

WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2015 REPORT

Theme: Managing wetlands for our future



FEBRUARY 2015

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Acronyms

ATC	Agricultural Training Centre
CDE	County Director of Environment
CEC	County Executive Committee
DG	Director General
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
IPD	Interactive Panel Discussion
KFS	Kenya Forest Service
KWS	Kenya Wildlife Service
LOC	Local Organizing Committee
LVEMP II	Lake Victoria Environment Management Project Phase Two
MCA	Member of County Assembly
NEMA	National Environment Management Authority
WRMA	Water Resource Management Authority
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

1.0 Background and Introduction

The World Wetlands Day (WWD) is marked annually on 2nd of February. It marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2nd February 1971, in the Iranian City of Ramsar on the shores of Caspian Sea. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is an inter-governmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

The Convention came into force in 1975, Kenya which became a party to it in 1990, having designated its first wetland of international importance (Ramsar site)-Lake Nakuru. Additional Ramsar sites include Lakes Naivasha, Bogoria, Baringo Elmentaita and Tana Delta.

The global theme for WWD 2015 was '**Managing Wetlands for Our Future**' which was adopted by the National Secretariat. In the recent past, anthropogenic activities have led to the degradation and destruction of wetlands hence the reason for this year's theme that seeks to encourage sustainable management of wetland resources.



1 (a) A view of the Kibirong' wetland in Nandi County

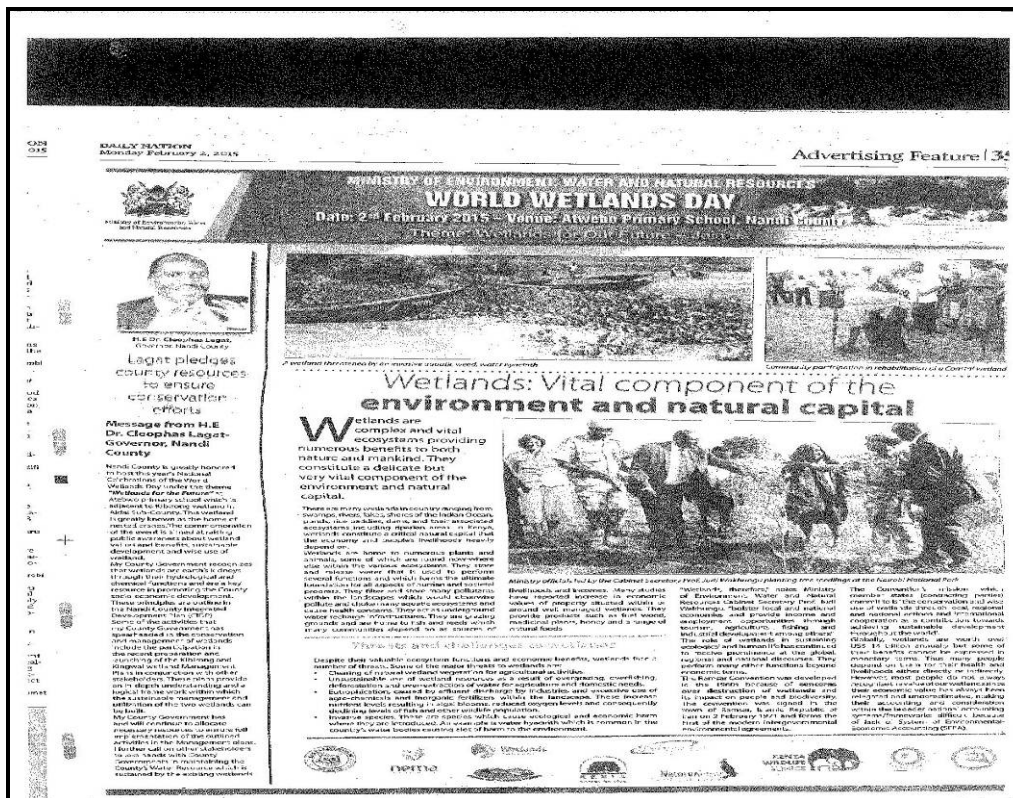
This year, the WWD celebrations were taken to Kibirong' wetlands in Nandi County; the event was preceded by build-up activities including: the Kibirong' Road Race and the Panel Discussion on the Yala Swamp. The main event was held at Atebwo Primary School in Aldai constituency-Nandi.

1.1 Awareness Creation and Build-up Activities

Wetlands provide ecosystem services as well as socio-economic functions which are essential for human wellbeing and livelihood as well as animals' survival hence the need for their protection. As a result, the specific objectives of WWD entail educating the public on the importance of wetlands, building local capacity to tackle wetland management issues and lobbying the Government of Kenya and partner institutions to put in place measures for the protection of wetlands. As climate problems intensify, there is the need to place emphasis on sustainable development to safeguard resources for future use and reduce adverse impacts on ecosystems.

Like other wetlands in the world, the degradation of Kenya's wetlands, (including the Kibirong' wetland) is mainly as result of intense anthropogenic activities. Surrounding communities overexploit wetland resources and thereafter face the consequences of degradation. This is mainly be attributed to ignorance and therefore creating awareness continuously can shed light on the importance of sustainable use since the same population needs wetland resources.

The National Secretariat in collaboration with the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) and closely involved stakeholders embarked on sensitization activities in preparation for the 2015 celebrations through use of both print and digital media, as well as organizing a panel discussion on Yala Swamp highlighting its major threats. The Kibirong' Road Race was also organized and open to various members of the community. In addition, a tree planting exercise led by the governor and his aides was conducted. On the day of the main event, brochures and DVDs with information on protection of wetlands was circulated and exhibition stands were set up by stakeholders such as NEMA, WRMA, LVEMP II, KWS, KFS and WWF.



1 (b) The gazette supplement on Daily Nation of 2 February 2015

Background

The World Wetlands Day (WWD) is marked annually on 2nd of February. It marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on wetlands on 2nd February 1971, in the Iranian City of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, is an inter-governmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

The Convention came into force in 1975, making it the oldest multilateral Environment Agreement (MEA) in the world. The Ramsar Convention is the only global environmental treaty that deals with a particular ecosystem-wetlands. The convention's member countries cover all geographic regions of the planet, including Kenya which became a party to it in 1990, having designated its first wetland of international importance (Ramsar site)-Lake Nakuru. Additional Ramsar sites include Lakes Naivasha, Bogoria, Baringo Elementaita and Tana Delta.

Each year since 1997, government agencies in Kenya, Non-governmental organizations and private sector organize World Wetlands Day celebrations to mark the date of adoption of Ramsar convention. This includes undertaking of actions aimed at raising public awareness on wetland values and benefits in general.

Specific Objectives of WWD

- Sensitizing and educating the public on wetland values and functions.
- Building local capacity to address wetland management issues.
- Lobbying GoK and other Institutions to do more for the wetlands

Wetlands are.....

Areas permanently or seasonally flooded by water where plants and animals have become adapted. These include swamps, marshes, peatlands, mountain bogs, banks of rivers, vegetation, areas of impeded drainage or brackish, salt or alkaline including areas of marine water. They incorporate riparian and coastal



Importance of wetlands

- Wetlands guarantee our food supply
- Purify and filter harmful waste from water
- Ensure fresh water for all of us
- Store carbon
- Are nature's shock absorbers
- Are critical to biodiversity
- They create sustainable products and livelihood

World Wetlands Day 2015 theme and relevance to Kenya

United Nations proclaimed 2015 as the International Year of light - therefore Ramsar Convention chose **'Managing Wetlands for the future'** as the theme for 2015. The theme focuses on the need for youth to be involved in the wetlands sector and work together with the responsible bodies for best shared outcomes. The Kenyan population is comprised of 35.39% youth between the age of 15 and 35. In this regard, the youth, our future, presents an invaluable segment of the society that can influence the way wetlands are managed across different scales.

World Wetlands Day Kenya, 2015

This year's World Wetlands day celebrations will be held in Nandi South Sub-county in Nandi County at Atebo primary School, Koyo centre, on 2nd Feb 2015 in Kibiron Wetland. The theme for this year places a lot of emphasis on sustainability, cognizance of the transition this year from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to post-2015 framework goals, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Nandi County is one of the smallest counties in Rift valley region, occupying an area of 2,839sq.km

The County is bordered by Kakamega county to the west, Uasin Gishu County to the North and East, Kericho County to the south-east corner and Kisumu County to the south.

Kibiron Wetlands and its management plan

Kibiron wetland is one of the most important wetland ecosystems in the lake basin as it is one of the sources of Yala river which flows into Lake Victoria.

Kibiron Integrated Wetland Management Plan has set the pace towards ensuring wise-use and sustainable management of the wetland resources. The plan which



Kibiron Wetland

envisions a "well conserved Kibiron Wetland Ecosystem for socio-economic benefits" is a product of commitments and good will of many stakeholders. When implemented, the plan aims to restore the ecological integrity of this important socio-economic and biodiversity hotspot. Resource use in the wetland is divided according to gender roles in different sectors of society. Some activities such as hunting and brick making are dominated by male adults (men), while women and youth are mainly responsible for fetching of water and firewood.

Challenges facing Kibiron Wetlands

Some of the challenges facing the wetland include: soil erosion, flooding, low water volumes, pollution, reduced grazing areas, reduced population of wild animals, reduced crop production, soil exhaustion as well as spread of waterborne diseases.

1 (c) WWD 2015 brochure used as a tool for creating awareness

The public was allowed access throughout the event to visit the stands and acquire information on the value of wetlands and the need for their protection.

1.1.1 The Kibirong Community Road Race and Tree Planting

The Kibirong' Wetland Road Race was organized by the LOC and took place on 24th January 2015. The objective of the race was mobilise and sensitize the local communities and to ensure maximum participation in the world wetlands day celebrations and to motivate the locals in management of Kibirong wetlands. Dr. Chumo, the CEC (Minister) in charge of mater environment, land and Natural Resources, Nandi County and also the Chairperson for all the County Executive Committee (CEC) on Lands, Environment and Natural Resources flagged off various races including the women's 10 km, children's 2 km race, veterans' 2 km race and the men's 10 km race. Julius Kogo emerged victorious in the men's 10 km race while Alice Timbilil won the women's 10 km race. Other winners were Wilson Kiprotich, Caroline Cheptoo who managed first place in the veterans' 2 km and students' 2 km races, respectively. The top three runners in all categories were awarded trophies and cash prizes/awards while positions four to ten were handed t-shirts.



1 (d) Athletes are on their mark, waiting for the starter for the men 10 Km Kibirong' wetlands road race



1 (e) Mr. Katua (first from right) presents a trophy to the runner-up in 10 Km men race



1 (f) Two of the oldest participants in the 2 Km Road Race male and female category address the media

There was a ceremonial tree planting session where various invited guests and participants planted trees. The trees planted were of bamboo species. Ms. Anne Owino, County Director of Environment (CDE) Nandi County led the tree planting exercise. Dr. Chumo, CEC Nandi County graced the occasion on behalf of the Governor, H.E. Dr. Cleophas Lagat. Other notable participants were Mr. Katua, the deputy director NEMA-KENYA in the sub-department of coastal marine and fresh waters; he represented NEMA's Director General, Prof. Geoffrey wahungu, Mr. Nyongesa who represented WRMA's regional manager Lake Victoria South Water Services, Mr. Baraza the Regional Coordinator (NEMA) Western Region, Mr. Kobo from Athletics Kenya, and two-time Olympic Champion Alice Timbilil.



1 (g) Alice Timbilil (Two-time Olympic champion) participates in the tree planting exercise

1.1.2 Interactive Panel Discussion

One of the key awareness activities that the NOC planned was an Interactive Panel Discussion (IPD) targeting government agencies, private sector, civil society and community members. The discussion themed “***Balancing Conservation and Development: the case of Yala Swamp***” was held on Tuesday 27th January 2015 at ATC Siaya, Siaya County. The discussion provided a platform for knowledge and information exchange between the experts/technocrats from institutions with a mandate on wetlands and sustainable development, in line with this year’s theme: ‘*Wetlands for Our Future*’. This Panel discussion aimed at raising public awareness and consciousness about sustainable wetlands management by striking a balance between human development and biodiversity conservation.



1 (h) Dr. Abila makes a presentation before the panel discussion

In addition, the forum provided participants with varied options on best wetland practices through technical presentations. There were two presentations from Dr. Romulus Abila dubbed ‘*Harnessing the Yala Swamp Ecosystem Capital for Sustainable Development*’. This presentation highlighted the main challenges in ecosystem which include inappropriate management of the swamp and the distribution of benefits. Dr. Abila also drew attention to the ecosystem capital which include

ecological/environmental, socioeconomic benefits; all these seeking to support livelihoods.

Dr. Abila brought to light the key areas of controversy between Yala Swamp and the developers. His presentation emphasized on the need to shift from conflict to synergy in order to enhance socio-economic activities that support local community development, harnessing environmental services, community based conservation activities and climate smart agriculture.



1 (i) Prof. Philip Raburu, the moderator, prepares for the panel discussion

Dr. Paul Mworio from Kenyatta University did the second presentation which was themed *'Balancing Conservation and Development: Case of Yala Swamp'*. He highlighted the various benefits derived from the wetland such as air quality regulation, climate regulation, water regulation, natural hazard regulation and cultural services. The way forward deduced from these two presentations were need for:

- Capacity building for the local communities
- Development of a management plan for the wetland

- Harmonize and reconcile existing National/County legislations relating to agriculture and technology.
- Informed research for policy and change our mindsets
- Conduct Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) and Land Use Planning (LUP) for the wetlands

After the presentations, there was an intensive one-on-one interaction/direct engagement between the public and the panellists. The essence of holding the discussion was grounded on the fact that members of the public must be informed on what the government is doing/intends to do as per Article 57 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 and this becomes an excellent opportunity for the public to give their viewpoints, concerns and issues regarding the subject area for future planning, policy formulation and execution of various programmes and projects by different stakeholders. As a result, diverse stakeholders in terms of institutional mandate constituted the panellists. The panellists were derived from the NEMA, County Government of Siaya, WRMA, Ministry of Agriculture, KWS, Dominion Farms, Academic institutions, Community Based organizations, Nature Kenya, Wetlands International among various other stakeholders.



1 (j) Prof. Wahungu, NEMA DG addresses the panelists



1 (k) A member of the audience gives raises an issue to the panelists

The IPD was moderated by Prof. Philip Raburu, Head of Department, Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences, university of Eldoret. The discussion sought to provide answers to many frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the relationship between wetlands and development. The public was mainly concerned on how to create a balance between conservation of wetlands and sustainable developments, with a view that Yala Swamp tends to attract a large number of investors. Issues such as conflict management along the riparian zones, ecotourism, conservation of endangered fish species and the benefits of research on the community were raised by the locals. They were also concerned by the rate at which wetlands were being degraded through conversion for agriculture and human settlement. More concerns were raised regarding NEMA's role in controlling developments through the EIA process especially for those developments that were being erected within wetlands.

From the IPD, the panellists were able to offer the following solutions to the issues being faced by Yala Swamp:

- Development of a Strategic Management Plan for Yala Swamp. This would be a guideline to all developmental activities within the swamp.

- The county government of Siaya has created a task force on conflict management.
- The county government of Siaya was tasked with improving infrastructure in terms of roads.
- Introduction of Bamboo so as to improve livelihoods and act as a swamp filter.
- A combined effort between the government and the community members towards safeguarding the swamp.
- Developers such as Dominion farms were advised to introduce community outreach programs, fingerling donations and effluent treatment as well as create more opportunities for growth.
- Researchers were tasked with implementing their research findings towards wetland development.
- The ecotourism potential of the swamp needs to be harnessed.
- Engaging as many people as possible in the capacity building and awareness creation activities including the MCAs.
- All developers were urged to channel the benefits back to the ecosystem in order to enhance sustenance and resilience building.
- It was suggested that a fee be levied on all the swamp visitors.

Professor Geoffrey Wahungu the Director General (DG) NEMA closed the IPD by urging the local community members to be patient and that the current leadership is determined to implement a proper balance between conservation and development in Yala swamp.

2.0 Main Event: National Celebrations

2.1 Courtesy Call, Tree Planting and Procession

Before the start of WWD 2015 celebrations, courtesy calls were done at the Nandi County Commissioner's office, Ms Matilda Sakwa and Nandi County Governor H.E. Dr. Cleophas Lagat. Dignitaries then participated in tree planting exercises at Atebwo Primary School followed by a procession from Koyo Centre to the venue-edge of Kibirong' swamp.

2.2 Entertainment

The official ceremony began with the National Anthem and prayers. Later on attendees were entertained by various groups including: Kibirong' community women group who presented a Kalenjin song, Kaptumo Boys School who moved the crowd with their rap song entitled *mazingira*, Aldai Girls Secondary School with a poem on management of wetlands and Nandi County comedians with a piece on importance of water.



2 (a) Professor Wahungu, DG NEMA participates in the tree planting session prior to the main event



2 (b) Nandi County Comedians entertain the crowd



2 (c) Aldai Girls High School entertain the crowd



2 (d) Kaptumo Boys High School present a song entitled 'mazingira'

2.3 Speeches

Hon. Edwin Cheluget, Speaker of the Nandi County Assembly informed the gathering that their future survival depends on their current actions. He also challenged Kenyans to be nature minded to bridge the gap between development and conservation. He warned that there will be no development if environmental degradation continues as water is the key for development.

Hon. Peter Kiilu Chairman WRMA Board of management described the importance of wetlands and its vital link to tourism in the area. He referred to Nandi County as the place formerly known as '***the place where God baths***' due to abundance of water. He however mentioned that this was threatened by the increasing degradation and depletion of wetlands in the County. He mentioned the need to attract investors and the wetlands were a large part of that process. He stressed that stakeholders need to join together to make a positive difference in the wetlands management.

Professor Wahungu, DG, NEMA in his speech recognized the general participation of both the regional and local stakeholders. He introduced to the gathering the various key government and non-governmental organizations heads that were present to grace the occasion.

Mr. Maluki Mwendwa, Chairman NEMA in reference to the theme '*managing wetlands for the future*' presaged that the future of humanity depends on wetlands. He took the crowd through the benefits of wetlands, highlighting their role as purifiers and filters of harmful wastes from water, food for humanity, supporter of biodiversity, and nature's shock absorbers in the protection of coastlines and climate change mitigation. He informed the people that 2015 is the United Nations International Year of transition from the Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals hence the WWD 2015 theme highlights the need for sustainable management of wetlands for the present and future generations which is cognizant in the pursuit of Kenya Vision 2030.



2 (e) Mr. Maluki Mwendwa, Chairman NEMA Board of Management addresses the crowd

Dr. Chumo, CEC Nandi County warned that the county will be water scarce in the next ten years if the wetlands are not managed. He reminded farmers in Nandi the agreement made that beginning 2015 there will be no planting in the riparian zones and all non wetland friendly trees shall be uprooted. He pleaded with the people of Nandi not to burn wetlands this year as they always do during dry seasons.

Mr. William Kiprono, Director KWS, who was representing the cabinet secretary of Environment, Water and Natural Resources- prof. judi Wakhungu, reminded the people of Kenya that Nandi has been a basket for the entire rift valley in terms of food production and could hardly run out of food even during long droughts, a trend which has greatly changed due to environmental degradation. While giving a speech on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary in charge of the environment Professor Judi Wakhungu, he expounded on the essence of the theme considering the youth on conservation efforts. He advised on collaboration to secure common future to ensure sustainable use of wetland resources.

The governor of Nandi County H.E. Dr. Lagat who became the Chief Guest, welcomed members to Nandi County and emphasized on the theme '*managing wetlands for our future*'. He went on to say that the number of Nandi county's water resources are numerous and are of economic importance and should be preserved

by wise use of the wetlands. He named the challenges facing wetlands and suggested that there is need for exploration on the wise use of wetlands by implementing the Integrated Management Plan. He mentioned that the process of buying and selling land should be closely monitored as it affects the conservation of wetlands.'



2 (f) H.E. Dr. Lagat Governor Nandi County addresses the gathering

2.4 Exhibitions

The event was enmeshed with several exhibitions displaying the benefits of a wetland ecosystem. Stakeholders demonstrated this through exhibitions on the wetland wise-use activities and products which was part of awareness creation.



2 (g) Nandi County governor Dr. Lagat and his team taken through the KWS exhibition



2 (h) Awareness materials displayed for the public at the NEMA exhibition stand

2.5 Awards

Awards were given to participants including: LVEMP II Kibirong Environmental Organization, Atebwo primary, World Vision, Nature Kenya, Dr Chumo, land owner Mr Kiplagat and CDE Nandi County, for overseeing the success of the event. This was intended to promote wise-use of wetlands and to appreciate those individuals

and institutions that have done commendable work in ensuring sustainable management of wetland resources.



2 (i) Ms. Ann Owino, CDE Nandi County receives a certificate from Governor, Dr. Lagat



2 (j) Mr. William Kiprono, Director KWS receives a certificate from Dr. Lagat