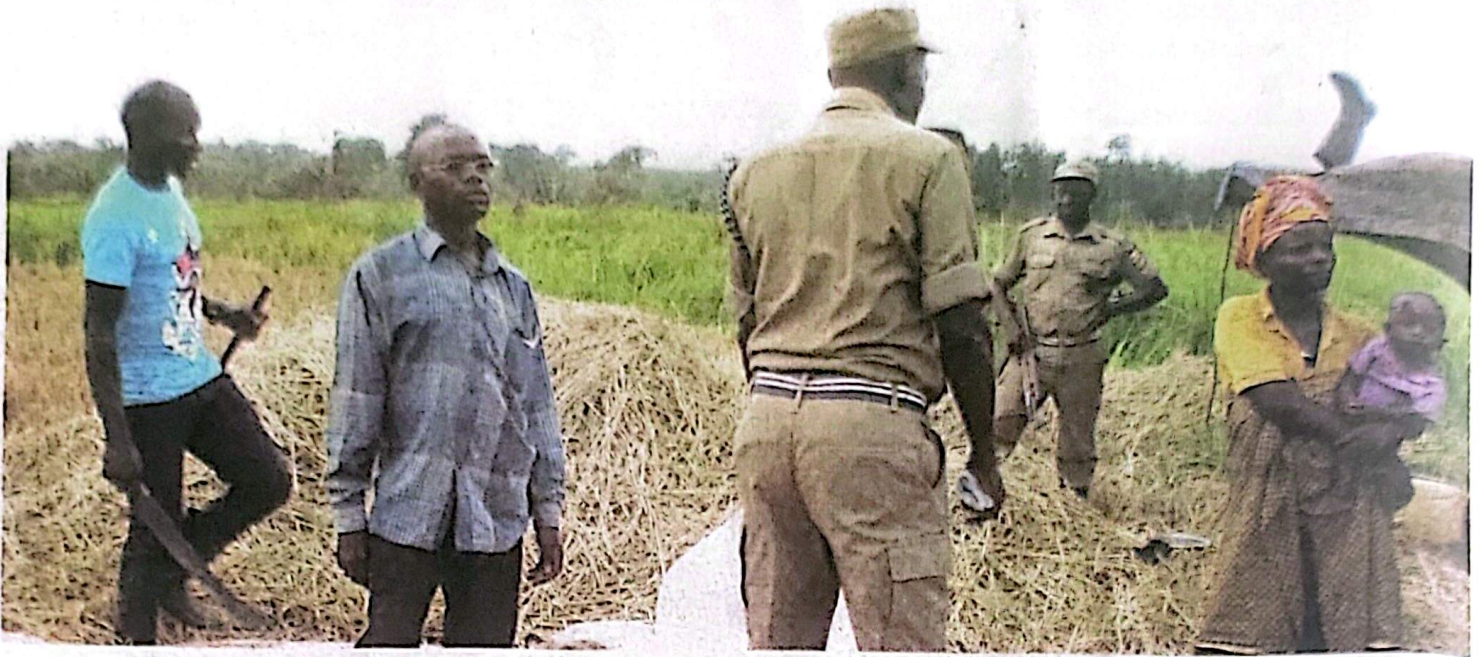




Bunyoro struggles to save wetlands



Impounded. Police officers seize rice from a garden in a wetland in Kibaale District recently. PHOTO BY ALEX TUMUHIMBISE

Serious. Encroachment on wetlands is rampant in Bunyoro Sub-region with Hoima, Kagadi and Kibaale districts being the most affected.

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KAKUMIRO. Kakumiro District authorities have launched an operation against escalating wetland encroachment.

The Kakumiro District secretary for production and natural resources, Mr Godfrey Barugahare, on Monday said they had started an exercise to demarcate wetlands and evict encroachers.

He said the exercise began in September in Katikara and Kisiita sub-counties where several wetlands have been heavily encroached on by farmers.

"We have started this exercise in order to have all these encroachers evicted. People should know where wetland boundaries are and should respect and protect them," Mr Barugahare said.

The Kakumiro District natural resources officer, Mr Christopher Baguma, said several farming tools have been impounded from people who were found cultivating in wetlands.

He emphasised the need for people to respect the National Environment Act and other regulatory instruments

on wetlands.

"The law is there and we should respect it as it is. All activities in wetlands must be first permitted by the relevant authorities," Mr Baguma said.

However, residents have welcomed the exercise with mixed reactions.

Mr Karoli Kaita, a resident of Katikara and neighbour of Kabale swamp, asked the district authorities to grant them more grace period to enable them harvest their rice.

Early this year, Kakumiro District Council passed a resolution to evict and prosecute all wetland encroachers in the district.

The law

Section 36 (1) of the National Environment Act states that no person shall reclaim or drain any wetland; erect, construct, place, alter, extend, remove or demolish any structure that is fixed in, on, under or over any wetland; disturb any wetland by drilling or tunneling in a manner that has or is likely to have an adverse effect on the wetland; deposit in, on or under any wetland any substance in a manner that has or is likely to have an adverse effect on the wetland; destroy, damage or disturb any wetland in a manner that has or is likely to have an adverse effect on any plant or animal or its habitat.

The resolution followed the expiry of a two-month ultimatum which was given to wetland encroachers to vacate by the end of February or face forceful eviction and prosecution.

Encroachment on wetlands is rampant in Bunyoro Sub-region with Hoima, Kagadi and Kibaale districts being the most affected.

In Hoima, the district environment officer, Ms Joseline Nyangoma, decried the high rate at which people have encroached on wetlands.

She cited some of the illegal activities being carried out on wetlands as cultivation, brick laying, erecting permanent structures and car washing, among others.

She said on several occasions the district authorities have launched operations against wetland encroachers but their efforts have been frustrated by politicians.

She added that Hoima District in the first quarter of this financial year started to demarcate wetlands in a bid to protect them from encroachment. However the process stalled due to lack of funds.

The Kibaale Resident District Commissioner, Mr Samuel Kitembo Araali, said the district is yet to come up with a comprehensive action plan on combating wetland degradation.

"People are destroying the water catchment areas and we need water for irrigation at one point," Mr Museveni said.