

# Encroachers reclaim wetlands

**List.** The most depleted wetlands include Bulenga, Kabojja, Mayanja, Kasengeje, Kasangombe and Kaliddubi, all in Wakiso District.

BY JOSEPH KIGGUNDU  
 & AL-MAHDI SSENKABIRWA  
 editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

**WAKISO.** Encroachers have reclaimed some wetlands in Wakiso District, barely two years after they were restored.

The fresh encroachment occurred after the encroachers took advantage of the festive season to invade the wetlands when environmental law enforcers were not in office.

The most destroyed parts of Lubigi wetland system are those near Entebbe Express Highway in Busega and Mityana road near the Northern Bypass, according to a mini-survey conducted by *Daily Monitor*.

The Lubigi Wetland is an important water catchment area serving Kampala City and the surrounding areas of Wakiso District.

Part of Nabaziza Wetland, which is adjacent to Hass Oil depot in Buddo, has also been reclaimed by an unidentified developer who has since poured murrum, covering an area measuring about two acres.

Nabaziza Wetland stretches from Kyengeru to Buddo on Kampala-Masaka highway. Nonve Wetland in Kakiri Town Council has also been encroached on and about five acres of the wetland have been filled with murrum by a group of Chinese investors.

According to Ms Stella Nalumansi, the Wakiso District wetlands officer, other wetlands including; Bulenga, Kabojja, Mayanja, Kasengeje, Kasangombe and Kaliddubi, have also been heavily depleted in the same manner during the same period. Wakiso District covers an area of approximately 2,400 square kilometres of which 384 are wetlands.



Explanation. Ms Stella Nalumansi (left), the Wakiso District wetlands officer, briefs Nema environment police officers how Novve Wetland in Bugwanya Village has been affected recently. PHOTO BY JOSEPH KIGGUNDU

Before the encroachment, all the affected wetlands, according to Ms Nalumansi, were relatively waterlogged following the September-December rainy season and the water drifting through the thick reeds and papyrus down to different channels leading to various water bodies including Lake Victoria.

#### Launch of operations

"Today, we are only seeing small portions of papyrus still standing and the bigger area has either been replaced with gardens or those making bricks, this is terrible and it signals danger ahead," she says.

Working with National Environment Management Authority (Nema) and police, Ms Nalumansi says they are going to launch fresh operations in all the affected wetlands to drive out all the encroachers.

"The district has already tasked all the town clerks in different town councils and municipalities to avail information regarding latest encroachment on wetlands to enable us draw a clear plan of executing our operations," she says, adding:

#### ROLE OF WETLANDS

Wetlands filter water from pollutants, their vegetation especially papyrus acts as a raw material in crafts making, habitat for several creatures such as birds and reptiles that not only act as tourism attraction, but also balance the bionetwork.

Last year, Mr Esau Mpoza, the Wakiso District environment officer warned that if nothing is done to conserve the existing wetlands, the area will not have wetlands in the next five years.

Other scientists and conservationists also agree in unison that the current rate of wetland degradation is becoming a national crisis.

In 1962, Uganda had wetlands measuring a total of 32,000km<sup>2</sup>, but by 1999, they had decreased to 30,000km<sup>2</sup>.

"This time, we are not going to announce. Our operations will come curtly and culprits will be prosecuted according to the law."

On Tuesday, one of environment police officers, Muhammed Kyamanywa, arrested Mr Ramathan Mudde, who reportedly sold part of Nonve Wetland to Chinese investors.

On his part, Mr Mudde admitted selling one acre of wetland to the investors. Mr Kyamanywa also reveals that more than 10 encroachers on different wetlands in Wakiso have been arrested and will soon be produced in court for prosecution.

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.

In 2016, Nema had embarked on a nationwide restoration of wetlands and several garden with flourishing maize, cassava and yams as well as sugarcane plantations in major wetlands in the district were cut down.