



**World Wetlands Day** is celebrated every year on 2<sup>nd</sup> February. This day marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Since 1997, the Ramsar Secretariat has provided outreach materials to help raise public awareness about the importance and value of wetlands.

The **broad aim of the convention** on wetlands is to halt the world wide loss of wetlands and to conserve them through wise-use and management. This initiative promotes the implementation of the concept of "**wise use**" of wetlands through strengthening the capacity of countries to manage their wetland resources in perpetuity and contributing to integrate wetland conservation and management with the development process.

The frequency of disasters worldwide has more than doubled in just 35 years, driven by climate- and weather-related hazards such as flooding, tropical cyclones and droughts. UN-Water estimates that 90% of all natural hazards are water-related.

Wetlands have many **roles they play in the world**, and among these we have:

- a. **Wetland provide resources** which include water, land, soils, plants and animals contained within them, all of which provide goods which can be used to generate subsistence, income and employment;
- b. **Wetlands provide services** which include the hydrological and ecological functions (e.g. water recharge), which support and maintain economic activities and human settlement because they act as a sink for wastes and residues, temperature regulation, contribution to climate change mitigation through carbon storage in above ground vegetation and in soil, and protect human and natural production systems;
- c. During storms, urban wetlands absorb excess rainfall, which reduces flooding in cities and prevents disasters and their subsequent costs;
- d. The abundant vegetation found in urban wetlands, acts as a filter for domestic and industrial waste and this contributes to improving water quality. Urban wetlands supply cities with water and are green spaces for recreation which helps to promote human wellbeing.

**Uganda** as a signatory to the Ramsar convention on wetlands will join the rest of the International community to commemorate the World Wetlands Day on **Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2018, starting at 8:30am, Arua District Local Government, Arua Hill ground, Arua Municipality** under the theme “**Wetlands for sustainable urban future**”. And the national slogan will be “**Urban Wetlands: Prized land, not Wasteland**”

This year’s **theme “Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future,”** was selected because it highlights the important role of wetlands for sustainable urbanization. Urban wetlands are essential and contribute to making cities live-able. ***Today’s current development of human settlements is a major concern for wetland conservation and wise use. As cities grow and demand for land increases, the tendency to encroach on wetlands also increases. They are often viewed as wasteland available to dump waste or be converted for other purposes yet when preserved and sustainably used, urban wetlands can provide cities with multiple economic, social and cultural benefits.*** They are **prize land not wasteland** and therefore should be integrated into the development and management plans of cities.

The **main objective of the event** is to raise awareness on the important roles played by urban wetlands in making cities livable. In this regard, the **Ministry of Water and Environment** has planned various activities to mark this occasion at the National and Local Government levels countrywide. The Ministry has called different stakeholders including the Civil Society Organisation (CSOs) to participate in the event with ***a mandate to showcase environmentally friendly technologies, practices, and materials.***

Environment Alert observes that the global theme and the national slogan for the World Wetlands Day 2018 are well thought out and timely. This is largely because several urban wetlands in Uganda wetlands (such as *Lubigi, Nakivubo, Kinawataka in Kampala; Mabamba bay ramsar site in Wakiso and Mpigi districts; Kibingo, Kashasha, Bujaga, Kibuba-Kongoro, Rucece, Rubindi and Rushanje in Mbarara district; Namanve wetland in Mukono district*) are under a very serious threat of total depletion and degradation. This is partly due to inadequate regulation of urbanization and industrial development. Hence, over the last 17 years the national

wetland coverage reduced from 13% in 2000 to 10.9% of the total land cover in 2017 (Ministry of Water and Environment, 2017).

The loss of the urban wetlands also means loss of the goods and services they provide. This has serious implications for economic development and sustainable livelihoods in the cities. Therefore, the World Wetlands Day celebrations provide an opportunity for reflection and call for action for all Ugandans to be cautious of the decisions and actions they implement to ensure that they prevent adverse effects on the wetlands. Hence, all illegal activities in the wetlands should give way for wetlands reclamation and restoration; and any actions resulting in further destruction and degradation of wetlands should be avoided.

**Environmental Alert** (see **Box 1** for further information) as a Civil Society Organization (CSO) will participate in the event and will showcase environmentally friendly practices, and materials for awareness creation containing information that promotes wetlands conservation and wise use. Furthermore, Environmental Alert will support active participation of representatives of community wetland adjacent user groups and association during the celebrations event. Thus, they will participate in exhibitions during which they will interact with key duty bearers to share their concerns and recommendation to advance wetlands wise use and sustainable development at the community level.

To further advance wetlands restoration and wise use towards achievement of the 12% wetland coverage by 2030 as committed in Uganda's Nationally Determined Contributions (Uganda NDC, 2015), the **Environment and Natural Resources Civil Society Organizations (ENR-CSO) Network** through their published **ENR-CSO Network Position paper 2017**, recommended the government through various line ministries to perform the following:

- a. MWE (Ministry of Water and Environment), NEMA (National Environment Management Authority) and EPPF should fast track wetlands reclamation and bring culprits to book;
- b. MWE should identify resources for demarcation of wetlands in urban and rural areas;
- c. MWE/CSOs should promote Ecosystem Based Adaptation Approaches that aim at sustainable utilization (for multiple benefits) of wetlands at community level;
- d. MWE should fast track the proposal to declare Lake Wamala as Ramsar site;
- e. MWE should undertake a sensitivity analysis of key wetlands likely to be affected by oil and gas infrastructure;
- f. MWE and ENR CSOs should fast track the development and finalization of the Wetlands Bill to fill the legal framework gap.

**Box 1. About Environmental Alert**

Environmental Alert (EA) was founded in **1988 and this year (2018) marks 30 years** of contribution to improved livelihoods and development in Uganda through several interventions in sustainable agriculture, environment and natural resources management. EA is officially registered with the NGO Board as a Ugandan non-governmental organization, incorporated as a company limited by guarantee. EA is governed by an independent Board that is responsible for providing strategic oversight of the organization including ensuring its integrity as a voluntary service organization.

EA is a **1<sup>st</sup> prize winner of the Energy globe award for environmental sustainability-2005 under the category, earth.**

EA is a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and a Member of The IUCN National Committee for Uganda.

EA envisions, *'Resilient and dignified communities, managing their environment and natural resources sustainably.'*

**EA's mission is to,** *'Contribute to improved livelihoods of vulnerable communities by enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainable natural resources management'*

**Program and institutional Components:**

1. Environment and Natural resources management;
2. Food security and Nutrition;
3. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene;
4. Finance and Administration;
5. Resource mobilization and Investment.

**Scale of Implementation:**

EA operates in selected districts for generation of evidence to inform policy engagements on agriculture, environment and natural resources at National and International levels. Currently EA's operations are in 20 districts across the country. EA undertakes area wide targeted awareness on selected issues in agriculture, environment and natural resources engagements

**EA is a Secretariat for following networks:**

- a) The Network for Civil Society Organizations in Environment & Natural Resources Sector (ENR-CSO Network) - <http://enr-cso.org/>;
- b) Uganda Forestry Working Group - <http://ufwg.entalert.org/>;
- c) The Standards Development Group (for promotion of Sustainable Forest Management in Uganda); and
- d) Promoting Local Innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resources management (PROLINNOVA-Uganda Network) - <http://www.prolinnova.net/uganda>.

**Further information** about **Environmental Alert** is available at: <http://entalert.org/>

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