

Museveni warns against degrading wetlands, forest

By Henry Sekanjako

President Yoweri Museveni has warned Ugandans against building and cultivating in the wetlands.

"Cultivation or building in the wetlands (*ebisharara, enfuujo-bisaaru ntobazi-bitoogo*) should stop. We can economically use the wetlands better when we preserve them and only use the edges for fish ponds," Museveni said.

Speaking during the State of the Nation Address, which marked the opening of the 3rd session of the 10th Parliament, yesterday at the Kampala Serena conference centre, Museveni said there is need to protect and preserve the environment, to avoid climate change effects.

Restoration

Museveni said there is need to pay attention to the restoration of wetlands, preserving and planting new forests.

"We should not allow cultivation within 200 metres of the lake shore. We should also stop soil erosion by using contours when cultivating in mountain areas," he said.

Citing the presidential farm at Kawumu in Luwero district,

"There is need to protect the environment, to avoid climate change effects,"

Museveni

the President said he had established four fish ponds on half an acre, which fetches him up to sh64m per year.

"This is the right way to use wetlands so that the centre of the swamp regenerates and preserves water because we need it for irrigation," he stated.

Museveni further noted that swamp grass (*Cyperus latifolia*) locally known as *ebigugu*, is good for mulching.

Museveni said: "The swamp vegetation also filters the water, so that, by the time it goes into the lakes and rivers, it is free of silt. This preserves its quality."

State of environment

The State of the Environment report as of 2012 showed a worrying level of degradation costing the economy a lot of

money on curative healthcare, water treatment and restoration of degraded ecosystems.

Over the years, Uganda has lost about 570,000 hectares of wetlands.

The Uganda Wetlands Atlas puts the cost of wetland destruction at nearly sh2b annually and contamination of water resources, which is partly caused by reduced buffering capacity of wetlands near open water bodies, to nearly sh38b.

Appreciation

Alex Byarugaba (Isingiro County South), the chairperson of the committee on natural resources, commended the President for his stand on the protection and preservation of the environment.

"The President was spot on. There is no way one can destroy the environment, especially wetlands, and get water for irrigation. We should come up with punitive measures to discipline people who degrade it," Byarugaba said.

He noted that the committee was working with the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) to come up with a law that outlines punishments for people who degrade the environment.



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