

LETTER OF THE DAY

Protect wetlands to escape poverty

EDITOR: Wetlands are not waste lands rather; they are wealth lands that play a significant role in poverty alleviation. They are live wires to many economic activities such as crop cultivation, fishing, livestock rearing, and hydroelectricity generation.

All Uganda's poverty eradication plans, such as the National Development Plan II, Vision 2040, Sustainable Development Goals and Operation Wealth Creation, among others, will come to nothing if wetlands are not protected.

With all the necessary legal and institutional frameworks existing to protect wetlands, they have remained the most widely abused ecosystems, for example, according to the wetlands mapping exercise of 2008 by the

Wetlands Management Department in the Ministry of Water and Environment, wetland resources were noted to have reduced from 15% in 1994 to 11% of Uganda's area. Following the activities of the commission of inquiry on land, it is evident that most wetlands have been degraded by politicians and well connected businessmen yet they would have been leading figures because they should know the value of wetlands. The other challenge also goes to the district land boards that have continued to issue land titles in wetlands.

We should not drain wetlands for agriculture or settlement, government and investors should not front setting up of industrial parks at the expense of wetlands and the public should desist from over exploitation of wetland

resources lest we suffer catastrophes arising from climate change.

It is important to note that wetlands play vital roles in water quality improvement, water supply, flood control, erosion control, recreation, cultural conservation, support to both flora and fauna, climate control, ground water recharge and commercial benefits, among others, and that Uganda is also home to over 12 Ramsar sites (wetlands of economic importance which provide a huge tourism potential and income to the country classified as Important Bird Areas. Thus for wetland to continue providing the above functions, concerted efforts is needed especially from the public.

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PICTURE BY WILFRED SANYU

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