

UGANDA COMMEMORATES WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2 FEBRUARY 2007

INTRODUCTION:

On 2nd February 2007, Uganda joined the rest of the international community to commemorate World Wetlands Day. This Day marks the date of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands in the Iranian city of Ramsar 36 years ago. The Convention has thus come to be popularly known as the "Ramsar Convention". The Ramsar Convention was developed as a means to call international attention to the rate at which wetland habitats were disappearing.

Relevance of the theme

The global theme for World Wetlands Day 2007 was '**Wetlands and Fisheries**'. This theme highlights the important role that wetlands play in sustaining fisheries. This is of high significance to the population of Uganda where 1.8 Million people directly depend on fisheries including boat owners, fishermen, fish processors and fish traders. The sector provides high quality protein to 17 million people, accounting for about 50 percent of animal protein consumption in the country. Therefore fish is a key factor in food security of the country.

WWD 2007 therefore provided an opportunity for the creation of awareness about the contribution of wetlands to fisheries sector thus leading not only to improved food security, but also to the sustained livelihoods of the communities involved in fisheries and hence poverty reduction.

Various institutions and communities joined the Government of Uganda to commemorate the day by sharing ideas about the link between Wetlands and Fisheries. These included, Non Government Organisations, Nature Uganda, Environmental Alert, Wildlife Clubs of Uganda and Environmental Teachers' Association (ENVITA).

OBJECTIVE

The main purpose of the WWD 2007 was to create more awareness about the benefits of wetlands of which fish is key product and to demonstrate wise use practices that can help the users to sustain the resource. This was done through a number of activities.

Main highlights

Public Dialogue and National Launch of Nine Ramsar Sites:

As part of the activities to commemorate this important day, the Wetlands Division in collaboration with Environmental Alert and Nature Uganda organised a Public dialogue on wetlands and fisheries in Uganda to take place. The Public dialogue which took place at Statistics House Conference Room on 1st February was a kick-starter the major commemoration activities.

The focus of the dialogue was on the national theme of the World Wetland Day 2007, "**Fish for the future**".

The key note address with topic Wetlands, Fisheries and National Development was an eye opener to the participants bringing out the importance of conserving wetlands for sustainability of fisheries and promotion of national development.

Launch of Nine new Ramsar Sites:

During the evening of 1st February, the Chief Guest, Hon. Rt. Second Deputy Prime Minister of Uganda and once a Minister in the Natural Resources Sector, Henry Kajura, officially launched the nine designated Ramsar sites. The Ramsar Sites are hosted by nineteen districts. Ramsar Certificates were handed over to the district Chairpersons as a means of entrusting them with the authority to ensure that the Wetlands of International Importance are protected.



This is it" – The Rt. Hon.Kajura shows the designated Ramsar Sites to Participants during National Launch at Statistics House, Looking on is Minister of State for Environment, Hon Jessca Eriyo.

National Commemoration

Commissioning of Mabamba Ramsar Site

On 2nd February 2007 Mabamba Wetland was commissioned as a wetland of international importance. The ceremony was done by the Guest of Honour, Minister of Water and Environment, Hon. Maria Mutagamba. While commissioning the site, the Minister reminded Mabamba Community, that it is of critical importance for them (community members) to ensure that the site is well maintained as it now presents many opportunities for both local and foreign earning. More importantly the site hosts very unique species of birds like the Shoe Bill, plants and fish that do not only bring in revenue from tourists but also can be crucial for research.



Minister of Water and Environment unveils Mabamba wetland System Ramsar Site on 2nd February 2007

Launch of the Children's Wetlands and Fisheries Education Initiative

During the Ninth Conference of Parties in 2005, the children made an appeal that Scientist's should simplify the information gathered on natural resources, and particularly wetlands, so that they (children) can easily understand and make use of the information. A Children's Wetlands and Fisheries Education Initiative was therefore launched on 2nd February 2007. The initiative marks another step in ensuring that this dream is fulfilled. This initiative will be jointly implemented by the Wetlands Division and Wildlife Clubs of Uganda in collaboration with Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC), Fisheries Department and Environmental Teachers' Association. The program will run through out the year to World Fisheries Day 2007, and finally cascade into the Tenth Conference of Parties in 2008, to be hosted by Korea.

Mass media campaigns:

Focusing on wetlands and fisheries, media programs explored all wetland benefits. In particular, the mass media campaigns included;

- Newspaper supplements in the leading dailies of *New Vision* and *Monitor* on 2 February 2007
- Talk shows on Uganda's National television, UBC TV. This program featured the Assistant Commissioner Wetlands Division and Legal Council from National Environment Management Authority (NEMA). In collaboration with institutions like NEMA the program will provide continuity of the WWD activities by engaging various stakeholders with focus on wise use of wetlands.
- Radio talk shows and programmes on a variety of FM stations across the country
- Press release and press conference

Ministerial Address

A recorded message by the Hon. Minister of Water and Environment was telecast on the eve of the World Wetlands Day on UBC Television. The address highlighted key policy issues, challenges to sustainable wetland management and progress with implementation of Uganda's Wetlands Sector Strategic Plan.

Wetlands Division
Ministry of Water and Environment
Kampala, Uganda

6th February 2007