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# Govt plays vital role in protecting wetlands

World Wetlands Day is celebrated annually on February 2, to raise global awareness about the value of wetlands for humanity and the planet.

It also marks the adoption of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar.

According to a policy report by the Ministry of Natural Resources dubbed; 'National policy for the conservation and management of wetland resources', although wetlands conservation and management is a shared responsibility for all Ugandans, government has a leading role to play.

The report highlights that in order to carry out the shared responsibilities, the government has outlined broad aims, which are supported by a number of specific goals.

"The national policy on the conservation and management of the wetland resources complements the goals and objectives of the

National Environment Action Plan process and sectorial policies, including those of fisheries, forestry, wildlife, water, land tenure and soils, among others.

"The overall aim is to promote the conservation of Uganda's wetlands in order to sustain their ecological and socio-economic functions for the present and future wellbeing of the people," the report reads in part.

In support of the above, government strives to establish the principles by which wetland resources can be optimally used, and their productivity can be maintained into the future.

According to an opinion, which was written last year by the United

Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator in Uganda Ms Rosa Malongo and published in *Daily Monitor*, the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an opportunity to celebrate wetlands. The SDGs include various plans aimed at protecting life in the ocean, on land and managing climate change.

She noted that as Uganda strives to develop, it is imperative for each of us to do everything we can to save wetlands. She said if well managed, wetlands ensure that communities are resilient and can bounce back from disasters faster.

"At individual and community level, we can become wetlands ambassadors and work with family,

friends and community members to use water sparingly, conserve and restore wetlands and to create alternative sources of livelihoods.

"Communities can lead efforts to check how wetlands are used in their local areas and participate in clearing the rubbish that is often dumped as well as unblocking the streams from which they receive water," she said.

## What government should do

The Ministry of Natural Resources Policy report notes that conservation of wetlands is very important for a variety of biological resources, some of which depend entirely on wetlands.

Often, wetlands are degraded

because the public is either not fully aware or do not appreciate the diversity of values and functions of wetlands.

Government, therefore, has to promote public awareness and understanding of wetland resources while encouraging participation of the public, local government authorities and institutions.

The report suggests that government should end existing unsustainable exploitative practices in wetlands to avert the decline in their productivity and maintain a biological diversity in wetlands either in the natural community of plants and animals or in the multiplicity of agricultural activity.

According to the NEMA website, government will establish fully "Protected Wetlands Areas" of important biological diversity.

"Government may also establish certain wetlands which will be used for partial exploitation such as research. No modification, drainage or other impacts will be entertained for the so-protected wetlands.