

SUSTAINABLE WETLAND MANAGEMENT STRENGTHENS RESILIENCE AND LAND TENURE SECURITY

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Country: Uganda

Principal Organisation: **UCOBAC**

ABSTRACT

Local communities are experts in building climate change resilience and are proficient in adapting to changing social and natural environments, organising to address problems collectively, drawing on traditional knowledge and improvising to face difficulties. Therefore, the role played by local communities in, climate change mitigation and adaptation and protecting the environment is critical.

Rural small-scale farmers have employed strategies to strengthen their land tenure, use wetlands sustainably and conserve the environment by adopting sustainable land-use practices. This case underscores the importance of community-driven and participatory planning processes in promoting the sustainable management of natural resources for enhanced food security and livelihoods.

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STRONG SMALL-SCALE FARMING SYSTEMS



EQUAL LAND RIGHTS FOR WOMEN



LOCALLY-MANAGED ECOSYSTEMS

INTERNATIONAL
**LAND
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COMPETENCIES

AREAS

RURAL LAND GOVERNANCE

**WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS
AND GENDER JUSTICE**

**CLIMATE CHANGE
AND NATURAL DISASTERS**

SKILLS

LAND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

MAPPING AND LAND REGISTRATION

**APPLICATION OF LAWS, GUIDELINES
AND STANDARDS**

BACKGROUND

Wetlands are an essential resource in sub-Saharan Africa, sustaining rural livelihoods, particularly in areas with low or unpredictable rainfall, land scarcity or where uplands have poor soil characteristics and a low potential for agriculture. Wetlands cover eleven per cent of Uganda's total land area, (UNEP, 2016) sustaining agricultural production and the livelihoods of 80% of the people living adjacent to wetlands. The increasing population and shortage of arable lands lead to encroachment

and degradation of protected natural land resources like wetlands. The encroachment on protected lands poses a threat to wetland ecosystems as small-scale farmers contravene environmental laws and regulations and degrade wetlands. The objectives of Uganda's legal framework for wetland conservation and management include sustainability, improved wetlands productivity, biodiversity conservation and good governance.

THE CHALLENGE

Smallholder farmers, a majority of whom are women in Uganda, depend on wetlands for their food security needs and livelihoods. The legal framework for wetland conservation and management provides guidelines for the wise use of wetlands, explaining the process used by the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) in granting permits of use of wetlands to individuals or groups of farmers. However, many small-scale farmers do not have permits to use the wetlands and are regarded as wetland encroachers. Consequently, they risk eviction by the government, threatening their food security and livelihoods.

Without permits to use the wetlands, the communities have no incentive or willingness to invest their resources into good management practices that reduce the risk of degradation of wetlands and the impacts of climate change. Without secure tenure, small-scale farmers exploit the wetlands without following the guidelines for the wise use of wetlands. Additionally, most small-scale farmers do not know about the existing regulatory framework and procedures to obtain permits as the processes are complicated and expensive for many individual small-scale farmers.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

The Uganda Community Based Association for Women and Children Welfare (UCOBAC), in partnership with UN-Habitat – Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) has supported smallholder farmers to promote food security and livelihoods through the adoption of sustainable land-use practices. A community-led project using low-cost geospatial technology has enabled smallholder farmers to map existing wetland resources, wetland use rights and compile a comprehensive inventory of present wetland users.

The smallholder farmers have used this information to develop a shared vision of their wetlands and a wetland use plan. They have also established Community Wetland Management Committees (CWMC) and Wetland User Associations (WUA) with legal rights to use the wetlands. The permits formalise the WUA and CWMC's land-use rights, securing their tenure and protecting their food security and livelihoods while ensuring the conservation and wise use of wetlands for environmental protection.

MOVING TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE

The permits enable the smallholder farmers to use the wetland legally. The district natural resources office supports the WUAs by capacitating them on responsible and sustainable wetland use practices in their agricultural activities. It is anticipated that secure land tenure and sustainable use of wetlands will protect and restore wetlands, resolve boundary disputes, and strengthen food production and food security among wetland-dependent smallholder farmers.



THE GOOD PRACTICE IN FIVE SIMPLE STEPS



1

FORMING COMMUNITY WETLAND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES (CWMC) AND WETLAND USERS ASSOCIATIONS (WUA)

WUAs and CWMCs constitute of wetland users and local leadership: youth and women are encouraged to participate. The CWMC manages and oversees specific wetlands and sets guidelines and procedures to use the wetlands. The WUAs are governed by a constitution that lays out their vision, strategic objectives, management actions, work plans and leadership structures. Six CWMCs and WUAs were formed through the project, ensuring that the wetland users adopt guidelines for the wise use of wetlands and follow the management plans applicable to their association. They also play a critical role in resolving emerging wetland use conflicts at the community level.

2

RECONNAISSANCE AND STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

The WUAs express interest to the local government's natural resource department to acquire wetland use permits from the National Environment Management Authority. Technical officers from the local government's natural resource department make reconnaissance visits to the respective wetlands to assess the status of the wetlands and map the various activities undertaken in the area. The technical officers document and collect baseline information on the quality of the wetlands. An analysis is then carried out in the respective areas, bringing together all community stakeholders to discuss communal management issues and document all issues and concerns regarding access and use of the wetlands.

3

ZONING, MAPPING AND TRANSECT WALK

The committee members, technical officers, community members, and wetland users, including, tenants, owners and landlords, take transect walks through each wetland to identify the different wetland activities and map conservation zones as agreed. The group also use low-cost geospatial technologies and participatory approaches to map and demarcate individual plots. The geospatial technologies assist wetland users in assessing and presenting people-land relations. Further, the tools used to collect and manage spatial data record diverse land tenure systems, the rights holders, and all types of property objects and spatial units, regardless of formality.

4

DEVELOPMENT, VALIDATION AND DISSEMINATION OF WETLAND MANAGEMENT PLANS

Using all the information collected from the processes above, the technical team from the Ministry of Water and Environment compiles and drafts wetland management plans (WMP). These are principles to guide the sustainable use of natural resources. Through the project, the community developed six Community Wetland Management Plans, which will regulate and guide the farmers to use the wetlands sustainably. Over 3,000 small-scale wetland users have benefitted from the participatory and inclusive process of securing land tenure. The broader community of wetland users and local government leadership review and validate the draft Community Wetland Management Plans (CWMP).

5

DRAFTING A PROJECT BRIEF AND ISSUANCE OF A WETLAND USER PERMIT

The WUAs apply for community wetland use permits from the National Environment Management Authority. They complete the application forms for a permit to use the wetlands. The district environment officer, local council leadership and the leadership committee sign the application form. A consultant undertakes a field exercise to verify the information provided by the applicant in the CWMP. The consultant then writes a brief based on their findings and submits all this information to the National Environment Management Authority for processing a permit for the community to use the wetlands.



KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS FOR REPLICABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY PURPOSES

6

- 1 It is essential to support the formal registration of wetlands to encourage wetland users to invest in the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices to protect the environment while securing livelihoods.
- 2 The community-led process should emphasise grassroots women's leadership and participation in the processes.
- 3 Collaboration between the government and local communities is essential in building knowledge and capacity of smallholder farmers. It also assists the government to design people-centred environmental management laws, policies, frameworks and processes.

7

LESSONS LEARNED

Local communities are experts in building resilience by addressing problems collectively. Natural resources should sustain the communities' food and livelihood needs while being protected from depletion. It is critical, therefore, to have sustainable and effective community-driven and collaborative land management processes. Also, simple-to-use and low-cost technologies have significant benefit for smallholder farmers, including women.

Local communities need support in devising strategies for disseminating information and strengthening their capacities to manage their lands in a climate-smart manner. Further, women at the grassroots level are encouraged to participate in leadership and community-level decision-making processes.

FIND OUT MORE

The Global Land Tool Network (GLTN)

<https://gltm.net/tag/uganda/>

The Uganda Community Based Association for Women and Children Welfare (UCOBAC)

<http://ucobac.org/ucobac/default.aspx>



UNITED FOR LAND RIGHTS

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