



Mr. Collins Oloya, Commissioner Wetlands Management Department, giving the status of wetlands in the country

Wetlands Department Targets to restore 8613.2 Square kilometer of degraded sections from the current 2592.3 Square kilometers

A wetland is a distinct ecosystem that is flooded by water, either permanently or seasonally, where oxygen-free processes prevail.

The primary factor that distinguishes wetlands from other land forms or water bodies is the characteristic vegetation of aquatic plants, adapted to the unique hydric soil.

Wetlands play a number of functions, including water purification, water storage, processing of carbon and other nutrients, stabilization of shorelines, and support of plants and animals.

In many parts of Uganda, wetlands are being encroached by illegal occupants who are practicing farming, agriculture, erected permanent and semi-permanent houses. There are also other economic activities like washing bays, taxi parks, brick-laying, sand-mining, among others.

These illegal practices or activities greatly endanger existence of these wetlands yet

if they are well protected we all enjoy the benefits equally.

The encroachment might be attributed to the increase in population which puts stress on land resources.

Authorities at every level are busy trying to sensitise people who have occupied wetlands, to willingly vacate or they be ready to face eviction with the help of the law enforcers.

In order to solve this challenge, the Ministry of Water and Environment formulated the Wetland Management Department to address the problem which has masterminded climate change in this country.

The Department which was started as a Program in 1989, to a division in 2007, was later elevated and made a fully-fledged Department.

Mr. Collins Oloya, the commissioner says his Department is mandated to ensure that all wetlands are sustainably managed to maintain integrity and also provide alternative livelihoods to the surrounding communities.

In addition to showing the public the boundary of wetlands inventory, assessment and conduct researches to provide more knowledge based on the functions of wetlands.

This is done through formulation of wetland policies, initiating the formulation of wetlands specific laws, developing wetland regulations and guidelines and also ensuring constant monitoring and inspection to regulate the users.

The Department which has two Divisions, one in charge of Policy and Enforcement and another

Division of Assessment, Information and Management, is also charged with building the capacities of all stakeholders involved in the wetland management like the District Local Government and Civil Society Organisations, among others.

The status of wetlands in the country

Oloya who is also the Acting Director for Environment Affairs in the Ministry of Water and Environment explains that in 1994, Uganda had 15.6% of the land surface covered by wetlands. Today, the country's territory covered by wetland stands at 8.4% meaning about 44% of the wetland ecosystem has been lost.

"We have been losing wetlands at the rate of 2 to 2.5% annually; indicating 75000hectares of wetlands lost annually, making it a great concern to all Ugandans. It is projected that by 2040, the country will remain with only 1.6% of wetlands if no measures are put in place," he said.

He explained that wetlands of late in the United Nations Frame work on Climate Change were recognized as a mitigation measure because of the huge volumes of carbon-dioxide they store.

"At the moment, we have 2592.3square-kilometer of intact wetlands in Uganda and these if maintained well, will sequester 1534.5metric tons of carbon dioxide annually, but if drained, this same amount of carbon-dioxide will be released in the atmosphere annually," he added.

The Department, he says, plans to restore 8613.2square kilometer of degraded sections from the current 2592.3square kilometers. This, he hopes, will increase the wetland coverage from the present 8.4% to 12% by the year 2030.

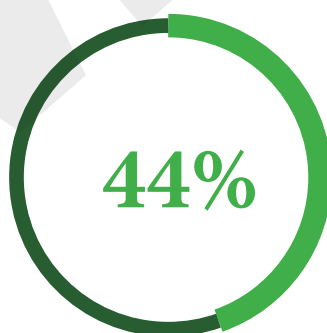
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