
[Uganda: Sugar company plans to destroy Mabira forest](#)

A Ugandan sugar company plans to expand its sugar estate destroying 7,000 hectares or nearly a third of Mabira forest, one of the few remaining intact forests around the shores of Lake Victoria, home to unique species of monkeys and birds. The plan has proved hugely controversial for threatening hundreds of unique species confined to dwindling patches of rainforest and may affect the rainfall in a region already suffering from drought linked to climate change.

President Yoweri Museveni ordered an assessment in August of the feasibility of giving away a quarter of the protected Mabira forest reserve to the privately owned Sugar Corporation of Uganda (Scoul), one of Uganda's biggest sugar companies, for clearing to widen its neighbouring sugar plantation. Museveni was quoted in the local press as saying industry must take priority. "Forests are easier to plant than constructing industries," the state-run New Vision reported him as saying. "If you have factories, you can get funds to conserve the environment."

(!) The move outraged parliamentarians, Mabira residents and officials at the National Forest Authority (NFA), who say the environmental cost of trashing one of Uganda's last remaining patches of natural forest would be incalculable. But the government says extra jobs would outweigh losses caused by the removal of the forest.

"You can't cut the forest. We'd lose our lives," said 50-year-old John Kasule, who lives outside the reserve. "The forest brings rain, we collect firewood from there, we use it for houses and rope. There are 40 types of medicine we would lose," he said, pointing to a dense green tangle of trees and thick vines stretching into the distance.

The forest absorbs pollution in an industrial area, sinking millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide, and helps maintain central Uganda's wet climate -- removing it would bring drier weather, hurting crop yields, a NFA report said. "Mabira is a watershed for two rivers contributing to the Nile, an ecological stabiliser between two major industrial towns and it protects Lake Victoria," said NFA spokesman Gaster Kiyingi.

"Instead of being negative ... we need to plant more trees," Environment Minister Maria Mutagamba said. But others disagree. "How many years have foresters been doing research in how to regenerate rainforest? We don't know where to start," said Jacovelli. "A tropical forest with hundreds of species is impossible to replant. Once it's gone, it's gone."

Article based on: "EU Scheme Cuts Uganda Sugar Funding in Forest Row", November 16, 2006, and "Plan To Axe Ugandan Forest For Sugar Sparks Anger", November 29, 2006, by Tim Cocks, Reuters News Service, sent by Andrew Boswell, e-mail: a_boswell_2004@yahoo.co.uk

