LETTER OF THE DAY

Communities should play the biggest role in wetland preservation



Every year on the February 2, Uganda joins the rest of the world to celebrate World Wetlands Day to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands for people and our planet.

This day is also an occasion to commemorate the signing of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Celebrated under that theme Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge: Celebrating Cultural Heritage. This year's global focus highlights how traditional knowledge, cultural practices and community lifestyles have long played a vital role in sustaining wetlands and preserving cultural identity around the world.

Wetlands are among the world's most diverse productive environment cradles of biological diversity that provides the water and productivity upon countless species of plants and animals depend on them for survival. Wetlands are indispensable for the countless benefits like ecosystem services that they provide to humanity ranging from freshwater supply, food, biodiversity recharge and climate change mitigation.

Often referred to as the "kidneys of the Earth," wetlands possess a natural ability to filter and purify water. Acting as sponges, they absorb and store excess rainfall, reducing the risk of downstream flooding. Moreover, wetlands serve as crucial habitats for a diverse range of plant and animal species, contributing to biodiversity conservation and ensuring the survival of numerous rare or endangered species.

However, in Uganda wetland coverage have reduced from approximately 13 percent of the country's total land surface to about 8 percent Through agricultural activities, such as growing crops and rearing livestock, which have been expanding into wetland areas, leading to the destruction of the ecosystems and the loss of valuable habitats for wildlife.

If nothing is done to halt this trend the country will lose its entire wetland coverage sooner than later. According to the World Heritage and Ramsar Conventions, 64 percent of the world's wetlands have disappeared since the beginning of the last century.

In most regions across the world, wetlands continue to decline, compromising the benefits that wetlands provide to people. According to the Global Wetland Outlook, we lose wetlands three times faster than natural forests.

Therefore, the conservation of wetlands is a vital task of humanity, which can help in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Additionally, World Wetlands Day serves as a reminder of the urgent need to protect and restore wetland ecosystems. As Uganda and the global community work towards a sustainable future, conserving wetlands remains essential for safeguarding water security, preserving biodiversity, and building climate resilience.

Since wetland management in Uganda was decentralised to the local governments, there is a need for community empowerment in conservation of the wetlands. Therefore, there is need for the government to invest in economic valuation of wetlands to assist in the policy and decision making during difficult situations such as the allocation of the resources to the sectors.

Furthermore, community sensitisation should be done through various media such as newspapers, radio, television, and others like public education campaigns to ensure that the community is well versed on the wetland benefits, policies, by-laws and ordinances to ensure that wetlands are sustainably managed. The community should also be well versed on the wise use of wetland for the sustainable supply of water.

In conclusion, let us renew our commitment to the preservation of wetlands, recognising their vital role in maintaining biodiversity, regulating water resources, and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Through embracing sustainable practices and promoting awareness, we can ensure that these essential ecosystems continue to thrive for generations to come.

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