

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

Uganda's 2023 Renewable Energy Conference & EXPO On a Clarion Call: 'Clean Energy for All!'



JEEP's 'energy hub'
in Nebbi district

The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development together with the National Renewable Energy Platform (NREP) will host the Renewable Energy Conference & EXPO (REC23 & EXPO), from 16 – 18 November 2023, at Munyonyo Commonwealth Resort, Kampala, Uganda. REC23 & EXPO will be held under the theme: 'A Clean Energy Future for All!'. This theme is timely as Uganda and indeed the rest of the world, looks forward to fulfilling SDG 7 target: "By 2030 ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services."

Affordable, clean energy fuels sustainable development, such as by providing the light that allows a child to do her homework or the power that a woman uses to run sewing machines for her business. Only 28% of Uganda's population had access to electricity in 2018. Millions still burn solid fuels such as wood and animal dung for cooking and heating, filling their homes with dangerous pollutants.

To compound the above challenge, ever since the President's Executive order banning commercial charcoal production in Northern Uganda was issued in May 2023, prices in Kampala and other surrounding areas have at least doubled. This has also had a snow ball effect on firewood prices as well, that is used by over 90% of the Ugandan population. This is because more people have chosen it as an immediate alternative for household use and in business (for example food vendors and bakeries).

It is no surprising to have a tin of charcoal costing Ugshs 1,000 cannot cook a quick meal for 3 people, while this is the minimum cost a household would need to cook beans for one meal using firewood. This is compounded by the widespread use of the inefficient three-stone fireplace to cook with firewood, while efficient charcoal stoves have not been adequately adopted by households.

REC23 & EXPO comes at a time when Uganda is facing a risky biomass energy deficit complicated by the high cost of electricity. According to the World Bank, Uganda has some of the highest electricity tariffs in the region, which can make it difficult for businesses to operate and for households to afford basic electricity services, relegating many to burn solid fuels as a viable option to cook and light. The event's choice of the theme 'Clean Energy for All!' is in itself a clarion call to reverse the above trends in the run up to 2030 (target for SDG 7 and others). Reducing the cost of electricity is no longer a matter of debate but an urgent necessity; scaling up energy efficiency and energy conservation practices should be compulsory rather than an option for institutions, households and businesses given the dwindling biomass resource on which they depend.

Some of the planned breakout sessions during REC23 & EXPO include: *Delivering Clean Energy at a Time of Global Crisis – Energy Security and Climate Change; A Spotlight on the Future: Parish Development Model and Productive Use of Energy; Towards New Energy Systems and Technologies; Charcoal Ban: Bottlenecks and Prospects for Transitioning to Clean Energy; Climate Change and Renewable Energy: Securing an Energy and Climate Resilient Future for People and Planet; Civil Society and Shaping the Energy Transition Discourse: Legacy and Prospects.*

Find more information about REC23 & EXPO including the programme: <https://nrep ug/rec23/>

Nebbi Communities Grumble Over a Growing Firewood Scarcity



Environmental Rights & Climate Action Advocacy training workshop at Angar town (Photo: UCSD)

Community members from 9 sub-counties in Nebbi district (West Nile region in North Western Uganda) have decried the rising scarcity of firewood in the area. This was during the Environmental Rights and Climate Action Advocacy training workshop held at Angar town in Nyaruvur Town Council. This was organized by Joint Energy and Environment Projects (JEEP), Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD) and the Nordic Folkecentre for Renewable Energy (Denmark).

Attended by over 45 participants from 9 sub-counties of Alala, Atego, Nebbi, Nyaruvur, Parombo, Acana, Parombo Town Council and Padwot, the workshop decried the over-cutting of trees for firewood supply, which has deprived them of other benefits including provision of fruits, shade and windbreak functions and increased women's burden of looking for firewood. As a result, the communities noted that this could conceivably explain the unreliable weather patterns experienced in the area in form of prolonged dry conditions, sporadic rainfall and storms that often result in flood occurrences.

The Environmental Rights and Climate Action Advocacy training workshop was a participatory capacity and knowledge sharing session for communities trained by JEEP in sustainable energy and climate action in Nebbi district. The intervention 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.

The interactive hands-on training involved awareness raising about the salient features of Uganda's newest legislation: the National Environmental Act (2019) and the Climate Change Act (2021); and 'speaking out' in a local context. Group work sessions were also held that highlighted the pressing environmental challenges in Nebbi district, while plenary discussions enabled participants to share issues, experiences and possible actions to sustainably harness their local environmental resources.

Exciting role plays were done. For example, participants were given an opportunity to assume the role of a citizen bringing an environmental concern to the attention of a local radio station within a limited time. To highlight the importance of having environmentally sensitive leaders, a mock local council campaign to highlight need for environmental and climate action was done with participants as the village local council members. Participants also identified other environmental challenges in Nebbi district that include uncontrolled grazing of animals, bush burning, lack of electricity as a viable option to the rampant use of tree biomass, pests and diseases and the poor disposal of plastics in rural and urban areas.

The Environmental Rights and Climate Action training was conducted by JEEP and UCSD in partnership with the Nordic Folkecentre for Renewable Energy (NFRE), supported by CISU Denmark under a Project titled: *Climate Action for Sustainable Livelihoods (CAISL)* in Nebbi district. The one and half year CAISL 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 will have special focus on youth and women participation.

Kikandwa Environmental Association Sparkles in Community Forest Management, Faces Rising Firewood Thefts



Despite KEA's forest conservation actions, there are firewood theft threats (Photo: UCSD)

Kikandwa Environment Association (KEA), a rural farmers' organization located in Kasejjere and Nakwaya in Mityana district is a model for community forest management that is driven and owned by the communities.

KEA was born out of the need to address the alarming low levels of food security, low income in the rural communities in addition to the need to protect against rapid degradation of natural high forests on the characteristic hilly landscapes to meet the demand for fuel wood and charcoal in the district and the surrounding areas.

To date, encroachment of wetlands has also been witnessed resulting in reduced access to clean and safe natural water sources for the fast growing population, which has also affected the microclimate (especially rain formation).

Over 20 years, KEA has grown as an organization that reaches 8 villages in Bbambula Parish. The key success has been the choice of the local innovations to strengthen community engagement in environmental management and climate action to address food insecurity. These include the restoration of forest cover through the 'half + half 1,000 acre' community forest project concept of planting trees on private land. These small forest patches or piece of land are left to regenerate into forests by farmers with a target of having 1,000 acres of forest conserved in Uganda.

This is driven by the fact that it is no longer feasible to conserve large tracts of forest only due to the rapidly growing human population and competing land use priorities. This initiative could lead to sustainable agriculture and food security, reduced soil erosion, stable rainfall pattern, stable income and alternative use of forests and is potentially scalable to other parts of Uganda. So far 30 acres of the targeted 1,000 are owned by individual farmers in Mityana District.

In a span of 20 years, KEA has planted more than 300,000 indigenous trees (including agroforestry) and has held over 200 training sessions for members and other community members in tree farming and care. The 'natural' ambiance one gets on reaching Kasejjere and neighboring villages bears testimony to this. However, challenges still loom high.

For example, cases of firewood theft that was unheard of are now a growing concern. KEA now plans to scale up household energy efficiency through training members in construction of firewood saving stoves and encouraging others to adopt efficient charcoal stoves. Securing trees planted and tree products is an issue that KEA wants to take up due to the firewood stealing threats

KEA headquarters is located in Kasejjere village, Bbambula Parish in Kikandwa Mityana District and is a member of the International Network for Sustainable Energy (INFORSE) in Uganda.