

Theme: Prevention and community involvement

1. Moses Nuwagaba, Environ Uganda, P.O Box 2612, Kampala, Uganda, nuwagabamoses@yahoo.co.uk
2. Harold Ssenkubuge sino_ug@yahoo.com

Introduction

The authors of this supplementary discussion would like to make an input on this theme by discussing a self generated sub-topic: *The Developing world as the Bedrock of International Environmental Revolution*.

It is no longer a disputable fact that the developed world, owing to their environmentally unfriendly investment policies, contributes immensely to the effects of global warming and other related hazards in the whole world. Surprisingly, the developing world too seems to be following suit. Yet the later still enjoys the opportunity of hosting a very large and virgin environment and ecosystem which when preserved would become the mustard seed for the restoration of the environment in the developed world. On the question of forests, fire is the main destroyer in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Sources of wildland fire

The main causes of these fires include:-

- **Pastoralists:** Some of them burn bushes in dry seasons. This is done in order to clear off old grass in preparation of fresh pastures as soon as rains come. Sometimes it is done to control ticks.
- **Charcoal burners:** In almost every city, town or trading center in the whole of Africa charcoal is the main source of energy especially for cooking, ironing and other domestic heat energy requirements. In addition to the daily massive tree-cutting for this charcoal, some burners position their furnaces closer to the bushes and the latter inevitably catch fire.
- **Petroleum products:** Most petroleum products are highly inflammable. Business saboteurs, terrorists or even ignorant people set such products ablaze with serious environmental consequences.
- **Cultivators:** Some Cultivators burn grass in their gardens. The fire sometimes spills over to the bushes causing havoc. Yet others use fire to clear bushes and pave way for cultivation.
- **Accidents:** Any motor accident can result into fire. The situation is worse if this involves a vehicle carrying any inflammable products. The resultant fire may not easily be controlled especially for fear of one's life.
- **Careless smokers:** Some people, irrespective of age, love seeing the world burning. They extract happiness from such sadist ways of living. An unfortunate forest will have such a person as its neighbor.
- **Hunters:** In Africa the act of hunting has only reduced but it has never stopped. These people burn bushes in dry seasons in order to trap wild animals searching for fresher pastures as soon as rains come.
- **The search for rain:** Some traditions still existing in Africa may be interesting but they can also be disastrous. Some people believe for example that since the Cumulo-Nimbus cloud

- that brings rain in normally dark, then smoke from burnt grass would assist to create and bring rain faster.
- **Honey harvesters:** Over 80% of our population in Uganda still uses fire and smoke to either kill or scare Bees when harvesting honey. They rarely mind what havoc that fire they leave after this harvest would cause.
 - **Wars:** Sub-Saharan Africa is a region still prone to wars. Belligerents in military conflicts often burn bushes either to restrict movement of their adversaries or expose them altogether, the destruction such fires may cause notwithstanding.
 - **Volcanoes:** Volcanic eruptions, though not very regular, may too be a source of destructive fire in any part of the world.
 - **Fire as a pesticide:** Some farmers use fire in pest-infested fields to control crop diseases. The other out come of this may be wild fire especially where huge plantations exist.

Remedial mechanisms

Generally, over one-half of forest destruction in the developing world is through fire. Since man is directly involved in creating this fire, deliberately or otherwise, it is very fitting now for us to discuss how we can make communities an integral component of wildland fire prevention and management. Short of this endeavor, all our efforts to preserve the environment remain an exercise in futility. Whereas in wider terms we shall need to cause awareness to such communities about the direct benefits they extract from a well preserved environment, in some instances like provision of heat energy and pest control, we may have to suggest viable alternatives that reduce dependency of these people on forests. Further, international and local social, economic and political policies must be environmentally friendly. In this paper the following remedies are suggested:-

- **Energy saving charcoal stoves:** At domestic level here in Africa, at least 98% of all homesteads use charcoal for cooking. However, over 80% of the heat produced at a particular fire place is wasted to the surroundings. This means that if the technology of energy saving charcoal stoves is emphasized, the rate of tree cutting would reduce by the same rate per day. Inadvertently this would reduce the chances of burning forests by charcoal burners.
- **Community sensitization:** International efforts to create continuous awareness on environment, especially in the developing world, should immediately be prioritized. This would reduce ignorance per capita and create awareness on available alternatives.
- **Dialogue emphasis on conflict resolution:** To avoid fires emanating from military confrontations, dialogue should be the only internationally accepted mechanism for resolving conflicts.
- **Quick Fire Response Mechanisms:** Most developing countries should be helped to build and establish Quick Fire Response centers in order to expeditiously attend to fires of a wider magnitude.
- **Trans-border fire fighters:** Some fires are cross-border. This calls for government departments responsible for environment to establish trans-border fire fighting bodies for effective fire management.
- **Updating international laws on environment:** Due to fast changing global challenges, additional and particularly restrictive laws need to be enacted for protection, preservation and promotion of the environment. For example, the government of Uganda now has embarked on cutting natural forests to create ground

for sugarcane and other plantations in the name of promoting investment. This is being done by government despite wide public outcry. The helpless people here now need re-enforcement by international laws in order protect their environment from overzealous 'investors'. The same laws should create stringent penalties for individuals or groups of people using fire to fight wars any where in the world.

- **International taxation policies:** The international law should create a special annual environment tax requiring each country to remit money directly proportional to its contribution to environmental degradation. Such money would be used by international environment bodies to reverse the effects caused against environment by such countries.
- **International policy on forest incentives:** In order to encourage people to plant trees in the world, an international policy that requires individual governments to buy artificial forests from their people should be designed. The buying process could stretch over years in order to make people directly responsible for those forests on full time basis till they have matured. This would encourage many people to plant and grow trees in every country.

Conclusion

A lot needs to be swiftly done to guard against wildland fires and generally protect the environment. In order to quickly attend to the current threats like global warming, we need to first look at what exactly do we rely on today for protection against it. Then after consolidating, we can proceed and strategically plan for re-expansion of our global environment. This calls for zoning of the whole world into parts each given specific priorities in the areas of environment protection, preservation and expansion. And of course both national and international policies, laws and conventions need to be adjusted to accommodate this approach. If any body has been thinking of salvaging the environment then he or she needs to be told that the time is now.