

Programme to restore wetlands in offing

Target. The project is targeting about four million beneficiaries living in and around wetlands and relying on them for livelihood.

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Government has revealed that it is going to embark on a programme aimed at restoring wetlands in various parts of the country.

The programme will be implemented by the Ministry of Water and Environment and is aimed at restoring 760 square kilometres of degraded wetlands and associated catchments in 20 districts.

"We want to restore these wetlands because they have been heavily degraded. The affected people will get livelihood options," the director of environment in the ministry of Water and Environment, Mr Paul Mafabi, told *Daily Monitor* in an interview.

The eight-year project will cost \$44.26m with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and its subsidiary Green Climate Fund providing a combined contribution of \$26.14m grant and \$18.12m in co-financing from the government.

The project is targeting about four million beneficiaries living in and around wetlands and relying on them for livelihood and food in eastern and south-western regions whose wetland



Due to lack of land, many people have encroached on wetlands in order to practice farming.

PHOTO BY PAUL TAJUBA

systems have been severely destroyed mainly for agriculture.

Also, Mr Mafabi says government is working on how to implement the 2014 Cabinet directive of cancelling all titles in wetland.

Encroachment

In 2015, the ministry of Water and Environment released a report titled; 'The Wetland Atlas for Kampala, Wakiso and Mukono districts' highlighting the status of wetlands.

According to the report, more than 30 wetlands were

facing pressure that may result into extinction if encroachers are not stopped.

The wetlands that the report listed to be facing pressure from encroachers included Lubigi on Hoima road, the same marshland that was a target in 2011, by people claiming to be army veterans and again in 2013, by a group of traders under Uganda Patriotic Voluntary Organisation, Nakivubo Wetland, Kitante Wetland, and the Inner Murchison Bay wetlands.

Others are Kyetinda wetland, Kansanga Wetland and Nalu-

kolongo wetland Namanve wetland located in Mukono District. The causes of degradation, according to the report, range from reclaiming land for settlement, setting up industries, social amenities such as roads and agriculture.

Tampering with the ecological set up of the wetlands, according to experts, not only affects the aquatic lives of different small mammals, but also water quality and quantity.

Wetlands are biodiversity havens, acting as breeding grounds and habitat for aquatic

animals including birds, fish, papyrus used for craft industry, tourism purposes and other wildlife.

There is more to these marshes though; "the most important function of wetlands, especially in these areas are filtering water from pollutants, control flooding and stores it," Mr Mafabi said in an earlier interview with this paper.

Unfortunately, Uganda has lost 30 per cent wetland cover in a period of 20 years, Mr Mafabi says.

"If you compare with 1994, wetlands were covering about 15 per cent of land surface area. Currently, we have between 8 and 9 per cent wetland coverage. So we have lost a minimum of 30 per cent of our wetlands over a period of 15 to 20 years," he said.

Environment minister Sam Cheptoris, attributed the declining wetland coverage to 'greedy Ugandans' who have grabbed and converted wetlands for different uses including construction of homes, farms, factories among other things.

"Consequently, we have experienced increased flooding, reduced water quality and quantity, including drying of water sources, diseases," Mr Cheptoris said urging urban authorities to integrate wetlands into urban planning and police formulation.

GREEDY

Environment minister Sam Cheptoris, attributed the declining wetland coverage to 'greedy Ugandans' who have grabbed and converted wetlands for different uses including construction of homes, farms, factories among other things.

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Govt plays vital role