

Farmers cash in on green money

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By Gerald Tenywa

UGANDAN farmers are earning millions of shillings from western companies for maintaining and planting new forests to compensate for carbon emissions into the atmosphere by western factories, a new report has said.

Western companies, to comply with environmental laws contribute millions of dollars annually to farmers mainly in the third world to maintain and create "carbon sinks."

Countries, particularly the developed nations emit excessive amounts of carbon dioxide that are blamed for trapping heat escaping from the earth surface. This contributes to the increasing global temperatures and what is referred to as global warming.

In a statement on Monday, the Environmental Conservation Trust of Uganda (ECOTRUST), said it has assisted local farmers in Ruhinda and Bunyaruguru counties of Bushenyi to earn \$100,000 from planting native tree species.

The statement was released at a forum entitled "Building Foundations for Pro Poor Ecosystem Services in Africa" convened at Hotel Africans to discuss funding for natural resources management in eastern Africa. The four-day workshop was co-hosted by ECOTRUST, the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), US-based Forest Trends and the Katoomba group.

Alex Muhweezi who heads the World Conservation Union in Uganda said the carbon trade in the case of Uganda was moving fastest among the initiatives that reward the stewards of nature.

"Paying land owners, communities and companies to protect eco-system services could have great impact on conservation and provide important new income generating opportunities for Ugandans," said Dr Sonko Kaboggoza, the head of ECOTRUST. Kaboggoza also said many countries have had encouraging experience in mobilising private companies, municipalities and others who benefit directly from eco-system services to pay for conservation.

"We are eager to explore how to adapt these programmes to work well in Uganda and other regions of Africa," he said.

Speaking at the same ceremony, Dr Aryamanya Mugisha, the NEMA chief, said payments for ecological systems offer an exciting possible solution to some of Africa's largest economic and ecological challenges.

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