



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

Focus: Wetlands

The second of February was commemorated as World Wetlands Day.

In Zambia, the Department of Environment under the Ministry of Lands, Natural Resources and Environmental protection led the events. Usually a parade or march is arranged by the government along the main roads to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands in Zambia. Wetlands are areas that are either periodically wet and periodically dry or permanently flooded with a water layer of not more than a few metres.

This definition of wetland clearly excludes open waters that are several metres deep, but includes permanent swamps, floodplains, and dambos or shallow wetlands.

Wetlands in Zambia, occupy slightly more than 20% of the total area (FAO).

The Weekly for Zambia Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

The Problem: Depletion of Wetlands in Zambia

Zambia wetlands are at risk. The major factors causing wetlands loss are -- agriculture expansion, construction works and also climate change impacts.

The World Wildlife Federation estimates that Zambia is losing between five to ten percent of its wetlands annually. Wetlands are important sites for wildlife -- including birds and other animals. Wetlands also play a big role in providing recharge areas for underground clean water.

The major wetlands in Zambia include the Baroste Flood Plains, Bangweulu Flats and Kafue Flats. The Baroste Plains provide the main water supply for the Zambezi River which feeds the Kariba and Victoria Falls. The Kafue Flats

is the main water source for the Itzhezhi Dam and the Kafue National Park water points. The Kafue Flats provide water to the Nakambala sugar estate in Mazabuka -- the home of Zambia sugar.

The loss of these wetlands is a threat to the economic benefits around all of these areas.

Climate change impacts on wetlands are also attributed to poor management of the wetlands. If well managed, the impact of climate change, can be reduced. The commemoration of Wetlands Day signifies the importance and necessity of these water bodies to various forms life -- including humans and other animals.

Solutions: Activities for Journalists

Ask listeners how much they know about wetlands in their areas? Have a live discussion on how large an area the wetlands made up 20 years ago. Have the wetlands in your community shrunk? If so, have a discussion about how it happened.

Ask listeners to describe how important wetlands are to their everyday life activities. Did anyone in your community mark World Wetlands Day? If so, what did you do?

Wetlands in Zambia support a wide range of livelihood activities. These include crop production, livestock rearing, and fishing, gathering of wild products, brick-making, craft and building materials and above all water for domestic use, especially in the dry season when wells in the upland become dry.

The use of wetlands during both the dry and rainy seasons adds diversity and increases adaptation to changing climate impacts. If well-managed, wetlands provide a very good opportunity for food security and they provide clean water during dry.

Wetlands are also very important for climate change mitigation as they hold about six percent of the global carbon pool. Therefore, managing wetlands contribute to mitigating climate change as they hold carbon in the ground.

The Zambia Government has developed a draft wetlands strategy and policy that can be used as reference material for sustainable utilisation of these areas.

During drought periods crops are damaged and most small-scale farmers resort to intensive gardening using wetlands for cash crops. Sustainable use of these wetlands becomes very important for conservation of these areas. For instance, some farmers cut trees to increase areas for crop production and

this can lead to permanent drying up of these wetland areas.

Consult your local agriculture extension officers on sustainable use of wetlands – and ask them to talk about the importance of wetlands.

Areas that were once wetlands, but have dried up can be restored if the community can work together with experts from the Ministry of Lands, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection.

Ask listeners about any dried up wetlands in their community. Are there plans to restore them? Perhaps your station could take the lead in helping restore your local wetlands areas.

Ask listeners to recall areas that used to be dambos or swamps and the type of wildlife that was common, but have disappeared.

It is the duty of every citizen to get involved in the sustainable use and management of wetlands areas.

Useful Links

Information about farming and the environment: Chief Environment officer, Emphrain Shitima, email emshitima40@gmail.com

Good source of information: Vincent Ziba, FAO Zambia, Zambia; Email: vinceziba@yahoo.com. Phone: 0966-246-924

Mwape Sichilongo, WWF Conservation Manager. Email: mwapesichilongo@wwfzam.org. Phone: +260 966442540

Information environmental degradation write to Irene Lungu of ZEMA on iglungu@zema.org.zm

Call Senior Forest officer Davies Kadhole on 0976059152