

World Wetlands Day 2010

Theme: 'Wetlands, Biodiversity and Climate Change'

Nature Palace Foundation: Empowering Local Communities to conserve Uganda's Wetlands

Background Information

Wetlands play a vital role in maintaining biodiversity, enhancing the capacity of local communities to adapt to climate change and in checking global warming/climate change trends. Wetlands are very important stores of carbon, a major green gas contributing to global warming, but at the same time their destruction releases tones and tones of carbon into the atmosphere. It is estimated that wetlands store 300 – 700 billion tons of carbon globally, making them probably the best eco-systems on the planet to sequester carbon (William Mitsch, 2009). At the same time, peat land degradation is a major source of carbon dioxide emissions, averaging 2 – 3 billion tons a year – equivalent to roughly 10% of global carbon emissions

The Role of Wetlands in enhancing Local Community Adaptability to Climate Change

Wetlands enhance the adaptability capacity of local communities by offering alternative livelihoods in addition to the traditional roles of wetlands. This is especially so in times of climatic variations like extended dry spells. For example in many communities, wetlands are the only sources of water during the dry season for both people and their animals; wetlands and riverbanks provide pasture – some times are the only viable sources of pasture; they also provide off-season crop cultivation by supporting supplementary watering.

Nature Palace Foundation's approaches to Wetland Conservation and Wise-use

Nature Palace's approaches to wetlands conservation and wise use include Promoting Community Participation; Pro-poor Eco-tourism; Eco-system restoration; Schools Environment Education for Sustainable Development; Clean-Up Campaigns and Promoting Generation and Sharing of Information about wetlands.

Promoting Community Participation and Support in Conservation and Wise use of Mabamba Bay Wetland

This project supported by The Rufford Small Grants for Nature aims at promoting local Community members' participation and to kindle their support in conservation and wise-use of Mabamba Wetland, through community organizing; sustainable resource-based and alternative income generating activities; and, an effective information system. As a result of the project, the community was mobilised through their association (Mabamba Wetland Eco-tourism Association); An Eco-tourism Information Centre was



School boy participating in the campaign to restore River Bukoola

established and volunteers from the community trained to manage it; cases of abuse and destruction have also reduced because of the Education and Awareness programmes that were organised for community members. Community members organised under Mabamba Wetland Eco-tourism Association (MWETA), are also involved in alternative income generating projects – especially handicrafts and bee-keeping on top of hospitality services.

Promoting Pro-poor Community Eco-Tourism for sustainable Conservation, and Wise-use of Mabamba Bay Wetland

This project emphasizes that community's recognition of the importance of a protected area is key to success of conservation programmes. Participation of community members is equally important, and ensures sustainability of interventions put in place.

At Mabamba, tourism activities started at least some eight years back, and are on an increase since the designation of the Wetland as a Ramsar Site in 2006. Promoting pro-poor and pro-community eco-tourism where participation of the community is central will ensure sustainable conservation of the wetland because a broader layer of the community will change from viewing the protected area as a lost opportunity in terms open and uncontrolled access to animals, fish and agriculture etc., and view the resource as a sustainable contributor to their livelihoods. This will avoid the dangers of getting opposition towards conservation efforts if community members maintain a negative attitude towards the programmes.

Mapping other tourist attractions in the vicinity will expand the tourism base from birds only to community and agro-tourism and reduce the pressure on the wetland resource that is likely to increase with the increasing in-

flow of tourists

The approaches above combined, will ensure that the interventions put in place are sustainable – not only for this project, but even other future projects, including those of other developmental partners.

Rehabilitation of River Bukoola for Livelihood Improvement for local Communities and Sustenance of Sango-Bay Ramsar Site and Lake Victoria.

Due to its natural ecological value, River Bukoola in Rakai District has for decades served a significant role to the local people as a source of water, fish and pasture for animals. Notably, this river was and still stands as a key feature to aid the local population adapt better to effects of climate change in this semi-arid region. But in the last three years, its water levels have drastically dwindled due to indiscriminate destruction of its banks through tree cutting, uncontrolled grazing and river bank gardening. This has seen it suffer the effects of siltation causing some of its parts to dry up, thus pausing a great danger to the local population and to Sango Bay-Musambwa-Island Ramsar site and Lake Victoria in general.

River Bukoola feeds Sango Bay Wetland system which is considered an important bird sanctuary with an exceptional biodiversity, supporting among others, congregations of breeding birds. The system is known to have the largest breeding colony for the Grey-headed Gulls in Africa and 75 % of the total global population of the Blue Swallow, Egyptian Goose, Little Egret, Long tailed Cormorant and Greater Cormorant. Unique reptiles like snakes and lizards are also found in the wetland and Island system which are covered with forest mosaic containing 30 endemic floras, restricted sub-species of primates, Elephants and Sitatungas.

The over-degradation of River

Bukoola and its water catchment areas has led to a significant change in the course of the river. Today, most of the district teeters on the edge of disaster and no doubt if no serious action is taken, the ruinous wave of Climate Change could push it over the edge.

Using the support from Artists' Project Earth support, Nature Palace Foundation teamed up with other local Civil Society Organisations, Local Government and Schools to launch a massive environmental campaign to restore the river. Other participants included Rakai Friends of the Environment (RAFEO); Concerned Women Farmers' Organisation of Rakai, Masaka and Kalangala; The Wetlands Management Department; Rakai District Wetlands Office; Rakai District Forest Office, Kakuuto Sub-county local government; local schools and area member of parliament.

Clean-Up Campaigns for Well-being of Uganda's Wetlands

The Clean Up event is part of a world-wide campaign coordinated by Clean Up the World, an International Environmental Agency. The Clean Up the World weekend (19-21 September) celebrates and culminates the many important environmental actions and achievements of the year. Nature Palace Foundation has organised Clean Up Campaigns since 2008 as one-day sensitization and media campaigns involving volunteers (Community members, schools, local leaders, district officials, civil society organisations and political leaders). The 2008 Clean Up Campaign event took place at Mabamba Bay Ramsar Site on Friday 19th September 2008. About 500 people participated and it also coincided with the official opening of Mabamba Eco-tourism Information Centre with a theme: 'Start today. Save tomorrow – Clean up Our Climate'. The Guest of Honour was Hon. Miria Mutagamba, the Minister of Water, Lands and Environment.

The 2009 Clean Up event coincided with the campaign to restore River Bukoola Banks and took place at Kakuuto Sub County with tree planting activities at River Bukoola. The theme for the campaign was 'Our Climate needs Tour Attention'

Nature Palace Ecolife (<http://ecolife.naturepalace.net/>)-An Interactive source of information about Uganda's Wetlands.

In order to aid a more convenient avenue to get information about Uganda's wetlands, especially Wetlands of International Importance known as Ramsar sites, Nature Palace Foundation created an interactive sub-domain. This facility will enable accumulation and sharing of information about Uganda's wetlands with different stakeholders who include conservationists/scientists, researchers, students, policy makers, tourists etc. The facility is still under construction.



Nature Palace Foundation(NPF)

About Nature Palace Foundation

We are a not-for-profit Community Development and Human wellbeing focused organization that operates on the principle of blending conservation with development.

We respond to universal concerns of biodiversity loss, climate change, poverty and disease through innovative community-based approaches that include a Community Botanic Garden, Home Herbal Gardens, Pro-poor Eco-tourism etc.

Our Vision: A world where all people are leading sustainable livelihoods

Our mission: To transform traditional survivalist tendencies into those which make optimal and sustainable use of natural Resources

Our Strategic Approaches

- Community Botanic Garden
- Home Herbal Gardens
- Nature school approach
- Pro-poor Sustainable Eco-tourism
- Indigenous knowledge documentation and sharing
- Popular participation
- Frequent and on-going Data collection to monitor change and facilitate self assessment

- Value addition to improve Income and fight poverty
- Alternative environmentally friendly income generating projects

Our supporters

- Botanic Gardens Conservation International
- Rufford Small Grants for Nature Conservation
- Artists' Project Earth
- NFP Facility

Partnership

Nature Palace Foundation works with kindred civil society organizations at national, regional and international levels, works in collaboration with The Wetlands Management Department, National Environment Management Authority and various departments of Local governments. We also welcome more partnerships. If you wish to collaborate with us please contact us on the address provided.

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