

Rugunda launches sh161b wetlands project

By Gerald Tenywa
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The extreme hot weather at Limoto Primary School in Puti-puti sub-county, Pallisa district did not stop the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, from going to Limoto Swamp on Saturday to commission fish ponds.

Rugunda led hundreds of residents, ministers and United Nations (UN) dignitaries to the edge of the swamp, where he commissioned a small-scale irrigation scheme.

This is part of the livelihood initiatives that have been given to residents, including youth that were previously growing rice in Limoto wetland, but ended up destroying it.

The ministers in attendance were Dr Goreti Kiiru Kimono, the state minister for environment and Jennifer Namuyangu, the local government state minister. UN dignitaries were led by Rosa Malango, the UN resident coordinator in Uganda.

"When we destroy wetlands, we destroy ourselves," Rugunda, who was representing President Yoweri Museveni, said.

He made the remarks during activities organised to commemorate the World Wetlands Day, which is celebrated across the world on February 2 every year.

"We need to reflect on what each of us can do to conserve our wetlands," Rugunda said.

Role played by wetlands

According to Malango, the theme for this year's celebrations, *Wetlands and Climate Change*, highlights the role played by wetlands as natural



Namuyangu (left), Malango (centre) and Rugunda (right) with other dignitaries celebrate after harvesting onions in a wetland during the function on Saturday. Photo by Juliet Kasirye

BETWEEN THE LINES

Rugunda said when we destroy wetlands, we destroy ourselves.

solutions in adapting and mitigating the impact of climate change.

Kiiru said scientists estimate that 64% of the world's wetlands have disappeared since 1900.

In Uganda, Kiiru said the natural wetlands had reduced from 15,6% in 1994 to 8,9% in 2018, representing a decline of 30%.

Climate change is rising and it is affecting different parts of the world. African countries want temperatures to remain below 1,5° and European countries want temperatures to remain below 2°C.

The 2015 Paris Agreement provides for the rich countries to cut emissions and support poor countries to cope with the changing climate.

Wetland protection initiative

Rugunda also launched the wetland protection initiative, funded by the Global Climate Fund, with an investment of \$24m (sh88b); the Government provided \$18,1m (sh66b), while UNDP \$2m (sh7b).

The project will support the protection of wetlands and their catchment areas where communities will engage in income-generating activities outside the wetlands.

The project will last for eight months and is implemented in 20 districts in the east and southwest of the country.

The eastern districts that will benefit

from the initiative are Pallisa, Kibuku, Bukedea, Ngora, Kurni, Mbale, Tororo and Butaleja.

In the southwest, the districts of Kisoro, Kabale, Rukungiri, Ntungamo and also the Greater Bushenyi, comprising Sheema, Bushenyi and Rubizi will benefit.

At the launch, Collins Oloya, the commissioner for the wetlands department, who represented the permanent secretary in the water ministry, Alfred Okot Okidi, said today's theme challenges us to take measures that protect, restore and sustainably manage wetlands.

Limoto Wetland Invasion

Thousands of encroachers from Pallisa and Kibuku, as well as other areas as far as Tororo, camped in Limoto Wetland for decades, destroying the swamp that feeds water into Lake Lemwa, the source of water for Pallisa town.

Consequently, the water in Limoto dried up and the water pump kept on clogging with silt during the dry spell. Fishing stopped as fish disappeared and wild animals, as well as birds shunned, the vast swamp that covers parts of Kibuku and Pallisa.

Wetland restoration

Paul Malabi, the national project coordinator for wetlands resource project, said the purpose of the project is to ensure that communities are guided so as not to destroy the wetlands.

In order to achieve the objective, Malango advised everyone to say no to wetlands encroachment.

"Let us start by planting a tree to celebrate childbirth and marriage, anniversaries," he said.

Airport officer arrested over security drones

By Simon Masaba

A Counter-Terrorism Police officer attached to the Aviation Police (AVIPOL) has been arrested in connection with alleged smuggling of security drones through Entebbe International Airport.

The female Police officer, who was arrested on Friday, was identified as Norah Achom, while her alleged accomplices are on the run. Security sources said Achom was arrested by a joint-security team, led by Special Forces operatives.

During the operation, two drones were intercepted and are in the custody of AVIPOL, pending investigations.

During interrogation, Achom allegedly said she did not know that they were drones. She allegedly said the items were packaged as television sets, a source said.

The drones, according to sources, can be used for military purposes.

The Police are investigating, among other things, why the drones of a security nature, were smuggled into the country.

What is a drone

An unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), commonly known as a drone, is an aircraft without a human pilot aboard. UAVs are a component of an unmanned aircraft system, which include a UAV, a ground-based controller and a system of communications between the two.

