

Farmers burn Iganga wetlands

IGANGA

By George Bita

Several acres of swampland in Iganga district have been burnt in preparation for the forthcoming planting season.

In Walugogo wetland, adjacent to Iganga municipality, rice farmers are already digging up the burnt remains of marshland despite the dry spell to prepare rice paddies.

The situation is not any different at Naigombwa, Namundudi, Namadope and part of the Lumbuye swampy stretch.

All the lush green cover is no more save for burnt stumps of palm trees and papyrus.

Joanita Baluka, a farmer in Kasolo village, told *New Vision* on Sunday that clearing of the swampland vegetation is best done during the dry season.

"As soon as it rains, water settles in the area and no effective burning can be carried out," Baluka said.

Environment threat

Abdu Saleh, the Iganga central division chairman, said that some urban dwellers had started sugarcane growing in the urban neighbourhood, clearing swamps in the process.

"It is said that if one wants to have the best harvest, no tree should be left standing in a sugarcane plantation. This causes deforestation," Saleh said.

Abdul Samanya, the district natural resources officer, said bush burning is harmful to human health as it depletes the quantity of available oxygen, replacing it with



Swamp vegetation being burnt at Namadope village in Iganga. Photo by George Bita

What resident say

Edith Kawala: Fertile soils are in swamps,

so we cannot avoid opening up such places to get good harvests.



Madina Nabirye: Wetlands are the only free space left since most of

the land has been fragmented among family members.



Andrew Kyalibona: Local swamps are being cleared at a high rate. In the future they will be no more.



carbon dioxide.

Samanya said carbon dioxide fuels hot weather as it is one of the gases responsible for warming the earth under the global warming phenomenon.

"We also lose animals such as

porcupines and snakes," he said.

Samanya said the swamp vegetation is meant to act as a sponge that absorbs and thereby slows down moving water thus checking flooding.

"It also affects filtering of stream

waters leading to pollutants sipping into lakes," Samanya argued.

Way forward

Sam Cheptoris, the water and environment minister, said wetlands need to be conserved.

"The Government has embarked on a nationwide campaign to rid swamps of encroachers. The plan will help rejuvenate wetland vegetation which is currently threatened with extinction," he said.

Samanya disclosed that wetland demarcation had already kicked off in Iganga after the delivery of the concrete mark-stones.

"Together with environmental protection Police, we surveyed areas surrounding wetlands starting with the urban locality. Those affected are already in the know," he said.