



Zambia commemorates World Wetlands Day in Lukanga

2nd February 2006

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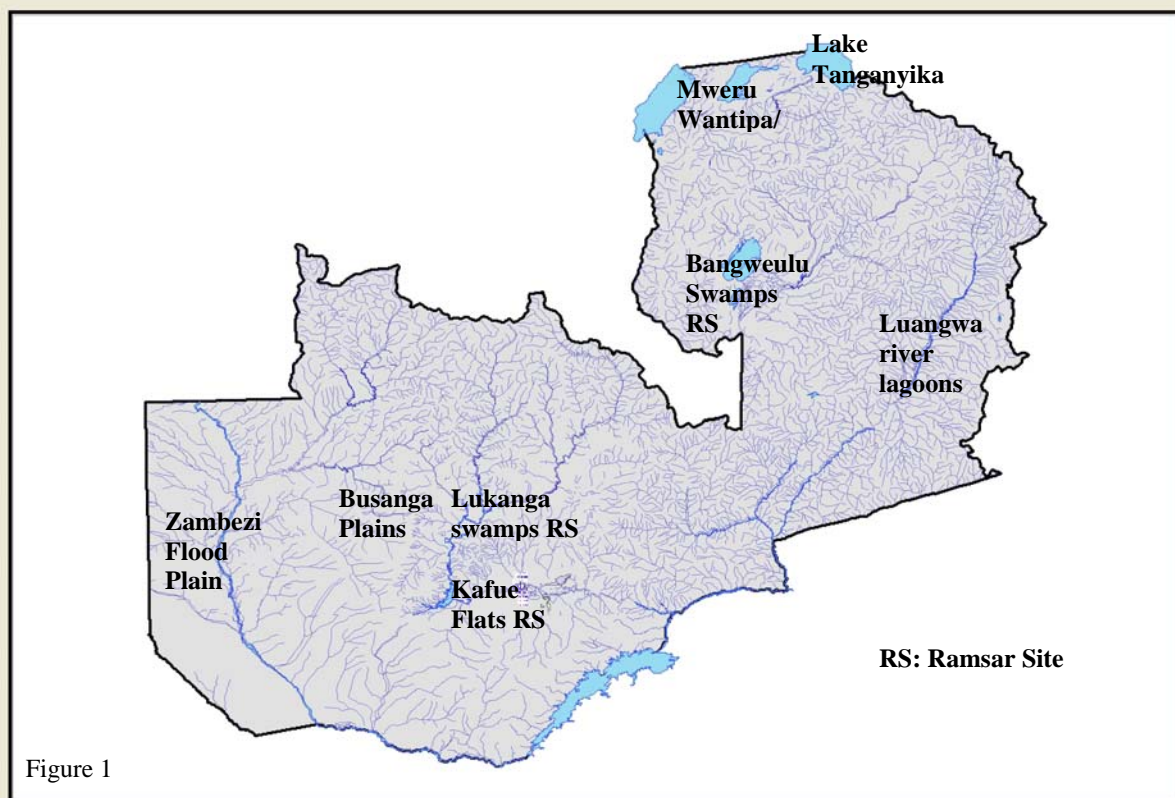
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1.0 Introduction

Recognising that wetland resources, if used wisely have an enormous array of benefits including poverty alleviation among rural communities who depend directly on them, Zambia ratified the Ramsar Convention in 1999.

Zambia has three Ramsar sites; Bangweulu Chikuni site, the Kafue flats site composed of Lochinvar and Blue Lagoon National Parks and the newly designated Lukanga swamps site. Lukanga swamps Ramsar site was designated during the 9th Conference of Parties to Ramsar, which was held in Uganda in November 2005.

Zambia's drainage: Major Wetland Areas



On the 2nd of February every year, Parties to Ramsar Convention undertake actions aimed at raising public awareness of wetland values and benefits in general and the Ramsar Convention in particular. Each year has a different theme. The theme for 2006 was 'wetlands as a tool for poverty alleviation' closely linked to the theme of the 9th Ramsar Conference of Parties held in Uganda in November 2005 whose theme was 'Wetlands and Water – Supporting life, Sustaining livelihoods'.

Zambia found it duty bound to commemorate such an important event as a Party to Ramsar Convention and also to demonstrate her leadership under the New Partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD where Zambia is the lead country for the wetlands component of NEPAD's Environment Initiative. The wetlands component of NEPAD's Environment Initiative's strategy and action plan aim at maintaining and/or improving the ecological integrity of wetland ecosystems enabling the best use of wetland values and functions in the long term. The objectives include the promotion and attainment of a healthy and productive environment in which African countries and their people have wetlands and watersheds that can support fundamental human needs such as clean water, appropriate sanitation, food security and economic development.

Lukanga swamps are endowed with ecological goods and services such as water, fish and wildlife (animal and bird life) and has a potential for tourism activities though a number of people who visited the area 20 to 30 years ago that were interviewed during the World Wetlands Day (WWD) preparations claimed that Lukanga swamps were heavily endowed with larger quantities of fish and animals species and that the geographic extent was much wider than it was today.

2.0 World Wetlands Day Activities

Activities were funded by Zambia Wildlife Authority, WWF, Environmental Council of Zambia.

2.1 Location

As a way of getting started with programmes and activities in the new Ramsar site, Zambia found it appropriate to commemorate the world wetlands day in the in Lukanga Swamps. The aim of holding the celebrations in Lukanga swamps was to mainly sensitise the locals on the meaning of Ramsar and its principles in the management and conservation of wetlands. Secondly, it was also an opportunity to expose invited co-operating partners and potential donors namely WWF Partners for Wetlands, Environmental Council of Zambia, Development Aid from People to People and Individuals, to the geographic, social and economic platforms of Lukanga swamps for future collaboration.

2.2 Participants

The celebrations, spearhead by the lead institution in the management and conservation of wetlands in Zambia, Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA), were held at Nansenga Community School located about 10km before the Lukanga Boma. In attendance were Government Officials from the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries and the Ministry of Community Development and Social Service Welfare, local people, traditional leaders, the school community (teachers and pupils), WWF Partners for Wetlands, Environmental Council of Zambia, Individuals in Wildlife Conservation (Honorary Rangers) and the Media.



Figure 2): From left to right – Acting ZAWA Director General Mr. Gershom Chilukushusha welcoming guests, Her Royal Highness Chiefteness Chiawa and Chairperson for ZAWA Board, Senior Chief of the area Mukuni Ngombe and Deputy Permanent Secretary for Central Province Mr. Christopher Mutembo.

3.0 Activities

3.1 Class Session

Before the assembly of invited guests and the local community, Zambia Wildlife Authority addressed the grade seven classes on the importance of wetlands, the Ramsar Convention and the significance of commemorating WWD (figures 3, 4, 5 and 6) The session lasted for about 1 hour with great emphasis on sustainable use and conservation of wetland resources for posterity.

The class was conducted in a local language to make the topic more meaningful to the audience who had a good idea of wetland services but had no clue that natural resources were not only a national issue but of a global concern. The head teacher expressed gratitude for the honour of choosing such a remote school for what he called the biggest educative and community based function ever held in the area.

Materials distributed to teachers and pupils included T-Shirts with Ramsar/WWD inscriptions (courtesy of WWF Partners for Wetlands and Environmental Council of

Zambia), posters and stickers (courtesy of Ramsar Secretariat) and calendars from Environmental council of Zambia.

Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 : class session with grade sevens at Nansenga Community School on WWD, 2nd February 2006.



3) Senior Wildlife Ecologist for Conventions and Agreements Ms. Francesca Chisangano teaching the Grade Seven Class on WWD



4) Grade Seven Class at Nansenga Community School on WWD



5) class session as Mrs Maureen Mwape (Public Relations Officer for ZAWA) looks on



6) Ms. Francesca Chisangano rewarding a sticker to the pupil who gave a correct answer to why we should conserve wetlands

3.2 The opening ceremony

The opening ceremony was characterised by local dances, figures 7) and 8). A drama group also performed a sketch in line with the theme for 2006 WWD's theme and the wise use concept. These were also done in the local language to cater for the majority of

the local people that needed interpretation in the events that took place during the commemoration.



Figure 7



Figure 8

3.3 Speeches

All the speeches were done in English with interpretation into the local language, Lenje. The introductory speech was given by the Acting Director General Mr. Gershom Chilukusha who gave an overview of the Ramsar Convention and its principles. He

specifically explained why Lukanga swamps were such an important wetland area locally, nationally and internationally at the same time calling for collaborated efforts in the conversation and management of the new Ramsar Site so that Ramsar's mission and principles of sustainable use of wetland resources could benefit the local communities where poverty alleviation was concerned.

Senior Chief Mukuni Ngombe welcomed the gathering stating that it was such an honour to hold such a big function in his area. Admitting that the concept was new, he demanded to know the benefits of the declaration of Lukanga swamps as a Ramsar site to the local communities. The Acting Director General took time to repeat that the declaration of Lukanga swamps was not meant to deprive the local people of the rightful wetland resource but that the declaration was a structured way of ensuring the sustainable way of utilizing wetland resources for the benefit of local communities.

The speech for the Honourable Minister of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources was delivered by the Deputy Permanent Secretary for Central Province Mr. Christopher Metembo. The speech included highlights on the importance of Ramsar, why Lukanga swamps were declared a Ramsar Site, Zambia's role in the NEPAD's Environment Initiative's wetlands component, the link between the 2006 theme and the global focus on the 2015 United Nations Millennium Development Goal no. 1 (eradication of extreme poverty) and the need to simultaneously embrace Millennium Development Goal no. 7 (ensuring environmental sustainability). Furthermore the Minister called for partners to ensure that the declaration of Lukanga Swamps as a Ramsar was put into a practical working programme to benefit both the local people and the wetland resource itself.

The Country Co-ordinator for WWF in Zambia Mr. James Phiri pledged support to any working programme which the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources was going to come up with via the WWF Partners for Wetlands Project, giving an example of the ongoing project in the Mwanachingwala area in Kafue Flats. The Project Co-ordinator for the Partners for Wetlands Mr. Nalumino Nyambe briefed the gathering on the works done in the Mwanachingwala Conservation Programme where the local community together with the help of WWF and Private companies teamed up and came up with a community based conservation and management programme of the wetland resources in the Chiefdom. He further indicated that similar programme could be undertaken in Lukanga swamps in future.

The representative from the Development Aid from People to People Mr. Nsansaula commended ZAWA for organizing the event that had to do with poverty alleviation among the rural communities in Chibombo area which extended into Lukanga Swamps. He indicated that his organisation was working along the lines of poverty alleviation and rural community empowerment hence it was going to be easy for DAPP to participate in similar future programmes in Lukanga Swamps

In closing, the Acting Director General expressed gratitude to every organisation, government Ministry, individuals and the local community for participating. He reiterated that the event was the beginning of more programmes to come and called for

multisectoral co-operation so that the principles and benefits of the Ramsar Convention would be experienced among the local people while securing the future of the wetland resources in Lukanga swamps.