



Press Release

European Union signs joint strategy with Ministry to conserve national water assets

The European Union and Ministry of Environment, Water and Natural Resources have agreed on a joint strategy to protect two of Kenya's five major natural water assets. The Ministry's Principal Secretary, Dr. Richard Lesiyampe, and the Head of Development at the European Union in Kenya, Erik Habers, met today at the Ministry to sign the five-year plan of action.

The conservation strategy will protect water supplies across ten counties in Kenya. Large areas of land, known as water towers, in Mount Elgon and Cherangani Hills that hold and funnel water, will be conserved with KShs 3.5 billion of funding from the European Union.

The initiative will protect Kenya's ground supplies of water, which are essential for farming and people, and also improve sanitation. Water towers are tracts of land that store rainwater, enable regular river flows, recharge ground-water storage, improve soil fertility, reduce erosion and sediment in river water, and host a diverse species of plants and animals.

The joint programme will enable technical support and funding to the Ministry, 10 County governments and several government agencies. In the area of the two ecosystems, work will be carried out at all levels to conserve the local environment – from Central government planning around climate change, to supporting sustainable community land use. There will be replanting of trees, and conservation grants will be available to local communities.

The programme will benefit hundreds of thousands of people living in the areas that rely on water supplies from Mount Elgon (Trans Nzoia, Bungoma and Mt Elgon Counties) and Cherangani Hills (West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet, Uasin Ngishu, Kakamega, Busia, Siaya and Kisumu Counties).

Principal Secretary at the Ministry of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, Dr. Richard Lesiyampe, said:

“Kenya’s water assets are of vital national importance to our country’s future. They need to be conserved, especially in this era of climate change that is starting to hit Kenya.”

“Conserving, restoring and regulating Kenya’s water towers will benefit tens of thousands throughout ten counties. Action is needed now to build long-term solutions to protect Kenya’s future agriculture and water supply needs.”

“I am happy that my Ministry and colleagues at the Kenya Forest Service, the Kenya Water Towers Agency and the Kenya Wildlife Service will be working with the European Union in this important area.”

Erik Habers, Head of Development Cooperation at the European Union in Kenya, said:

“This period of drought underlines the importance of maintaining national water assets in a country like Kenya, that relies on increasingly scarce rain water for both farming and people.”

“This is part of our close partnership with the Kenyan government to generate solutions to some of Kenya’s most significant, long-term challenges, especially involving food production and reducing the impact of drought.”

According to the UN, between 2000 and 2010, 50,000 hectares of forest cover – an area larger than Amboseli National Park - was lost in Kenya, resulting in soil erosion and depleting water storage in the soil. A report by the UN Environment Programme estimates the long-term costs of deforestation to outweigh the short-term benefits by three times and has estimated the overall damage to the Kenyan economy to be approximately Kshs 6 million each year.

This strategy will help implement constitutional provisions, especially on environment and forest protection, and will form part of the government’s second medium-term plan to protect the environment and address the effects of climate change.

Kenya’s main water towers are the Aberdares, Cherangani Hills, the Mau Forest, Mount Kenya and Mount Elgon. The European Union has previously supported conserving the important ecosystem of the Mau Forest.

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