WAKISO

Govt set to restore wetland boundaries in 20 districts

By Martin Kitubi

The Ministry of Water and Environment has revealed that government is embarking on wetland restoration at the eight wetland drainage basins covering 20 districts across the country.

The eight wetland basins include Albert Nile, Victoria Nile, Achwa, Kidepo, Lakes Albert, Edward, Kyoga and Victoria in Mbale, Pallisa, Kibuku, Kaliro, Namutumba, Tororo, Budaka, Ngora and Butaleja in Eastern Uganda.

Other districts are Kisoro, Kabale, Rukungiri, Kanungu, Mitooma, Bushenyi and Ntungamo.

According to Collins Oloya, the commissioner in charge of wetland management at the water ministry, the wetlands have been affected by human activities such as agriculture for instance at Awoja and Doho in Lake Kyoga wetland basin.

"We have restored Limoto wetland in Pallisa district which had dried up last year. This was possible due to co-operation with residents and we are going to use the same measures to restore other wetlands in the country," Oloya said.

He said about 1,700 hectares of wetlands were degraded over the years, and that the Government targets to restore 350 to 500 hectares annually with support from the Green Climate Fund.

Oloya said by 2030, government shall have restored the degraded hectares.

The water and environment ministry is also set to undertake demarcation of 14,146km of

boundaries for wetlands with pillars.

Oloya said both restoration and demarcation exercises shall consume about sh1.1trillion proposed budget until 2030.

"A total of 135km of wetland boundaries in urban centres have been demarcated with pillars. Walugogo wetland in Iganga, Masese wetland in Jinja, and Lubigi in Kampala and Wakiso districts are some

of the demarcated wetlands," he said. Paul Mafabi, the director environmental affairs at the water and environment ministry, told *New Vision* that the Government is also undertaking review of the 1995 National Wetland Policy, the drafted National Wetland Resources Management Bill, all this as measures intended to tighten protection of wetlands.

The review shall include all issues accelerating degradation and mitigation and gazetting of wetlands in the country.

The review shall be concluded in June this year and will contribute to establishment of a Wetland Specific Act and show wetland boundaries.

On land titles in wetlands,

Lwanga (left) receiving an award from Mafabi (right) as former president general of the Democratic Party Paul Ssenwogere (centre) looks on during the World Wetlands Day on Thursday. Photo by Wilfred Sanya

"We all know several public servants destroying wetlands

Mafabi and Oloya blamed the delayed cancellation of land titles in wetlands on other government institutions such as National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) who issue environmental impact assessment certificates to developers.

However, they promised that with the ongoing reviews, it will speed up cancellation of land titles once concluded.

In April 2016, President Yoweri Museveni issued a directive that all titles in wetlands on public land acquired unlawfully after amendment of the Constitution in 1995 be cancelled.

The directive was mainly for land titles on the 200m lakeshore protection zone.

According to Matia Bwanika, the Wakiso district LC5 chairperson, NEMA, Uganda Investment Authority (UIA) and the lands ministry must be investigated to establish how land titles were issued in wetlands.

in the name of development. NEMA, UIA, and the lands ministry have continued to help them in acquiring titles," Bwanika said.

Local leader honoured

At the public talk, which was organised by Nature Uganda, Bwanika received a 'Wetland wise Use' award from the water and environment Ministry for his commitment to fight degradation of wetlands in Wakiso district and the country at large.

"Bwanika has become a wetland martyr, and is leading all local government leaders in protecting them. He has fought sand mining among other activities in wetlands," Mafabi noted.

FACT BOX

Wetlands are breeding grounds for Uganda's national bird, the Crested crane. If degradation continues the wetlands will disappear together with the Crested crane.

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