source of foreign exchange to the Ugandan economy.

Soil erosion has been one of the direct causes of deforestation that can easily be detected by the local public and conservationists. Soil erosion

usually occurs on hilly areas in the country like western districts where there trees on slopes were cut down to make way for crops. Erosion is encouraged by deforestation because trees usually take many years to grow and have strong tap root systems that hold the soil particles together and they also protect the soil from the agents of soil erosion e. g. wind and rain.

Erosion leads to the loss of soil fertility and structure making the soil less productive leading to low yields and this also has an effect on the soil biodiversity as most of the soil organisms are killed or displaced. This soil erosion is also essentially the cause of land slides now common in Kabale district which have caused loss of property and sometimes loss of lives.

Global warming is one the biggest problems facing our generation today.

Global warming is an increase in the earth's average temperature due to the increase of green house gases like carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Trees absorb and store carbon dioxide the most abundant green house gas and thus the cutting down of these trees stops the active removal of carbon dioxide and release of stored portion into the already vulnerable atmosphere. So deforestation is the main cause of global warming which has blamed for catastrophic events like climate change and worldwide desertification. In Uganda the recent floods and droughts being experienced in many parts of the country have been attributed to global warming by many environmentalists and this means these negative events have been caused by deforestation in the past.

Forests are habitats to many animal and plant species and this essentially makes forests a natural choice for a tourist attraction. Forests harbor many

primate and bird species which are popular with tourists and the clearing of these forests has led to the loss of foreign exchange from tourism. Since tourism has become major source of national income this has affected the countries economy negatively enabling countries like Kenya and Rwanda to out compete Uganda as tourist destinations.

In conclusion there are numerous causes for deforestation depending on many factors and the effects are wide spread with new ones being discovered. This shows that forests are essential not only to the survival of the species they inhabit them but also to the protection of our way of life and that we have the power to protect them. This stresses the need for the conservation of forests not only by the few conservationists but by the general public through education on the importance, the effects and empowering people to protect the forests and woodlands.