

NATIONAL REPORT FOR UGANDA TO THE 7TH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

Designated Ramsar Administrative Authority ¹

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1. Progress towards universal membership of the Convention

1.1 The Government of Uganda hosted the second Pan African Regional meeting. In addition, Uganda is collaborating with Kenya and Tanzania for the implementation of the Lake Victoria Environment Management Programme which aims at the conservation and sustainable utilisation of the shared wetlands of Lake Victoria.

2. Wise use of wetlands and further development of wise use guidelines

Uganda adopted a national policy for the conservation of wetland resources in 1994. The policy is a result of wide consultations involving a wide range of stakeholders at national, district and local levels.

The main features of the policy are:

¹ The recent restructuring of government ministries has introduced a Wetlands Inspection Division under the Directorate of Lands and Environment, which is expected to serve as the Administrative Authority for the Ramsar Convention.

- To establish the principles by which wetlands can be optimally used and their productivity maintained in the future
- End exploitative practices in wetlands
- Maintain biological diversity in natural or semi-natural wetlands
- Maintain functions and values of wetlands
- Promote integration of wetlands into decision making processes and sectoral planning

The National Wetlands Policy compliments the goals and objectives of the National Environment Action Plan.

2.2 An implementation strategy was adopted in 1995 and the policy is now being implemented at the national, district and community levels. The main difficulties encountered during implementation include:

- A legacy of previous policies which encouraged drainage of wetlands;
- Lack of alternatives to unsustainable use of wetlands. This is exacerbated by the collapse of the cash crops such as cotton leading local communities to turn to rice growing as a cash crop;
- Development pressures and the resultant conflict with wetland conservation especially in the urban areas

2.3 The responsibility for implementing the policy is vested in the Ministry responsible for wetlands (previously Ministry of Natural Resources and now Water, Lands and Environment). The ministry is assisted by an inter-ministerial committee comprising of 17 departments and institutions with responsibilities for wetland management

2.4 Although Uganda is not a federal state, there is a decentralized system in which power is devolved to the district and local councils. Under this system, it is planned to develop district and local wetland policies, which are in conformity to the national wetland policy.

2.5 A review of legislation and practices, which impact on wetlands, is underway. No results yet which assist with the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. However, several issues have been identified so far such as the lack of clear institutional arrangements for wetland management.

2.6 The National Wetlands Programme has organised workshops for the districts and local councils to discuss the integration of wetlands into national, district and local development plans. Two districts have already incorporated wetland issues into their development plans.

2.7 Several publications have been made to publicise the policy and the wise use concept. These are:

- A documentary film on Uganda wetlands

- A bi-annual WetNews newsletters
- Guidelines are under preparation

2.8 The Kasese Cobalt Company has started processing the cobalt stockpile, which has been leading into Lake George Ramsar Site. In addition, under the National Environmental Statute (1995), EIA is now a requirement for any development involving toxic chemicals and pollution.

2.9 Wetland valuation is carried out as part of the inventory process. However with assistance from IUCN Uganda is to undertake a detailed wetland valuation exercise.

2.10 Yes, under clause 20 and 21 of the National Environment Statute (1995) it is a requirement for EIA to be undertaken for any development which may have or is likely to have a significant impact on the environment.

2.11 The Wetlands policy stipulates that Government may require that some wetlands, which have already been drained, should be allowed to regenerate. For this purpose Government aims at restoring the soil hydration so as to re-establish the wetlands vegetation as far as is ecologically possible.

An inventory of wetlands is underway to identify priority wetlands for conservation and restoration.

2.12 Several actions have been undertaken to encourage active and informed participation of local communities in the conservation and wise use of wetland resources. These include:

- Project sites at local level to support community initiatives that demonstrate sustainable use of wetlands
- A Gender strategy is being developed to review the roles played by women and youth in the conservation of wetlands

2.13 The private sector has been involved in brainstorming session on the conservation of wetlands in Kampala. In addition, the Uganda Investment Authority requires the developers to submit an EIA to the National Environment Management Authority for approval as a condition for granting a license.

3. Awareness of wetland values and functions

The National Environment Management Authority in collaboration with the National Curriculum Development Centre has developed an environment education curriculum which incorporates wetlands. Priority Actions include:

- Policy awareness which targets the policy makers and district and local councils and NGOs;
- Radio broadcasts which target the general public

- Schools programme which targets the upper primary schools

Wetland issues are now included in the school curricular as part of the environmental education programme. The National Wetlands Programme is developing support materials such as teacher's guides and booklets on wetlands.

4 Institutional Development and Collaboration for conservation and wise use of wetlands

4.1 Uganda has an Inter-Ministerial Committee which also serves as the National Ramsar Committee. The committee is composed of 17 ministries and departments with responsibilities for wetland management. The committee is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry responsible for environmental affairs (previously Natural Resources and now Water, Lands and Environment). The secretariat is provided by the National Wetlands Programme. The main functions of the committee are to:

- Promote the implementation of the National Wetlands Policy and compliance by departments, local authorities and the general public;
- Advise the National Wetland Programme on its objectives, priorities, planned outputs and activities;
- Ensure integration of wetland issues into sectoral planning and harmonise the wetlands policy with other sectoral policies on natural resources and the environment.

The IMC is expected to meet once every three months or more frequently as the need arises.

The decisions made the IMC are submitted to the government through the Permanent Secretary who is also the chairman.

4.2 The following is an overview of the actions taken to reinforce the capacity of institutions to achieve conservation and wise use:

- a) A Training Needs Assessment for the National Wetlands Programme is underway and is expected to result into a training plan for the Programme.
- b) There has been no review to indentify training opportunities for people within and outside Uganda, although a review for Uganda is planned.
- c) A training module for wetland managers and pracitioners which was developed in 1994 is undergoing review and updating. The module was used to train district techincal officers is wetland assessment and management.
- d) 10 techincal officers from line ministries have been provided with training in Environment Impact Assessment involving wetlands as a case study. In addition 1 technical officer from the Ministry of agriculture has attended

the international course on wetland management at Lelystad, the Netherlands.

5. Conservation of sites included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar List)

- 5.1 A management plan is being prepared for Lake George Ramsar site.
- 5.2 A monitoring scheme is part of the Management Plan for Lake George.
- 5.3 There has been a negative change in ecological character due to a cobalt spill which affected parts of the northern end of the Lake George.
- 5.4 Management guidance procedure for Lake George Ramsar site was planned to take place in 1997 but execution has been delayed due to insecurity in the region. It is hoped that this will be completed by mid-1999
- 5.5 Not applicable to Uganda

5. Designation of wetlands to the Ramsar List

- 6.1 A national inventory of wetlands is underway and by June 1998, wetlands in 17 of the 45 districts have been inventoried. It is expected to complete the inventory by 2001.
- 6.2 A list of wetlands of important wetlands (in terms of biodiversity) exists. It is also planned to produce a Wetlands Master Plan with hot spot wetlands which need urgent protection. It is expected to have the masterplan completed by the end of 1999.
- 6.3 Wetlands cover about 13% of total land surface area of Uganda. About 7% of the wetlands have been lost according to the National Biomass Study.

Definition of wetland:

‘Vegetated area of land that is flooded either permanently or seasonally. The area stays wet long enough for certain plants and animals to grow even when there is no rain.’

- 6.4 Yes, consultations have started with the district authority to designate Lake Nabugabo as Uganda’s second Ramsar site. Lake Nabugabo meets several of the criteria for designation including the criterion on fish habitat.

- 6.5 Two sites namely Lake Opeta in eastern Uganda and Lutembe bay on the shores of Lake Victoria are under study for possible designation.
- 6.6 Not applicable.
- 6.7 Under the GEF cross border biodiversity project Sango Bay which borders with Tanzania is being considered as a potential Ramsar Site.

5. International Cooperation and financial assistance for wetland conservation and collaboration with other Conventions and agencies.

- 7.1 Uganda is collaborating with Tanzania and Kenya for the implementation of the Lake Victoria Environment Project which aims among others, at the conservation of the lake resources. The project is funded by the World Bank and the GEF.

In addition Uganda is collaborating with Kenya and Tanzania for the implementation of the cross-border Biodiversity Project. The project area includes the Sango Bay swamp forests in Uganda and Minziro swamp forests in Tanzania.

- 7.2 At present there are no Ramsar sites twinned with others, although this is desirable.
- 7.3 The administrative authorities for the Convention on Biological Diversity and Bonn Convention are NEMA and the Wildlife Department respectively. Both of these institutions are members of the Wetlands Inter-ministerial Committee which provides a forum for dialogue and cooperative actions.
- 7.4 Although Uganda signed the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement, she has not yet formally ratified the agreement.
- 7.5 GEF and the World Bank are supporting the implementation of the Lake Victoria Environment Management Project.
- The UK Department for International Development is finalising a project for the conservation and sustainable utilisation of Lake George resources involving local communities.
- 7.6 The Government of Uganda has budgeted for \$ 100,000 to support to the National Wetlands Programme during the financial year 1998/99. In addition, the government finances the National Environment Management Authority which coordinates environment issues.
- 7.7 Not applicable.
- 7.8 Not applicable.

5. Providing the Convention with the required resources

- 8.1 No voluntary contributions to SGF
Preparations of the Pan African Regional meeting
- 8.2 Uganda has cleared most of the previous arrears and awaiting approval of the national budget to remit the contributions for 1998.

5. Participation of Non-governmental organisations

- 9.1 Two NGOs (The East African Natural history Society and Wildlife Clubs of Uganda) have wetlands as part of their business. The EANHS has a wetlands working group which carries out waterfowl counts in January and July.

In addition, the National Wetlands Programme held a workshop for 35 national NGOs in June 1998 to raise awareness of wetland issues. Several of these NGOs are considering incorporating wetland issues into their development plans.

- 9.2 There is no specific forum in which NGOs express their views except through workshops and seminars.
- 9.3 In the past Uganda did not include NGOs as part of the official government delegation but it is expected that this will happen during the 7th COP.
- 9.4 The Wildlife Clubs of Uganda and the Uganda Wildlife Society run public awareness programmes about wetlands in Uganda. The Wildlife Clubs of Uganda devoted the year 1996 to wetland conservation messages.
- 9.5 A Ramsar site management advisory committee is being planned for Lake George and is expected to include NGO.
- 9.6 National NGOs most active in objectives 2, 3, 5 and 6.

10. Final comments

- 10.1 The Ramsar Strategic Plan is an important tool which has provided a more focussed approach for the implementation of the Convention.
- 10.2 The following are observations regarding the functioning of the organs of the Convention;
 - a) The Standing Committee is effectively discharging their roles of carrying out interim activity between the meetings of the Conference of the Parties.
 - b) The Scientific and Technical Review Panel is

- c) The Bureau is now more focussed in the development and implementation of the annual work plans
- d) The NGO partners have been very instrumental in the development of a Wetlands Programme in Uganda. BirdLife International and Wetlands International are actively supporting the East African Natural History Society

10.3 The Ramsar Convention is an important inter-governmental treaty which has focussed national attention to the conservation and wise use of wetland resources. The Convention needs to be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Contracting Parties and to demonstrate there is more to gain by joining the Convention. The Convention should strengthen links with other Conventions such the CBD which have clearly defined financing mechanisms. There is also need to refine the concept of wise use by providing more practical guidance especially on issues related to ecological character of wetlands.