

Facts on Mabira



Mabira forest is one of the 65 Forest Reserves covering an area of 29,974 ha legal 518ha of which are fall under Strict Nature Reserve. Strict nature reserves are areas which are maintained in their natural state without any form of exploitation to act as benchmarks against the activities and operations of silviculture and management (Dawkins, 1958).

Importance

- Many compartments of Mabira forest reserve are important for recreational purposes; a total area of the recreation zone is 5079 ha, equivalent to 16.2% of the whole reserve. Ecotourism is among the best non-consumptive uses of the Tropical High Forest (THF) provided of course that it is carefully planned and regulated according to the available forest resources and the number of users.
- Mabira is ecologically important, it provides a habitat for many species of plants and animals including 312 trees and shrub species, 287 species of birds, 16 small mammals and 199 species of butterflies and 97 species of large months. Mabira has wild robusta coffee, dioscoria tubers, yams and other plants whose economic importance is unknown, which would then be lost.
- Mabira forest is still an important area for conservation. It is the only large forest in the biogeographical zone of the Lake Victoria Crescent thus providing the only watershed for this already water stressed area. The watershed feeds the streams that flow into L. Victoria and R Ssezibwa and also provide sources of water for the neighbouring communities. Cutting down of Mabira will escalate the water stress that already exists.
- The Alam group of companies together with its international partners have invested over \$1m dollars in a hoel facility that is due to be opened in April to tap into this potential. The Uganda Government has also committed to retain Mabira forest for maintenance of the ecological balance in relation to construction of Bujagali power project.
- This and other low impact usage such as collection of dry wood for household use, medicine, leaves, fruits, mushrooms, termites, grasshoppers and other products that do not entail destruction of standing growing stock are on-going.

Impacts of degazetment

- Carbon sequestration (*absorption of carbon from the atmosphere*) in the Kampala – Jinja conurbation with heavy industry activity will be lost. In terms of price this damage is estimated at US\$ 316,305,000 million
- The biomass of Mabira estimated at 300tonnes per hectare, an equivalent of 550tonnes of carbon dioxide per hectare
- Destruction of the watershed for lakes Victoria and Kyoga and Rivers Sezibwa and Musamya will perpetuate decline of water levels and undermine their socio-economic and ecological functions

■ Loss of ecotourism value of Mabira forest which may result into closing down of eco tourism investment and losing tourism revenue source

■ Breach of contract for big investments such as the Eco-lodge and Bujagali Power project as well as regional and international agreements and protocols

The obligation of the legislature

The 1995 Uganda Constitution stipulates in article 237 (2) (b) that “the Government or local government as determined by Parliament by law, shall hold in trust for the people and protect natural lakes, rivers, wetlands, forest reserves, game reserves, national parks and any land to be reserved for ecological and tourist purposes for the common good of all citizens” and any degazettement should be in done in public interest and after thorough consultations with the stakeholders.

Is SCOUL public or private interest?

The Sugar Corporation of Uganda Limited is a private commercial company.

Whereas it provides some public good through its enterprise, its operations are fully subject to the policy and legal provisions. As part of their corporate responsibility obligation they must uphold the set environmental standards and practices without compromising public interest or even pressing government into taking prejudicial, detrimental and irreversible actions.

That said, it is worth noting that actually SCOUL will be ripping off Ugandans if it were to take the designated area. It is estimated that the factory would bag \$ 568m dollars to start with. It is estimated that the world market value of a cubic metre of wood is approximately \$160 and each hectare is valued at 500 cubic metres. And this is of course is less the value of land estimated at Uganda Shillings. 8.5 billion and other ecological services such as watershed and carbon sequestration!

There are alternatives to addressing investment interests that require land use change

In the case of the proposed SCOUL investment:

- Buganda Kingdom has proposed to provide alternative land located in Mukono that they can earmark for sugarcane growing under mutually agreed upon terms and conditions.
- There is a possibility of out growers that are able to grow and supply the required sugarcane quantities to the SCOUL factory, if the factory honored and paid a decent price for the product.