



The national meteorological authority aims at increasing the functionality of climate monitoring stations



The NRM has the goal of ensuring access to clean and safe water

By Jacqueline Emodok

Changes in climate and weather patterns, which, in recent times, have manifested through long spells of drought, leading to shortage of food and water for both domestic use and production, call for a sustainable approach towards addressing the challenge.

Climate change has been attributed to environmental degradation, with the forest cover gradually declining from 11% in 2010 to 9% in 2015 and currently at 8%.

The wetlands have not been spared, either and the country continues to face other challenges such as pollution. All these challenges have a negative impact on the climate and environment, which affects social and economic development.

According to Festus Luboyera, the executive director of the Uganda National Meteorological Authority, climate is an important factor in the social and economic development of the country, as it influences the development of all sectors of the economy.

"Virtually all sectors need information on weather. However, the key sectors that we mostly serve include transport, mainly aviation and marine, defence, agriculture, disaster preparedness, environmental and water resources management, tourism and construction industry," Luboyera says.

Also, the 2016-2021 NRM manifesto observes that when wetlands are protected, they contribute to increased catchment water discharge volume and, thus, enhance and sustain hydroelectric power, water for production, agriculture production and tourism development and construction potentials.

The Government attaches great importance to fragile ecosystems for the intrinsic and economic value they offer to livelihoods. This is evidenced by the fact that the country is a party to various international conventions and has

Water ministry implementing NRM manifesto

prioritised the restoration of fragile ecosystems in its national and sector-planning frameworks.

That is why the NRM Government, through the water and environment sector, put in place strategic objectives and targets to guide the implementation of the manifesto.

The water and environment sector worked with the different departments it is composed of namely, National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), National Forestry Authority (NFA) and National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) to implement the strategies and realise the goals that the manifesto set out to achieve.

Way forward

"In the next five years, we will continue protecting wetlands. We will also educate the people on how to use the wetlands sustainably," it reads.

Indeed, NEMA has embarked on advocacy and sensitisation of the public about the dangers of pollution and environmental degradation.

Furthermore, in order to protect the environment sustainably, the NRM Government promised to increase the involvement of the population in tree planting, through Greening Uganda Programme, which is aimed at planting 100 million trees in the next five years.

BESIDES MAINTAINING THE INTEGRITY OF THE FORESTS, THERE WILL BE EFFORTS TO INCREASE FOREST PLANTATION

To achieve this, the manifesto states that they will step up the supply of free and subsidised tree seedlings and support private initiatives in production of seedlings.

Others include encouraging land owners to plant trees as a means of generating income, promoting afforestation on bare hills and supporting partnership between NFA and the private sector.

The manifesto also emphasises the restoration of degraded natural forests in the reserves.

Re-surveying and demarcation of central forest reserves (CFRs)

boundaries is also a priority in maintaining the integrity of CFRs.

The manifesto notes that the total external boundary of 12,000km of the 506 CFRs under the management of NFA requires opening, re-surveying and regular maintenance.

Michael Mugisha, the executive director of NFA, says in the last year, 385km of forest boundaries were re-surveyed and demarcated with permanent concrete pillars to effectively secure the integrity of the CFRs.

Besides maintaining the integrity of the forests, there will also be efforts to increase forest plantation through the Forest Plantation Development, which entails investing in plantation development at a rate of 2,500 hectares per year, while maintaining the existing and subsequent young forest crops.

Ultimately, NFA has been tasked with increasing the forest cover from 10% to 15% by 2021.

The Government also promised to invest in water to boost commercial agriculture and industrial activities.

Emphasis will be placed on construction of large and small-scale water schemes for irrigation, livestock and rural industries.

There is also the goal of increasing access to clean and safe water from the current 65% to 79% in rural areas, within a radius of 1km and from 77% to 100%, to ensure that at least each village has a clean and

safe water facility and, eventually, piped water in urban areas by 2021.

"This financial year, NWSC has registered a number of achievements towards improving service delivery to the people of Uganda," Eng. Silver Mugisha, the managing director, says.

Among these is the 212m Euro Kampala Water-Lake Victoria Watsan project, whose objective is to provide long-term solutions to the water supply challenges in Kampala.

When it comes to weather, the national meteorological authority aims at increasing the functionality of weather and climate monitoring stations from 25% to 44%, developing and implementing weather and climate awareness programmes and early warning products, in support of climate change adaptation.

Also on the agenda is improving the quality and quantity of meteorological services to customers by strengthening the observing network, National Meteorological Centre, data and information exchange, according to the World Meteorological Organisation and International Civil Aviation Organisation standards.

The authority set out to build a skilled and motivated workforce through good human resource management practices, promotion of awareness of the benefits of using meteorological services, information and products for public safety and socio-economic planning.

The meteorological authority disseminates monthly weather updates and in the last year, nine monthly weather forecasts were released to the public, through local radio shows, television shows, local print media and also through the district production officers and registered farmer groups for decision making at the districts.

The meteorological centre has also continued to provide routine mobile weather alerts. Alerts were given to 1,000 registered marine weather information users and 200 vessel operators on a daily basis.

Collectively, these government bodies are working towards fulfilling pledges, which the NRM made in the 2016-2021 manifesto.