

We can continue wetland regeneration amid climate crisis

FOR the first time in decades, Uganda has registered a turnaround of fortunes in wetland degradation amid growing climate change concerns. The water and environment ministry says wetland cover has increased from 8.9% in 2015 to 9.3% this year, halting the decline that has plagued the ecosystems. This good news comes at a time when the world is reeling from climate change impacts, including devastating floods, prolonged dry spells, erratic rainfall patterns, rising temperatures and unprecedented biodiversity loss.

Wetlands are nature's climate warriors, because they act as natural water filters, flood regulators and carbon sinks to stabilise our environment. Wetland destruction has directly contributed to our worsening climate vulnerability because when they disappear, floodwaters rage unchecked, water purification fails, habitats vanish and communities lose protection against extreme weather. Without wetlands, key sectors, such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism, the craft industry and hydropower generation would be severely impacted.

It is for this reason that we commend the Government, communities and partners for this hard-won progress



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through sustained protection efforts, official gazettement of wetlands and increased political commitment.

There has also been the integration of traditional knowledge with scientific approaches, such as honouring how clans like Buganda's Mamba, Ngonge, Njobe and Nvubu historically protected aquatic ecosystems, which represents a culturally grounded

conservation model.

However, we must counterbalance this celebration with sobriety because threats persist through agricultural encroachment, unsustainable resource extraction, pollution and climate pressures.

Of course, there are questions whether wetland restoration efforts adequately address degradation around lakes Victoria and Kyoga, where population pressures grow by the day.

This progress is confirmation that collective efforts bear fruit. Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither will our environmental resilience be, but these baby steps today, if we stay the course, will compound into generational security tomorrow.

We must, therefore, strengthen community-led wetland monitoring with real-time data, expand alternative livelihood programmes to reduce pressure on wetlands, integrate wetland conservation into urban planning, scale up restoration projects around critical water bodies and enhance enforcement against illegal encroachment.

Environmental healing is possible if we commit to it and maintain or improve all initiatives geared to it.