

We should jealously protect the wetlands in our counties

Wetlands are areas permanently or seasonally flooded by water where plants and animals have become adapted to and include swamps, marshes, bogs, shallow lakes, ox-bow lakes, dams, river meanders and floodplains, as well as riverbanks, lakeshores and seashore where wetland plants grow.

Globally, wetlands occupy about 6% of the earth's surface. Kenya's wetlands occupy about 3% to 4%, which is approximately 14,000 km² of the land surface and fluctuates up to 6% in the rainy seasons. They provide many ecological and socio-economic benefits. These include water supply, food production, construction materials, and products for the cottage industry, tourism and recreation. The ecological benefits include flood control (like sponges, wetlands soak up and slowly release floodwaters), water recharge and discharge, water filtration, nutrient storage and re-cycling, wildlife habitats and sinks for carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

While wetlands have the potential of contributing significantly to the socio-economic development of Kenya, they face diverse and severe threats. These threats include among others inappropriate human activities within the catchment and in the wetland areas, lack of coordinated and holistic policy guidelines, and climate change. The threats have induced changes that have eroded the ecological and socio-economic values and services derived from wetlands. The underlying threat remains lack of recognition of the importance of these wetlands.

What does the future hold for your local wetland? This will really depend on how humans choose to use their wetlands and the impacts that their activities will have on these special environments. We are all perplexed with what is happening to our wetlands (Mbututia, Nkuunga, Rurie, Matiru, Mporoko). Let's rehabilitate and restore wetlands!

For more information, contact the centre for environmental stewardship (CES) on telephone; +254 787 573 275 or 714 753 142. Email; info@ces-stewardship.org