

Geography students study the effects of Mau Forest destruction

The University of Nairobi Geography students visited the Mau Forest and witnessed first-hand the destruction of the indigenous trees and the devastating effects of climate change as the rivers dry up.

Accompanied by their Lecturer, Dr. Parita Shah, the Geography students had a chance to learn about the desertification of the indigenous forests in Kenya. Students had an opportunity to witness the destruction of the Mau Forest as the locals were busy cutting down trees and setting the forest a blaze.

Among the several ways that locals use to destroy forests include logging and burning of trees. Once the forest is burnt, the land is hence used for agricultural purposes. The locals grow potatoes, maize among other crops.

According to Dr. Shah, the desertification of Mau Forest by the locals and the burning of the indigenous trees will accelerate the effects of climate change and the area will soon experience floods. The area is bound to experience biological weathering. Biological weathering is weakening and subsequent disintegration of rock by plants, animals and microbes. Once the land is weak, the landslides over like it happened recently in the Embu region.

The preservation of the Mau Forest is critical. This can be achieved by education of the local populace on the dangers of the climate change.

Mau Forest is a beautiful scenery for bird watchers and since the destruction of the forest began, the birds have reduced significantly in number hence denying the country the much needed income from tourism.

Unlike Karura Forest, which doesn't suffer from desertification, because of 'Friends of Karura' who have been in the forefront in protecting the forest, Mau Forest faces challenges. The forest has since been deforested up to 70%. Mau Forest also faces the challenge of parasitic weeds like Lantana Camara which feed on the few remaining indigenous trees.

Protection of the indigenous forests cannot be left to the government alone, but the entire nation and local communities need to be engaged. Government authorities like National Management Authority, (NEMA), Kenya Forest Services, (KFS) have limited human capital to combat the ferocious tree loggers.

In the recent past, University of Nairobi Geography students together with Kenya Forest Services have planted trees in the forest. The tree planting exercise is a show of solidarity and goes a long way in preservation of Mau forest. The visit to the Mau Forest is in line with this years' environment theme: 'Connecting people to nature.'