

The Dying National Wetland-Case Study of Yala Swamp Beyond 2020-KENYA

John Voster, International Delegate, Kenya

Yala Swamp lies within the equatorial line (zero degrees) with rich biodiversity. The Swamp covers an area of 175km². Research findings in relations to property rights management, environmental stewardship and healthy ecosystems from case studies of Yala Swamp in Kenya are discussed. Yala Swamp is home and living museum to many fish species and wildlife. This fact is supported by reality that prior to the introduction of Nile perch in Lake Victoria for export market, the lake was once dominated by over 300 fish species and currently, Lake Victoria only supports three fisheries. The endemic species that were in Lake Victoria, it is only evident that Yala Swamp has lived to its restoration of native species which cannot be found anywhere within the catchments of Lake Victoria. The Swamp was once drained by government through UNDP and later on reclaimed by UNDP-GEF programme. Currently the Swamp has been leased to an American investor for the purpose of agricultural production without considering the dire consequences. Within the project, a number of communities have been forced to sell their lands and homes for project takings to which conflict of interest has created a vacuum of land rights and ownership and the State involvement in leasing lands to foreign based developers without conducting EIA and the socio-economics of wetland reclamation. Negative impact is the involvement and leasing of National Heritage (wetland) coverage to Dominion Farm for the purpose of agricultural activities of which currently has threatened the integrity of wetland ecosystem health and the community. The bone of contention in this type of set up leasing for a period of 99 years is “should we feed the chicken before the child or the child before the chicken” This is an argument which is calling for alarm to restore the community trust in resource management and sustainable utilization. Our studies therefore conducted actual inventory and potential biological loss from areas converted into heavy agricultural use, implication of loss of soil to downstream users and the entire ecosystem, waste management treatment envisaged environmental pollution, socio-economic and cultural issues of land right and resource ownership. Why alarm? Given the fact that Lake Victoria has become a dumping site, the fisheries population is at extensive risk of loss of species diversity hence the health of dependants is at dying moments. The Swamp has great ecological importance, in acting as a cleansing filter for water entering the international waters of Lake Victoria.

It provides critical habitat for many endangered fish, bird and mammal species, and its abundant resources have provided food security and livelihood for thousands of families over many hundreds of years. The Swamp is considered the largest in Kenya part of Lake Victoria with a composition of about 90 % papyrus. The main species here are *Cyperus papyrus* and *Phragmites mauritius*. The wetland consists of three ecological satellite lakes in it's the periphery: Lake Kanyaboli with coverage of 10.5 km², Lake Namboyo (2 Km²) and Lake Sare (5Km²).

