

Govt should protect Lubigi wetland

Last week, the Ministry of Water and Environment issued an order directing all people who have invaded and converted Lubigi wetland in Kampala for various purposes to vacate in 21 days from the date of publication.

Lubigi wetland is one of the many wetlands facing extinction in Uganda despite their critical role of filtering, retaining and controlling floods in and around the surrounding districts of Wakiso and Mpigi.

The expansive wetland has for long been a soft target for encroachers who reclaim it for settlement, setting up gardens, bricklaying, washing bays, among other activities.

In 2011, people claiming to be army veterans attempted to settle there but were stopped. Again in 2013, a group of traders under Uganda Patriotic Voluntary Organisation descended on the same wetland and started constructing stalls, claiming they had authorisation from State House.

The issue:

Wet lands

Our view:

Although the ministerial order is targeting Lubigi wetland encroachers alone for now, we think it would be wise for the ministry to issue similar orders to other encroachers.

The latest directive by the Environment ministry should be viewed in good faith.

Scientists from the National Environment Management Authority, (Nema) have on several occasions warned that should Lubigi wetland disappear, the entire Central Cattle Corridor, which includes Luweero, Nakasongola, Nakaseke, among other districts will not have water. This should be an area of concern since it directly endangers the survival of thousands of people and their animals.

Although the ministerial order is targeting Lubigi wetland encroachers alone for now, we think it would be wise for the ministry to issue similar orders to other encroachers across the country, strictly implement them and put in place a mechanism to keep encroachers off these protected ecosystems.

The orders should not only target the urban-poor, less privileged and leave the wealthy to use the wetlands for activities that contravene the law.

Degradation of our environment normally for selfish gains has resulted in degradation of our environment normally resulting in climate change which is making farmers count losses, with high temperatures and the Kampala flooding whenever it rains.

So far, available statistics indicate that the country has less than 10 per cent of wetland cover as opposed to 14 per cent in 1990s.

Restoring the wetlands therefore calls for support from politicians at all levels and set aside their selfish interests and let the law work.

Section 36 of the National Environment Act provides for protection of wetlands and prohibiting any person from reclaiming, erecting or demolishing any structure that is fixed in, on, under or above any wetland.