



## Press Release: May 22, the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB)

### Uganda's Solutions are in Nature, But ONLY Upon Respecting Mother Earth

The United Nations has proclaimed May 22 the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues. In light of the challenges the world is facing from the current COVID-19 pandemic, the IDB will be commemorated through its first ever online-only campaign. This welcomes citizens across the globe based on their knowledge, to come up with awareness-raising campaigns and calls to actions that are feasible at the respective national levels. According to the [Convention on Biodiversity \(CBD\) secretariat](#), as the global community is called to re-examine its relationship to the natural world, one thing is certain: despite all our technological advances we are completely dependent on healthy and vibrant ecosystems for our health, water, food, medicines, clothes, fuel, shelter and energy, just to name a few.

Hence, the 2020 IDB slogan “Our solutions are in nature” emphasises hope, solidarity and the importance of working together at all levels to build a future of life in harmony with nature. As remarked by [Martha Rojas Urrego, Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands](#) on International Day for Biological Diversity the Ramsar Secretary General, ‘Year 2020 marks a watershed for action on biodiversity. Our past efforts have not been enough. The global post-2020 road map for biodiversity currently being negotiated must be the impetus for new thinking and unprecedented action. The Post-2020 framework represents a unique opportunity to approach biodiversity in a cooperative manner and mobilize the needed actions across all sectors to achieve the level of ambition needed to reverse the unprecedented loss of nature. The biodiversity-related conventions have a critical role to play, by contributing to the achievement of specific goals and targets within their mandates.’

In Uganda there are **several issues impacting on biodiversity even before COVID-19 pandemic comes in picture**. These include human-induced impacts on wetlands, forests, water – that is home to countless species of plants and animals. **These include the ‘cross cutting’ issue of high population growth rate that buttresses poverty levels, the heavy reliance on fuelwood as a primary source of energy for majority population, the huge waste disposal problem and financing national level biodiversity conservation.**

First, Uganda’s [population remains relatively higher](#), with rate of population growth at 3.2 %, well above the sub-Saharan Africa’s average rate of 2.6 %. The population increased from 5 million people in 1948 to 24.2 million people in 2002, 38.8 million people in 2014 and currently estimated at 42.9 million people in 2017 (Ministry of Water & Environment, 2019). If unchecked Uganda’s population is expected to grow to about 93.4 million people in the 2040s. The high population growth combined with the lack of knowledge and information, is wielding pressure on natural resources, resulting in unrelenting degradation that is worsened by climate change.

Secondly, wood fuels are heavily used for cooking in rural areas while charcoal mostly provides for the cooking needs of the urban population. The high demand for wood fuels used inefficiently results in overuse and depletion of forests. With time, the land available is becoming scarce and households prefer to use the land for food crops rather than planting trees, thus postponing the energy challenge.

Production of charcoal is carried out under primitive conditions with an extremely low efficiency at 10 to 12% on weight-out to weigh-in basis. To produce 1 kilogramme of charcoal, 9 kilogrammes of wood are needed, which translates into 22% efficiency on an energy output to energy input basis (EnergyPedia, 2019). At the same time, [biomass use by households is very inefficient as the three-stone fire is still widely spread](#). Continued unsustainable harvesting may have negative impacts on Uganda's forest habitats in the foreseeable future.

Thirdly, waste disposal is mainly a growing problem in the fast growing urban settings in Uganda. For example, there are three types of wastes generated in Kampala, namely domestic waste water, industrial waste water and solid waste. The composition solid waste in Kampala capital city is changing rapidly. Biodegradable materials accounted for 88.5% of the urban waste composition in 1990, but the share decreased to 77% in 2014. The decline in the organic waste is attributed to number of factors which include rapid urbanisation, increase in disposable income, industrialisation and infrastructure development.

Above all, there is increase in the composition of plastics in the waste over the last decades from 1.6% in 1990 to 12.4% in 2014. Furthermore, the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) serves approximately only 6% of the households in Kampala, translated into approximately 10,000 m<sup>3</sup> per day. Projections indicate that by 2030, the NWSC will manage to provide services to only 30% of the population. This means that about 70% of urban population will not have sanitation services (Ministry of Water & Environment, 2019). These calls for innovative solutions to deal with waste water disposal, or else this will be directly poured in wetlands and other natural habitats with consequences on attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Lastly, in Uganda, there is an array of financing mechanisms and instruments (for example the environmental levy and tax, central government transfers and private sector contributions) currently employed for implementing the green economy (UNDP and NEMA 2017). While these have potential to bring benefits particularly poor communities and smallholders, the contribution of these instruments to sustainable development is unclear (the Uganda Green Growth Development Strategy 2017/18 – 2030/31). In addition, limitation of resources to conserve biodiversity and for general environmental management at the subnational level (district and lower local governments and administrative units) is a distressing trend.

**Therefore, in line with the need to work together at all levels to build a future of life in harmony with nature, the following actions are deemed feasible at national level in Uganda led by Government and supported by Non State Actors and Development Partners:**

1. **Promote sustainable lifestyles and education for both rural and urban communities** to sustainably manage natural resources and sinks. For example, [individual local sustainable energy and climate actions](#) through reduction and reuse of plastics; and adopting water and energy efficiency tips. Strategically, Uganda should no longer appear to be [cold shouldering the ban on single use plastics](#) amongst the East African Partner States.

2. **Launch targeted and time-bound actions to conserve trees outside forest reserves and national parks, small wetlands on public and private lands and rivers**, as they provide a myriad of products and services especially to rural communities. They also contribute to meet national strategic objectives and in fulfilment of international obligations like the CBD and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. For example, establishing buffer zones using bamboo and other vegetation to demarcate lake and river banks against future encroachment could help to increase acreage of wetlands as [key components in climate change mitigation and their maintenance country wide as carbon sinks](#).
3. **Invest in deliberate dissemination of all existing indigenous innovations and modern sustainable energy technologies and climate action options in ‘hotspot’ areas of Uganda**, in order to strengthen community resilience, while sustainably managing use of remaining wetlands, forests and other ecosystems.
4. **Promote buildings and infrastructure that incorporate renewable energy technologies**, leading to the creation of zero-energy buildings through decreased consumption, appliance efficiency and promotion of new building materials. For example, alternatives to wood to bake bricks and the pervasive use of clay in making bricks.
5. **Document, popularise and promote community level biodiversity conservation and livelihood enhancing initiatives** like bee-keeping, tree growing for feeds, food and income, enrichment planting and forest restoration for wood products. For example, the [Half +Half 1000 Acre Community Forest Project](#) by Kikandwa Environment Association in Kasejjere village (Mityana district), as an innovation based on small holder farmers’ initiatives to conserve and restore small forest patches ranging from ¼ an Acre to 2 Acres per household/farmer or leaving a piece of land to regenerate naturally into a forest on their small plots voluntarily, that has contributed to the building of a resilient community.
6. **Scale up customised community engagement models like collaborative natural resources management** in conservation of [Key Biodiversity Areas](#), wetland and forest ecosystems close to them but are under considerable stress due to the rising demand for water, food and fuel.
7. **Improve sector and actor coordination** in [conservation of wetlands, forests and water resources in light of climate change in Uganda](#). This calls for mass sensitization alongside the full implementation of existing sector policies and laws by the existing institutions. This should go together with addressing emerging policy and legal gaps, in order to have a more coherent governance regime for biodiversity conservation in Uganda.

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Supported as part of the *East African Civil Society for Sustainable Energy & Climate Action (EASE&CA) Project* by



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