



## Stakeholders call for multi-sectoral approach to reduce air pollution

**Kampala, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2021** ; Today, National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), AirQo of Makerere University, Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), in collaboration with the US Mission Kampala join the rest of the world to commemorate the 15th annual Air Quality Awareness Week (AQAW) 2021. Held under the theme “Healthy air - Important for everyone!”, the AQAW is an opportunity to raise awareness about the impact of air pollution on human health, economies, and the environment, as well as actions people can take to reduce health risks.

Air pollution contributes to over 7 million premature deaths annually. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that over 80% of populations in monitored urban centres are exposed to ambient pollution levels above the guideline levels. In Uganda, it is estimated that over 30,000 people die annually due to air pollution-related illnesses while ambient air quality levels in monitored urban centres are estimated at over 5 times the WHO annual guidelines. Despite these grim numbers, there is still limited capacity for effective management and interventions to mitigate air pollution.

Speaking during the launch of the Air Quality Awareness Week, Dr. Tom Okurut the Executive Director, NEMA, noted that the Authority has been involved in the development of National Environment Air Quality Standards for Uganda. The standards will set parameters and limits for the protection of public health and set limits beyond which industries and other facilities should not exceed. The Air Quality Standards will also regulate vehicular emissions and set health and safety standards for air related exposures at workplaces.

Last year during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and the countrywide lockdown NEMA undertook a study to establish the extent of air pollution originating from the transport sector. It was discovered that the sector contributes close to 60% of the NO<sub>2</sub> exhaust emissions within the Kampala city centre. This, according to Dr. Okurut means that regulating the emissions from vehicles would greatly reduce the air pollution around the city.

Without air quality data, it is very difficult to raise awareness of the emerging issues, or for government, business and individuals to know which actions to take to improve air quality and protect community health. Therefore, there is a need for sectoral monitoring to know what is the dominant source of air pollution and what to tackle first.

Prof. Engineer Bainomugisha, Principal Investigator at AirQo stressed that one of the major keys in the fight against air pollution is monitoring air quality levels. "We need to know how bad or good the air pollution is and devise appropriate actions to improve the air quality in our cities." He added that in order to fill the data gap, AirQo has developed a wide network of low-cost monitoring devices that continuously

provide data on the extent of air pollution in major cities in Uganda. "We have installed over 90 locally designed monitors that we have placed in different physical settings including on boda bodas to bridge this gap. The information collected from these monitors is then analysed to predict the level of pollution in the air," he said.

Long-term monitoring data from AirQo shows that pollution is highest in the morning and evening, and lowest in the afternoon during hot sunny days, while the average concentration is about 55 µg/m<sup>3</sup>. Findings from the pilot source apportionment study, an ongoing collaboration between the US EPA Fellows and Uganda air quality community facilitated by the US Mission in Kampala, indicate that pollution largely comes from biomass burning, direct exhaust emissions, and dust.

The week-long celebrations happening from the 3rd - 7th May 2021, will seek to expand awareness and support for local air pollution solutions. This, according to the stakeholders, will amplify Uganda's air quality story among health practitioners, policymakers, opinion leaders and environmental enthusiasts and the general public.

According to Dr Okello, the Director of Public Health Services and Environment at Kampala City Council Authority, (KCCA) the Authority has also installed 25 monitors across the 5 urban divisions of Kampala city to monitor pollution across seasons. "We have used this additional evidence to design strategies to curb down pollution in the city including areas of priority for tarmacking of roads, non-motorized ways, signaling of road junctions, tree planting and introduction of a train to reduce the number of cars," Dr Okello said.

He further added that the Authority is developing a Kampala clean air action plan with support from United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to guide coordinated activities for cleaning Kampala air and spell out all activities aimed at reducing air pollution in Kampala city.

Stakeholders have urged Ugandans to avoid exposing themselves to pollution while minimising activities that contribute to poor air quality. They advised on simple actions that can be taken including planting trees and grass in bare areas, and avoiding burning rubbish and idling engines in traffic, adopting cleaner cooking practices, servicing cars in time, and embracing car-sharing and non-motorised transport options.

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### **About AirQo**

AirQo is a research initiative based in the College of Computing and Information Sciences, Makerere University. Incepted in 2015, the objective of the project is to contribute to the improvement of urban air quality in Uganda and across sub-Saharan Africa by filling in the current data gaps present on the purity and quality of the air. AirQo has developed a growing network of over 100 low-cost devices that use advanced cloud-based technologies to store, manage and finally process the huge masses of data collected in a precise and accurate way. These devices are mounted on static buildings and on 'boda-bodas', motorcycles-taxis which can travel along off-road routes and secondary roads, increasing spatial coverage.

Website: [www.airqo.net](http://www.airqo.net), Facebook: [www.facebook.com/AirQo](https://www.facebook.com/AirQo) Twitter: @AirQoProject

## About NEMA

National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) is the principal agency of Government that regulates, coordinates and supervises all matters of environment. NEMA spearheads the development of environmental policies, laws, regulations, standards and guidelines; and guides the Government on sound environment management in Uganda. In doing this, NEMA contributes to social-economic development and wise use of natural resources, focusing on providing support to the Government's main goal of ensuring sustainable development contributing to the National Vision, the National Development Plan (NDP), regional and global commitments including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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