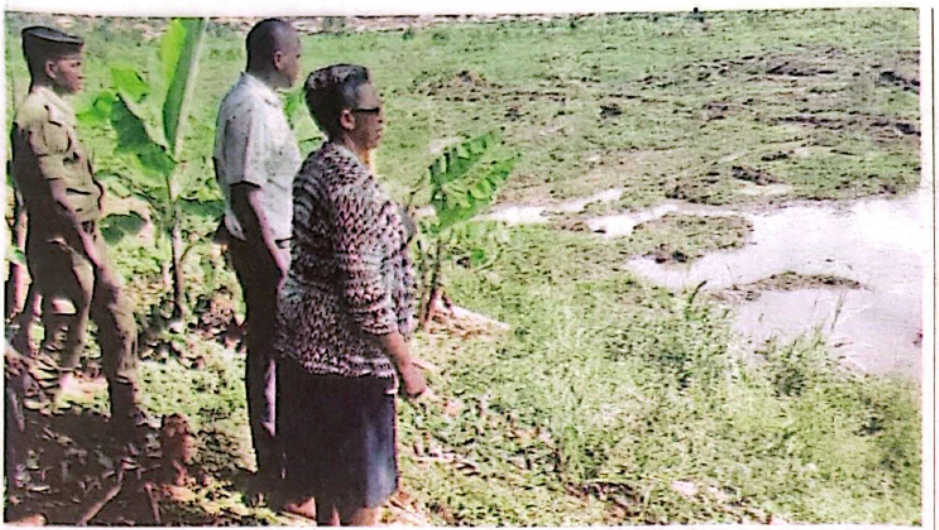


Inspection. Land probe committee commissioner Mary Oduka Ochan (right) and other members of the commission during a visit to Nakivubo Channel wetland. PHOTO BY EPHRAIM KASOZI

Encroachers degrade Nakivubo wetland

Damaged. Wetland has been parcelled out and allocated to businesses under the guise of development, according to residents and environment authorities.

BY EPHRAIM KASOZI
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KAMPALA. Nakivubo Channel wetland that filters sewage and waste water from Kampala City before emptying into Lake Victoria, has been encroached on and destroyed by developers, the commission of inquiry into land matters has established.

The wetland that stretches from Makerere-Kivulu in Kampala Central Division to Luzira in Nakawa Division, has been parcelled out and allocated to businesses under the guise of development, according to residents and environment authorities.

It is alleged that Uganda Land Commission (ULC) issued land titles to the developers who have since degraded the wetland.

Evidence before the commission indicates that at Mpanga Close in Bugolobi in Nakawa Division, unspecified stretch of the wetland has been allocated to Majestic Commodities commonly known as Britannia, which has levelled and demarcated the area.

Documents before the commission indicate that the same portion of wetland was subject to a dispute between Majestic Commodities, Nyumba ya Chuma as well as ULC.

It is alleged that Nyumba ya Chuma had acquired its title in 1982 from the late Kafumbe-Mukasa who claimed ownership of the area.

During a tour of the area, the commission led by commissioner Mary Oduka Ochan criticised the authorities for being quick to accept 'dodgy' legal opinions to allow the developments.

> "This is a dilemma we are operating in to protect the environment in this era of investors. We're guided by the Policy Committee of Parliament on environment, but there is also a law which gives another body powers to issue land titles."
>
> TOM OKURUT, NEMA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The commissioners also noted that part of the wetland is being filled with soil ferried to the area by trucks at night by an unknown developer who also deployed security guards to secure his place.

Former Kampala mayor Nasser Sebaggala described the situation as unfortunate.

"We are surprised that there are only four people owning the entire wetland. They have only been changing names on titles to defeat justice," he added.

The commissioners blamed the National Environment Management Authority (Nema) for failing to apply the law to stop the illegal activities.

Dr Tom Okurut, the Nema executive director, confirmed that the portion of affected wetland belongs to Majestic Commodities, which carried out an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) in 2009.

Dr Okurut said the company planned to construct apartments and warehouses but their activities have since been stopped.

He said the land title held by Majestic is newer but generated from an old one while that of UBC was issued in 1961 and they are part of the 642 land titles issued on wetlands countrywide.

Dr Okurut said Nema's work is guided by the nature of permit issued. Regulated activities in wetlands include fish farming, green space and other farming related activities.

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