

Paul Mafabi, Director for Environment, Affairs in Ministry of Water and Environment, Uganda and has been involved in wetlands management for the last 25 years rising to the rank of Commissioner and head of the Wetland Management Department. He shared his views on conserving the wetlands of Uganda, during the Kigali Forum for Wetlands which took place from 8 to 12 July 2013 in Kigali, Rwanda.



UNEP-TEEB: *What has been the key reason behind the success of the implementation of wetland conservation in Uganda?*

Paul Mafabi: Political will has been the key reason for the successful implementation of wetland conservation. In 1986 our government put in place a ban on the drainage of wetlands, until a policy had been developed. This set the tone coupled with the fact that our president was very positive in his remarks about wetlands. Secondly, effort has been made to create government and public awareness as well as clearly demarcate and set boundaries,. Although setting boundaries is a costly exercise, it ensures that the public is aware which areas should be preserved and which areas are free for regulated activities.

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UNEP-TEEB: *Wetlands continue to be degraded because their values are not mainstreamed into the decision-making process, how are you ensuring that these values are continuously integrated in policy-making?*

Paul Mafabi: We have done some economic valuation studies, such as for the Nakivubo wetlands, located in Kampala, a study which became very prominent. We want to build on this success and repeat this exercise for other natural resources. We recently finalized the Terms of Reference for a study to value natural resources, wetlands, water, range lands forests and general biodiversity, to assess their contribution to the GDP of the country. Most of the values as they appear in the TEEB for Water and wetlands report are intrinsic and cannot be easily measured, so when the country is doing its accounting it does not

account for the losses that arise out of natural resources degradation. For example we could say agriculture production has declined and this could be attributed to drought or lack of water, but this could also be a direct result of a wetland that has been degraded. By undertaking this valuation exercise we want to convince our decision-makers that wetlands, forests, water and other natural resources provide natural infrastructure and it is in the long run cost efficient to invest in the judicious management and conservation of natural resources.

UNEP-TEEB: *What advice would you give to a country at the beginning of the process?*

Paul Mafabi: The first step is to identify a champion for wetlands within the country to take the lead. Many countries have different institutions handling the management of wetlands and this can lead to overlaps, duplication, gaps and conflicts more than it can provide solutions. Secondly it is important that a country undertakes a wetland inventory at the early stages of the process so as to capture the values of the wetland under review. The information from the wetland inventory is essential to building awareness, sensitizing policy makers and mobilizing communities. It is also important to engage the key stakeholders such as from agriculture, fisheries early in the process and any other stakeholders concerned by wetlands.