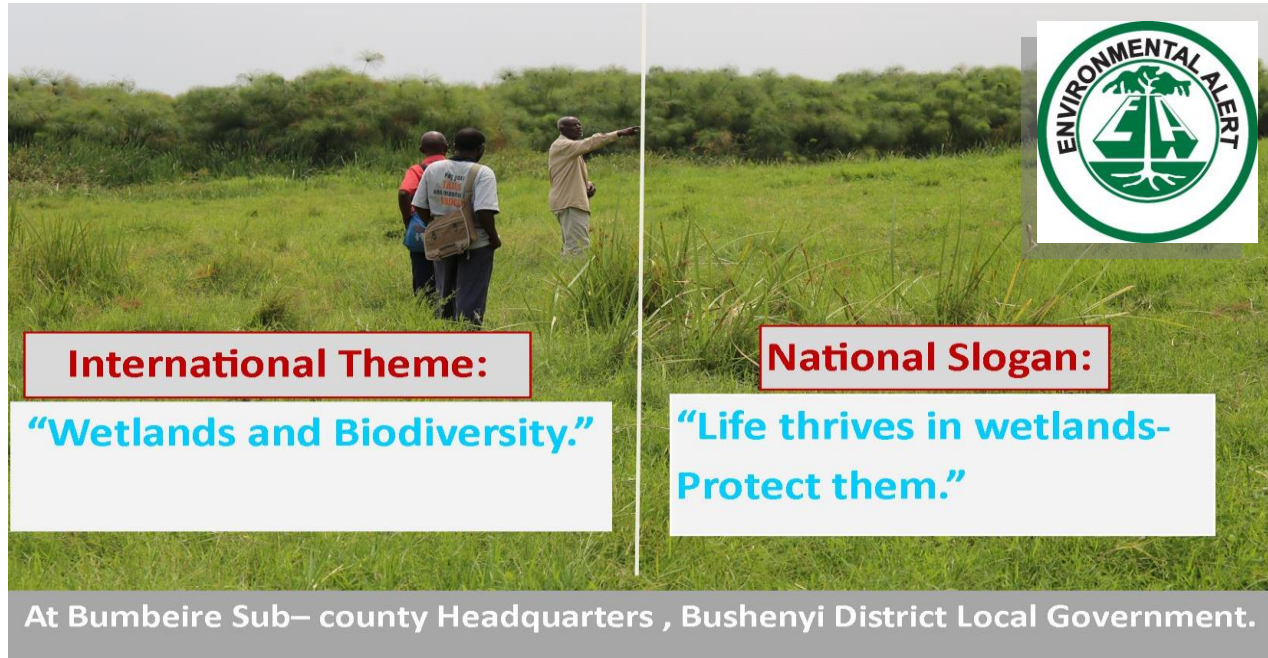


THE WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2020

7th February 2020



World Wetlands Day (WWD) occurs annually on February 2, marking the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on February 2, 1971 when a group of environmentalists signed an international agreement at the Ramsar Convention in Iran. WWD was established to raise awareness about the value of wetlands for humanity and the planet, and was celebrated for the first time in 1997 and has grown since then. Each year, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and groups of citizens at all levels of the community have taken advantage of the opportunity to undertake actions aimed at raising public awareness of wetland values and benefits such as conservation (SDG Knowledge Hub 2020).

The **broad aim of the convention** on wetlands also known as Ramsar 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 floods, tropical cyclones and droughts. UN-Water estimates that 90% of all natural hazards are water-related (Ramsar, 2017).

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 (O'Connor, 2010);
- 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 (O'Connor, 2010);

- c. During storms, urban wetlands absorb excess rainfall, which reduces flooding in cities and prevents disasters and their subsequent costs (Bullock, 2003);
- 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 (Bullock, 2003).

Uganda as a signatory to the Ramsar convention on wetlands will join the rest of the world to commemorate the World Wetlands Day on **7th February 2020, starting at 8:30pm** at **Bumbeire Sub-county Headquarters, Bushenyi district Local government** under the theme **“Wetlands and Biodiversity,”**. The national slogan is **“Life thrives in wetlands- protect them”**.

This year's theme **“Wetlands and Biodiversity,”** was selected because it highlights the important role of wetlands in biodiversity management. According to Ramsar Convention bureau (1997), 40% of biodiversity is found in wetlands and are a habitat for a dense variety of plant and animal species. Latest estimates show a global decline of biodiversity, while wetlands are disappearing three times faster than forests. This year's theme is a unique opportunity to highlight wetland biodiversity, its status, why it matters and promote actions to reverse its loss (www.ramsar.org).

Environment and Natural Resources Civil Society Organizations (ENR-CSO) Network through their published **ENR-CSO Network Position paper 2017/2018** noted the following key concerns:

- i. Donors, government, Civil Society Organizations continue to have low investments in the sector,
- ii. Wetlands in urban areas are under attack, with developers continuously reclaiming them for other forms of land use,
- iii. Wetland ecosystems such as Lake Wamala have long been fronted as Ramsar sites but no follow up is made and yet they are faced with encroachment challenges,
- iv. Oil and gas developments, particularly the routing of the oil pipelines is likely to affect wetland ecosystem,
- v. f. There is no specific law to bring to book culprits that encroach and misuse wetlands in the country,
- vi. Bigger proportions of wetlands in the rural areas are not demarcated and are affected by agricultural expansion especially by large scale farms and industrial parks,
- vii. District local governments have a challenge of developing management plans for wetlands and yet they are underfunded.

The **main objective of the event** is to raise awareness on the important roles played by wetlands in biodiversity management. 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.**

Environmental Alert observes that the global theme and the national slogan for the World Wetlands Day 2020 are well thought out and timely. This is largely because several wetlands in Uganda wetlands especially in the urban (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 (Zake, 2018). This is partly due to inadequate regulation of urbanization and industrial development. According to the Water and Environment Sector Performance Report 2018, currently the wetlands coverage is at 8.9% intact and 4.1% degraded and 2.6% completely lost (Ministry of Water and Environment, 2018).

The loss of the wetlands also means loss of the goods and services they provide. This has serious implications for economic development and sustainable livelihoods in the country. 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 experiences, lessons, concerns and recommendations 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 2017/2018**, outlined recommendations to the government through various line ministries to perform the following actions as shown:

- a. Donors, Government of Uganda, Civil Society Organizations should increase funding to the wetlands sector,
- b. Environment Protection Police Force (EPPF) should fast track wetlands reclamation and bring culprits to book,
- c. Ministry of Water and Environment to identify resources for demarcation of wetlands in rural areas.
- d. Ministry of Water and Environment / Civil Society Organizations should promote Ecosystem Based Adaptation approaches that aim at sustainable utilization (for multiple benefits) of wetlands at community level,
- e. MWE, NEMA and EPPF should fast track wetlands reclamation and bring culprits to book.
- f. MWE to identify resources for demarcation of wetlands in rural areas,
- g. MWE/CSOs should promote Ecosystem Based Adaptation approaches that aim at sustainable utilization (for multiple benefits) of wetlands at community level,
- h. MWE fast tracks the proposal to declare Lake Wamala (and other sites) and Ramsar sites,
- i. MWE undertakes a sensitivity analysis of key wetlands likely to be affected by oil and gas infrastructure,
- j. MWE and ENR CSOs fast track the development and finalization of the Wetlands Bill to fill the legal framework gap.

References

Omagor, J.G, & Barasa, B. (2018). Effects of Human Wetland Encroachment on the Degradation of Lubigi Wetland System, Kampala City Uganda.

Environment and Natural Resources Civil Society Organizations (ENR-CSO). (2017/2018). Consolidated Annual performance report.

SDG Knowledge Hub (2020). World Wetlands Day 2020. <https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/>

Ramsar. (2017), Wetlands for disaster risk reduction, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. <https://www.ramsar.org/taxonomy/term/1263>

O'Connor, F. M., Boucher, O., Gedney, N., Jones, C. D., Folberth, G. A., Coppell, R., ... & Johnson, C. E. (2010). Possible role of wetlands, permafrost, and methane hydrates in the methane cycle under future climate change: A review. *Reviews of Geophysics*, 48(4).

Bullock, A., & Acreman, M. (2003). The role of wetlands in the hydrological cycle. *Hydrology and Earth System Sciences Discussions*, 7(3), 358-389.

Wetland International. (2018), Urban Wetlands Make Vibrant Cities, <https://indonesia.wetlands.org/news/urban-wetlands-make-vibrant-cities/>

Zake, J. (2018). Call for Action to Save Urban Wetlands! New Vision, 2018. Accessed from <http://envalert.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Letter-to-Editor-Urban-Wetlands-Jzake-FWD-29January2018.pdf>

NDC, (2015). Nationally Determined Contributions, <https://unfccc.int/process/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions/ndc-registry>

Ramsar Convention Bureau (1997). Wetlands, Biodiversity and the Ramsar Convention. https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/wetlands_biodiversity_and_the_ramsar_convention.pdf

Box 1. About Environmental Alert

Environmental Alert (EA) was founded in **1988** and has developed and transitioned into a National Non-Governmental organization contributing to an enabling policy environment for sustainable agriculture and sound environment and natural resources management at community, local, national and international levels. EA is officially registered with the NGO Board as a Ugandan non-governmental organization (NGO), 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 **1st 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 40 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](http://www.prolinnova.net/uganda;);
- e) The Renewable Energy CSO Network.

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