National Wetland Policy Case Study: Uganda

Tim Dodman, Associate Expert, Wetlands International, Orkney, United Kingdom.

Esther Koopmanschap, River Basin Management specialist, International Agricultural Centre (IAC), Wageningen, the Netherlands.
Objective

The aim of this session is to illustrate the concepts and implementation of wetland policy with an example from Uganda, a country that has already developed a National Wetland Policies.
Uganda National Wetland Policy

Wetlands cover about 10% of Uganda's total land surface area and provide a wide variety of biophysical and socio-economic functions. However, these benefits are in jeopardy due to poor management practices.
The importance of wetlands to national development and the threats to their continued existence were recognised in 1986, when the government banned further large scale drainage and instituted the National Conservation and Management Programme within the Department of Environment Protection to analyse existing activities and assess the full range of functions and values provided by wetlands.

In addition, the programme concurrently carried out a sensitisation and awareness campaign and consultations to enlighten the public on the values and functions of wetlands and the need for their conservation and sustainable use.
Introduction to Wetlands in Uganda

Wetlands cover 10-13% of the total area. They are very productive and widely used. However, they are subject to many threats.

- Some threats include:
  - Conversion to other uses, especially through drainage, thus destroying flood buffers and resulting in siltation, pollution, biodiversity loss, floods etc
  - lack of protection status
  - unsustainable resource harvesting
  - Inadequate biodiversity impact assessments for development programmes
  - limited knowledge base
  - lack of clear ownership regimes
  - low awareness of wetland values and functions
  - Inadequate legislation enforcement and compliance
  - insufficient information on or recognition of, economic value of wetlands.
Aim of Uganda’s National Wetland Policy

- The Ugandan Government has adopted a *National Policy for the Conservation and Management of Wetland Resources* to promote the conservation of wetlands in order to sustain their values for the present and future well-being of the people.
Goals of Uganda’s National Wetland Policy

In support of this aim the Policy sets five goals:

1. to establish the principles by which wetland resources can be optimally used now and in the future;

2. to end practices which reduce wetland productivity;

3. to maintain the biological diversity of natural or semi-natural wetlands;

4. to maintain wetland functions and values; and

5. to integrate wetland concerns into the planning and decision making of other sectors.
Principles of Uganda’s National Policy

- Three principles apply in pursuit of these goals:

1. Wetland resources form an integral part of the environment and their management must be pursued in the context of an interaction between conservation and national development strategies and activities.

2. Wetland conservation can only be achieved through a coordinated and cooperative approach involving all the concerned people and organizations in the country including the local communities.

3. It is of vital importance for wetland conservation and management that the present attitudes and perceptions of Ugandans regarding wetlands be changed.
Thirty-six specific policy statements are made on how the goals will be achieved, and a preliminary set of guidelines for wetland resource users is annexed to the policy.

In particular, the policy aims at:

a. ensuring no drainage occurs unless more important environment management requirements supersede;

b. ensuring that only non-destructive uses are carried out in and around wetlands;

c. ensuring that wetland developments are subject to environmental impact assessment and audit;

d. maintaining an optimum diversity of uses and users and consideration for other stakeholders when using a wetland.
Implementation Strategies in Uganda’s Policy

1. no wetland drainage
2. sound environmental management
3. sustainable use
4. Conservation
5. water supply and treatment
6. land use, ownership
7. restoration of sites
8. environmental impact assessment, monitoring
9. public awareness
10. research and inventory
11. capacity building
12. international actions
13. legislation, institutional arrangements
A series of studies were commissioned to specifically review existing legislation in Uganda.

Result: There was almost no legislation in Uganda directly related to wetlands as an entity. There was reference to swamps in the Public Lands Act and Public Health Act. Enforcement of these laws was not sufficient to guarantee wetland conservation.

Legislative review helps to identify the negative aspects of policies affecting wetlands and those actions that need to be taken to modify such legislation. This can ensure that new laws do not conflict with laws in place or make them unworkable. The review further helps to identify the mandate of institutions with responsibilities for wetland management.

Provisions for wetland protection were incorporated into the National Environment Statute.
Conserving wetlands to sustain value is the principal aim of the policy.