

REPUBLIC OF KENYA
MURANG'A COUNTY ASSEMBLY

HANSARD

Tuesday, 9th May 2017

The House met at 2:37pm

(The Speaker Hon. Nduati Kariuki in the Chair)

PRAYERS

MOTIONS

TOTAL BAN ON CUTTING OF PREMATURE TREES IN MURANG'A COUNTY

Hon. Charles Kirigwi: I wish to give the following motion;-

Aware, that it is the function of the County Government to implement specific national government policies on national resources and environmental conservation, including soil and water conservation and forestry, further aware that global warming is increasing at an alarming rate due to many reasons one being deforestation, cognizant of the fact that this affects water cycle since trees extract water from the soil and release it to the atmosphere, recognizing that with no trees to facilitate transpiration process, the soil will dry up and contribute to drought and drying of water reservoirs in Murang'a County, such as Ndaka-ini dam which provides water to other counties like Nairobi, concerned that cutting of premature trees popularly known as shutters has been on the rise; this County Assembly urges the County Executive Member for Environment and Natural Resources through the county director ministry of forestry and natural resources to undertake the following for the next ten years;

- i. Ensure total ban on cutting of premature trees popularly known as "shutters".
- ii. Compel all tea factories to buy firewood only from their own farms.
- iii. Ban all Saw Mills from buying raw Materials including logs from Murang'a county catchment areas.
- iv. Liaise with the Kenya Forest Services and other national government organs to achieve this objective.
- v. Encourage the county residents to allocate at least 10% of their land to planting of trees.

I was motivated to do this motion because of what we have been seeing in the county starting with Thika dam which is in the media, it supplies water some of the parts in Nairobi went to as low as 21% a figure that we have never seen since its establishment.

Three weeks ago a standard one kid would cross Mathioya river without drowning because the water was at its lowest. We all have seen in the last weeks since it started raining all the rivers in our county have changed to color red, they are saturated with soil which is basically due to lack of good conservation meaning that there is a lot of soil erosion going into our rivers. I was privileged during the campaigns to have an aerial view of Murang'a county and to my surprise three quarters of our land is in dire need of afforestation.

If you look at Murang'a county from the helicopter view you will see that we have really as the residents of this county damaged our land by deforestation. The forest is reducing at a very accelerating rate and this one has been accelerated by ten factories in our county who have taken it upon themselves to manufacture tea using food fuel. The factories have gone to an extent of prematurely harvesting our fruit trees; avocados, sacred trees, mangoes so that they can sustain the business and I think it is not sustainable.

I know most of the factories have bought land and have planted trees so that they can mitigate some of this conservation issues. A tree takes a maximum of seven to ten years to mature.

I remember and if my memory serves me right we have never planted a single tree, the Deputy Speaker is telling that we have done, but I must thank the former municipal council who were the custodians of this area and the trees they planted which was championed by our Deputy Clerk Mr. Njogu. Considering the four years we have been here we found so many immature trees and even to date they haven't matured enough to be harvested. If we allowed people to harvest those premature trees in this Assembly I think we could see the harm that we could put ourselves into.

In Nairobi there is a lot of construction activities, the economy is physically heading into the construction industry which is dependent on our county for support. Those buildings being put up day in day out they are using raw materials from our county and especially these premature trees that I am calling chandazi.

Every morning if you stop at blue post around 4 a.m. or 3 a.m. at the bridge you can lorry loads coming from Murang'a county taking these premature trees to Nairobi. Unfortunately they buy from our farmers Kshs. 10 per tree and they sell at thousands of shillings when they get to Nairobi. If you go to Kangari, Gatanga, Kangema, you will find the lorries collecting the immature trees for export to Nairobi. For posterity we need to stop this business, we need to have regulations, and we need water for the next generations.

Our sons and daughters will wonder what the leaders were doing when this county went to the dogs in terms of environmental degradation. To sustain the national government projects that have cost millions of shillings e.g. the Northern Collector Tunnel, we need reforestation programs.

To sustain our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Nairobi we need to give other counties water. To support irrigation schemes in the lower parts of Murang'a we need water and forests. We need a way of enforcing people to have 10% forest cover.

I know our able County Executive Committee (CEC) can ensure we have this, even if we give all our budgetary allocation to this and fail to regulate the business, it will all go to waste. We will plant many trees but after two years the business people will come for them. We need to stop these activities by the traders and tea factories so that we can recharge our rivers to preserve our environment.

This is the best gift that we can give to this county and the generations to come. I call hon. Jane Ndegwa to second this motion.

Hon. Jane Ndegwa: I stand to second the motion

(Question proposed)

Hon. James Kariuki: I rise to support this motion. We should put a lot of effort in reforestation especially the Aberdares by planting indigenous trees. There are trees that are meant to grow in specific geographical areas, in our case there are trees that grow naturally in the Aberdares.

They also encourage undergrowth that makes it possible for water to form rivers and streams. This is not just reforestation but we reforest those areas with indigenous trees because they are meant to attract rainfall.

I support that tea factories should look for alternative sources of energy like idle power; there are factories in Meru doing this.

I would urge the management of tea factories and the Kenya Tea Development Authority (KTDA) to look into the possibilities of filling the roofing of those factories with solar panel. Solar energy is readily available although most of the tea factories are in high attitude areas, where the length of the sunlight during the day might be few hours.

I therefore think solar energy is a good alternative; we can fill the rooftops of all the buildings including the residential areas with solar panels, this could generate enough power for the factories to run their business.

On the area of premature trees, the 'shutters, they are supposed to be banned completely or for a period of time because they are used in in the construction industry and presently we know in the construction industry we are using metal bars replacing shutters when it comes to building hence easy to enforce if the national government gives a hand.

They can be completely banned so that there is no use of wood in the construction industry since we already have enough metals which can last for a long period of time unlike shutters.

That would be one way of preserving our forest. It is also my feeling that the people who are placed with responsibility of making sure we replant our forests are not doing their work properly that is; the work of afforestation and reforestation. Their efforts have not been realized because the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) undertake other things instead of their work.

They should be encouraged so as to undertake their mandate which will result in a change in expansion of our forest expands. On the issue of encouraging the county residence to allocate 10% of their land to planting of trees has been realized; since most of our farms in the rural areas have got the required percentage of land under trees be it avocado, coffee trees or even bananas that are referred to as trees, most of the farms are covered with trees of whatever nature.

What is more important is not the planting of trees in our farms because they do not help much in regulating the climate and formation of rainfall. Since rainfall is formed in the forest, catchment areas like Aberdare and Mt. Kenya, our efforts should then concentrate on the catchment areas in Murang'a and that is Aberdare forest. We should take a lot of interest in Aberdare forest and make sure we embark on aggressive campaign in the afforestation of trees in this particular forest because there are so many areas where trees have been depleted by human activities. I therefore support the motion. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Cecilia Gitu: I wish to congratulate hon. Charles Kirigwi for a very well thought motion which should have come yesterday.

Our land is being affected by coffee factories' demand for firewood. It is true that flora and fauna of the Aberdare region which is our catchment is going down, it is depleted because of the cutting down of tree. Aberdare is a catchment area not just for Murang'a but for the whole of Kenya since we are feeding Nairobi with water, then we can see the need of conserving our forest cover.

As Hon. James Kariuki has said, the trees that we plant; the exotic types, do not encourage a lot of ground cover and vegetation growth. I remember our former president Mwai Kibaki declining replanting of the exotic trees because there is nothing else that grows. He used to say that you cannot even hide to relive yourself.

As hon. James Kariuki has said, let us try to plant trees that were there originally; those that encouraged formation of other bush plants to grow so that our soil will be held together and we will not be taken away by the floods.

When we were going to Nanyuki you saw the damage that has been done by the cutting down of trees. Nyeri never used to experience floods but now people have been displaced by the floods. Why? Because the cutting down of trees added to the sun that has been there drying the ground cover, in that water is just sweeping the soil away.

The torrent comes in with a lot of force and causes a lot of damage, the more reason why we should take care so that our forests are holding water and the roots as well and are encouraging other plants to grow so that our soil can be held together.

In the lower part of Murang'a, we have seen logs of mango trees and other trees being cut. You drive along the roads in the rural areas and you find so many heaps of firewood kept for lorries to come and collect. I have been afraid that we have been leaving our land open for the element of weather.

The motion is very timely and I stand to support it. The answer should be reforestation since what has been done so far has not been so effective. It is a matter of the department of forestry or the ministry saying we have a tree planting day. It should not be a one off event; it should be continuous, a kind of practice so that we create awareness to Wanjiku that we have a duty to protect our land, our soil.

It is very important, as one speaker said, we should try and find alternative ways of sourcing energy for those factories because within 20 years we find our land bare by the cutting down of trees to provide energy. I support.

Hon. Rosemary Wakuthii: Thank you Mr. Speaker, I stand to oppose the motion because in the first place, the motion to some point is very good but to some point it is negative to our farmers.

Number one; ensure total ban on cutting of premature trees popularly known as shutters. Mr. Speaker when we talk about shutters farmers do not harvest shutters from the forest but from their farms, whereby it is one of their sources of income and they use that money to educate their children.

When we refuse them to cut down trees they planted without being forced, it means we are denying them their right.

Two; compel all tea factories to buy firewood only from their own farms. It might be possible to buy from their own farms but they do not have adequate farms to plant trees but for sure these farmers have planted the trees in their own land, so they harvest those trees as they try to eradicate poverty from their households according to the needs of the person.

Like myself Mr. Speaker, I have planted more than 10,000 seedlings in our farm because we have adequate land. My neighbor doesn't have that adequate land, but has a small portion of land; it is where he or she is getting resources from to educate the children and feed the family.

So I cannot deny them to cut down trees because they have a small portion of land but because I have adequate land, somebody cannot dictate to me to cut down or not to cut down the trees.

Right now I can't cut down any single tree in the farm because I know what I am doing but for that next neighbor who is forced to cut down the trees because he wants to sell the firewood to raise funds for that day, how am I going to deny them and I am not going to facilitate them with any cent to buy food?

Three; ban all saw mills from buying raw materials including logs from Murang'a county catchment areas. Mr. Speaker where the law normally collides we use the national government law. Here according to the saw millers; I am a saw miller, I am not talking as an interested party but I must talk.

We have gone for Kenya Forest Service (KFS) tree inductions where every saw miller has some requirements they must meet. Secondly we do not harvest the under grown trees, we harvest the over grown so that we can plant others. We are allowed as saw millers to go cater for the areas you have harvested the trees according to the law of the national government.

Mr. Speaker we cannot go and place a new law when we have one in place to govern the forest. We are interfering with the national government law but we can amend some parts of it, the forest service has catered for all these issues. It is only that my colleague does not know and the mover of the motion is within the forest but does not attend the KFS seminars so we cannot ban them from cutting down logs from the forest, whereby I know the indigenous trees cannot be harvested because we need them to preserve our water catchment areas.

Four, Liaise with the Kenya Forest Services and other national government organs to achieve this objective. This one could have been done the day before yesterday so that the department of co-operative and environment where I am a member, we have not been able to visit the KFS but this one I know everything has been put in place and it's only the implementation part that has not been done.

I request my colleagues to support the Kenya Forest Service because they know their work, this is not a business institution but a parastatal and they know after harvesting they must plant so that they can have somewhere to harvest next time.

Mr. Speaker I am opposing it, but if the mover can amend not to force the areas that are not to be forced, that could be okay, but I oppose the motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: The mover to respond.

Hon. Joseph Kirigwi: Thank you for giving me time to respond to some of the issues raised by the contributors. Hon. member for Ng'araria pointed out something as a county we need to embrace, that we need other natural resources we need to explore, like wind in terms of alternative source of energy.

Also he highlighted that we need to use metal bars instead of wood. Also there is something he brought out that forest service is not a devolved entity by that their actions may not be co-ordinated *vis-a-vis* what the county programs may be. We need some co-ordination. There is something he raised that we may not need to enforce; the county farmer to embrace the 10% afforestation in his farm.

I have a feeling if reforestation is carried out in the forest and leave all the other farms bare, the forest may not sustain. For those who drive, and I know the member for Ng'araria drives a lot, you may find that in the course of you driving you will find an area like Kakuzi area as you drive from Nairobi to Nyeri, you may experience rain in an area, such as Kakuzi, because of the trees that are there then find that as there is no rain as you head to Kambiti which is a neighbor.

We therefore need to embrace afforestation, I agree with him that fruit trees can also give good forest cover.

Hon. Cecilia who is a nominated member has brought up the issue of the water towers. It is good to remind members that Aberdare is a gazetted water tower and we cannot walk away from that. It is a gazetted water tower among three others in the nation.

She has also mentioned about the floods in Nyeri whereby Sagana Fisheries, which is the biggest in Kenya, lost all of its stocks of fish due to floods. Residents were picking fish from the road because the ponds were flooded and they could not have anything.

I also concur with her that as we do re-afforestation, we need to first address the leakage; it is like a container that is leaking. We need to refill the container as we do the re-afforestation. We need to have a stop gap opportunity for a period of time. The motion is explicit that its ten

years so that we stop that leakage and we do the re-afforestation over that time, thereafter we can allow people to continue harvesting.

I do not concur with the hon. member for Gaturi, I know she is a very prosperous woman in terms of that area, we cannot just sit back as leaders just because there is a national body called Kenya Forest Services. We cannot sit back just because they are there as an institution. We cannot close our eyes and wait for things to come squarely into place, we need to be proactive; we do not need to be reactive. Let us put the red flag that things are not going on well and we must tell them that as much as they are controlling our forests from Nairobi, as a county we want our forests to be handled this way. We have two forests in Murang'a- Aberdare and another 1,400 acres in Mbiri.

I know some of those officers employed by the Kenya Forests Services because my ward neighbors Aberdare. I know some of them are corrupted by some businessmen, they may give a guidance to go harvest a certain block of area but you find that after money changes hands, there are excesses and they can go to another block that is not within what was there. I however agree that if we work together with the Kenya Forest Services, we can re-afforest very easily and we will safeguard our environment for the future.

This motion is for the next generation. Hon. member for Gaturi, I know you have children, I also have them, the next generation will ask us what we did for their future when we were sitting as leaders of Murang'a.

I request her and any other Member who may have thought of opposing to support this motion for the sake of the generations to come and for sustainability and prosperity. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Question put and agreed to)
(Applause)

ADJOURNMENT

The Speaker: Hon. Members, the House adjourns until 2:30 p.m. tomorrow afternoon.

The House rose at 3.16pm.