

A *Monthly* from the East African Sustainability Watch Network and INFORSE East Africa

EU Deforestation Regulation Raises Anxiety Amongst East African Small holder Coffee Farmers



A coffee farm in Masaka district.
Photo: UCSD

The EU's new deforestation regulation (EUDR) seeks to ensure that seven commodity products—soy, beef, palm oil, wood, cocoa, coffee and rubber, all of which are major drivers of deforestation—will no longer be sold in the EU if sourced from areas affected by deforestation or forest degradation practices. Operators and large traders will need to demonstrate origin, including geo coordinates in an auditable manner, to prove the product/commodity is deforestation free.

According to the European Commission, ‘deforestation and forest degradation are among the main drivers of climate change and biodiversity loss - the two key global environmental crises of our time. As a major economy and consumer of these commodities, the EU is contributing to deforestation and forest degradation worldwide. The EU, therefore, has the responsibility to contribute to ending it.’ The Regulation text was officially approved by the European Parliament on April 19th 2023 and was published in the EU Official Journal 9th June 2023. Companies will need to be compliant by end of 2024. Key to this is deforestation-free commodity products into the EU. With regards to coffee, the EU regulations on deforestation-free value chains aim to make production more sustainable. The EUDR will establish strict measures to prevent companies from placing products on the EU that are linked to deforestation or forest degradation. For instance, the regulation mandates that all traders must definitively demonstrate that the production of their goods has no connection with deforestation, or else they could face fines of up to 4% of their turnover.

According to *welthungerhilfe.org*, coffee is estimated to generate \$200 billion in annual retail sales, supporting countless jobs. In the North, coffee houses are an integral part of the economy and demands for higher quality support prices. Coffee consumers are increasingly willing to pay a little extra for their coffee if this makes it more sustainable. In the Global South for example in East Africa, coffee is produced by small holder farmers using either the Robusta or the Arabica varieties, but is faced with several challenges including disease and pest outbreaks and climate change.

A key area of contention is how the EUDR will be implemented. As part of this regulation, the European Commission will create a three-tier benchmarking system to categorize commodity-producing countries and regions as low, standard, or high risk. The system will allow regulators to focus checks on products from high-risk countries, and allow operators to conduct simplified due diligence for products from low-risk countries. ‘However, it seems that the EU is oblivious to the potential consequences of these labels on the affected countries’ reputations. Many are concerned about being categorized as “high-risk”, which could discourage importers from buying coffee.’ notes *Coffee Intelligence*.

‘The need to prepare for the imminent enforcement of the EUDR and to demonstrate that the provenance of coffee from small scale farmers in East Africa is deforestation-free, is going to be taxing for coffee supply chain actors before entering the EU’, notes Kimbowa Richard, Chairman of *INFORSE East Africa*. In the meantime, climate change impacts that are pushing coffee farmers into fragile and in ‘more productive’ farmlands in coffee growing areas have been documented for both Robusta and Arabica coffee species. So, how will implementation of the EUDR be, given the structural bottlenecks and historical factors related to absence of property rights for many remote areas where small holder poor farmers are located, given that satellite imagery will need to be supplemented with field realities? How will climate change and the insatiable demand for fuel wood be factored in? How far are the coffee exporting countries ready in terms of facilitating provision of data, to be in line with the EUDR requirements for the coffee supply chain? To what extent are their agricultural extension set ups up to speed to support farmers, exporters and cooperatives to comply with the EUDR?

The stringent requirement of this legislation is of particular concern. For instance, aerial or satellite photography must be provided for every parcel of land used for coffee production. These images must demonstrate no deforestation has taken place and need to be submitted with each trade – or else the entire container can be rejected. In effect, many exporters feel the practicalities of mapping small farms and digitizing farm biodata to enhance sustainable coffee traceability to secure supply of accurate data on an ongoing basis as required under the law, will be very complex and quite costly.

Oweko Community Call for Massive Tree Planting, Law Enforcement to Prevent Further Loss of Forest Cover



From left to Right: Participants at the Environmental Rights & Climate Action Advocacy dialogue; Firewood for sale in Nebbi. Photos: JEEP & UCSD

Community members from Oweko parish, Ndhew Sub-County, Nebbi district are grappling with environmental challenges such as uncontrolled bush burning, indiscriminate tree cutting, population pressure, swamp reclamation, brickmaking in wetland areas and the high firewood demand. This was revealed during the Environmental Rights and Climate Action Advocacy dialogue, organized by JEEP, political and religious leaders of Ndhew Subcounty. The dialogue is part of the one and half year (2023 -2024) Climate Action for Sustainable Livelihoods (CAISL) in Nebbi district.

The dialogue was a participatory capacity and knowledge sharing session for communities trained by JEEP in sustainable energy and climate action in Oweko parish, Ndhew Subcounty, Nebbi district. This seeks to equip them with knowledge and skills to undertake advocacy to influence environmental and socio-economic change at the local level through promoting the sustainable energy solutions and climate action.

This event that gathered fifty seven participants from Oweko and other nearby villages served as a platform for community members to voice concerns and collaboratively devise sustainable solutions. Among the prevalent issues discussed were overcutting of trees for brick burning, firewood and charcoal for sale. This according to the participants has resulted into depletion of natural forests, which has deprived them of benefits such as fruits, shade, wind break and increased women's burden of looking for firewood for domestic use.

Based on the above challenges, a range of solutions were put forward. These include planting more trees, which emerged as an action of consensus, along with a call for strict laws to safeguard the remaining forest cover and other landscapes. To combat the growing scarcity of firewood that was noted as another challenge, participants were introduced to innovative cooking technologies such as the Rocket Lorena stove, shielded stoves, fireless basket cookers, briquettes and tips on reducing wood consumption through ensuring efficient cooking methods.

More emphasis was put on the importance of imparting knowledge on tree planting techniques. Through an all-inclusive tree planting formula approach; Who, why, Which, Where, and How, participants were equipped with tips and skills to particularly care for trees planted so as to accelerate actions to foster a greener environment.

An overwhelming feedback from the participants on the tangible benefits of adopting environmentally friendly practices and the importance of ongoing education in sustaining these efforts was expressed to Joint Energy and Environment Projects (JEEP) by various participants.

By fostering community engagement, equipping individuals with practical skills, and advocating for sustainable practices, the event exemplified the power of collective action in safeguarding the precious environment in Oweko parish, Ndhew Sub county.

JEEP and Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development in partnership with the Nordic Folkecentre for Renewable Energy (NFRE) supported by CISU Denmark have since July 2023 started implementing the CAISL Project in Nebbi district in West Nile region, North Western Uganda. The Project seeks to make Nebbi district a JEEP Model district in climate mitigation measures and built-up community resilience, accessibility to environmentally friendly solutions and advocacy skills. The intervention has a special focus on youth and women participation.

Global Urge to ‘Inspire Inclusion’ on Women’s Day 2024



A woman participant speaks out during an event in Nebbi under the CAISL Project

The International Women’s Day (IWD) is celebrated annually on the 8th of March in recognition of the role and contribution of women to the development process all over the world. The day provides an opportunity to enhance advocacy for inclusion of women’s concerns in the development agenda at all levels, by calling on United Nations Member States to design and implement interventions aimed at attaining gender equality and the empowerment of women.

This year, International Women’s Day will be celebrated under the global theme: 'Inspire Inclusion'. There are many ways to ensure the needs, interests and aspirations of women and girls are valued and included.

According to *internationalwomensday.com*, Government, organizations and groups can ‘Inspire Inclusion’ through action in areas such as: forging women's economic empowerment; recruiting, retaining and developing female talent; supporting women and girls into leadership; decision-making, business designing and building infrastructure meeting the needs of women and girls; helping women and girls make informed decisions about their health; involving women and girls in sustainable agriculture and food security; providing women and girls with access to quality education and training; elevating women and girl's participation and achievement in sport; promoting creative and artistic talent of women and girls and addressing further areas supporting the advancement of women and girls.

In Nebbi district, JEEP is working with Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development in partnership with the Nordic Folkecenter for Renewable Energy, to implement the *Climate Action for Improved and Sustainable Livelihoods (CAISAL) Project*. The goal of the CAISAL project is to make Nebbi a model district in climate mitigation measures, community resilience, and accessibility to local sustainable solutions and advocacy skills.

This it is hoped, will complement Government of Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP), the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) that engage women in traditional enterprises such as poultry, piggery and produce buying and selling and other national programmes.

The CAISAL project inspires action by conducting sensitizations, training and capacity development to assist women to conserve and use energy more efficiently at household level, while advocating for investment in agricultural enterprises which utilize climate - smart farming practices and appropriate technology for value-addition with energy efficiency.

Given the ban charcoal burning and charcoal business in northern and eastern Uganda since last year, the price of charcoal and firewood has gone up affecting women who have to look for fuel to cook every day, and for use in their businesses. CAISAL Partners believe that actions are needed to diversify and widen the income base for women and youth in Nebbi, build their resilience to climate change and as a result gradually inspire their inclusion in planning and decision making.

Furthermore, the CAISAL Project directly contributes to the UN Global Goals on gender equality as well as poverty, affordable and clean energy, climate action and partnerships for the goals in Nebbi district. This is done through local sustainable energy and climate actions that inspire inclusion and sustainability to *Make Nebbi Green*.

Equal access to energy is crucial to advancing gender equality. Hence, driving gender-transformative actions at local level to make energy more accessible, directly addresses the practical needs of women and girls in Nebbi and other parts of Uganda. Hence, CAISAL Project has a clear focus on women and youths; training (trainers including women) and practice in advocacy for improved and sustainable livelihoods; demonstration, construction and distribution of energy saving stoves as well as local seed collection and tree growing.

Read more about progress in implementation of the CAISAL Project to **#MakeNebbiGreen** from: <https://jeepfolkecenter.org/projects/caisl/> and about the *Local Sustainable Energy and Climate solutions* that are being promoted to **#InspireInclusion** in Nebbi district from: <https://www.localsolutions.inforse.org/>