

# NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY (NEMA)

## WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 2016 DRAWS ATTENTION TO BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION



*Rhinos at the Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary. In the 1960's there were more than 700 rhinos in the wild in Uganda, which had become extinct by 2003*

WED - the single biggest day for positive action on the environment worldwide, which takes place on June 5 each year was declared by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment Stockholm in 1972. On that day, each Member State is obligated to reflect on efforts and commitment to sustainable environment management.

WED has since become the United Nations' principal vehicle for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the environment. Over the years it has grown to be a broad, global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated by stakeholders all over the world.

### WED 2016 CELEBRATIONS

The global host for World Environment Day 2016 celebrations is Angola, under the slogan "GO WILD FOR LIFE." The slogan focuses on the fight against the illegal trade in wildlife which erodes precious biodiversity and threatens the survival of elephants, rhinos and tigers as well as many other species.

Latest figures from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, indicate that the African elephant population had dropped from 550,000 in 2006 to 470,000 in 2013, with East Africa seeing the worst decline, from 150,000 to about 100,000, triggering fears that African elephants could be extinct in the wild within a few decades.

At national level, World Environment Day (WED) will be jointly celebrated with the International Day for Biological Diversity (IBD), also known as World Biodiversity Day (WBD) that falls on every 22nd May. The International Day for Biological Diversity (IBD/WBD) 2016 theme is "Mainstreaming Biodiversity; Sustaining People and their Livelihoods". Consequently, the two themes have been merged to come up with the National theme: "Conserve Wildlife, Sustain Livelihoods".



*Elephants in Murchison Bay National Park*

### Wildlife & Biodiversity

The National Environment Act Cap 153 defines biological diversity as the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial ecosystems and aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which the, are part, this includes biodiversity within species, between species and ecosystems.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) defines biodiversity as "the variability among living things from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological



*Bags of Charcoal on display along Masaka Road. Massive deforestation has reduced the forest cover*

complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems. The definitions are broad and encompass biodiversity both in the wild and those that are domesticated. The National Environment Act defines the environment as "The physical factors of the surroundings of human-beings, including land, water, atmosphere, climate, odour, tastes, the biological factors of animals and plants and their social factor of aesthetics both the natural and built environment". This definition recognizes biodiversity as one of the elements constituting the environment.

Drawing from the above definition, it is clear that biodiversity is a common denominator and it is the reason NEMA celebrates World Environment Day (WED) and International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) on the same day. This year's theme for WED makes possible for Ugandans to clearly see the link between wildlife, biodiversity and environment conservation. The difference between wildlife and biodiversity is to the extent that the former only deals with wild animals or plants while the later deals with biodiversity in totality both wild and domesticated. The environment then is the "home" for wildlife and biodiversity. The national theme for WED 2016 "conserve

wildlife, sustain livelihoods", therefore brings out the connectivity between wildlife, biodiversity and environment and why these are linked to sustaining livelihoods and development.

### Biodiversity & Human Well-Being

The importance of biodiversity to human well-being can be seen at individual, community, national and global level. At the individual level, we depend on biodiversity for food, medicine, cloth, building materials among others. The different types of plants and animals which we have on earth makes it possible for the different parts of the world to have products and services to be derived from biodiversity like fresh water, food, medicine materials for building and cosmetics for beauty among others. Biodiversity thus makes life very enjoyable to all of us.

At national level, the grey crown crane (known locally as the crested crane) is on our national flag. The national emblem is largely comprised of biodiversity – the crested crane, the antelope (Uganda kob) and the drum – all point out to how we are connected to biodiversity as a country.

Think about cultural activities and belief of each tribe internationally and nationally. The cultural institutions in this country associate with and identify themselves with biodiversity, as demonstrated during the time of coronation of their kings. Skins of animals are worn by some of these cultural leaders during their coronation or anniversary celebrations. Most clans in Uganda are named after animals. The Bagisu wear skins of the black and white colobus monkey during their circumcision ceremonies. The bark cloth (derived from the ficus tree) is very important in Buganda. Some trees [like the sausage tree (yago) in northern Uganda] are known to cure mumps by just one dancing under them. Many organizations use names or pictures of biodiversity for their products for example lions, elephants, leopards, cheetah, crocodiles, giraffes, peacock, to mention a few.



*A typical Shea Tree. Shea Butter Trees (Vitellaria paradoxa) are under threat from charcoal burning in the North Eastern Part of Uganda.*

Tourism is among the key sectors generating revenue for this country. The gorilla tracking is perhaps the most important eco-tourism activity in Uganda. Tourism in Uganda has been growing consistently since 1986 and now accounts for 9.9% of GDP amounting to US\$2.13b in 2014 compared to US\$0.8b in 2006. Foreign visitors brought into Uganda an equivalent of US\$1.3b in foreign exchange earnings in 2014 from US\$662 in 2010.

The tourism sector is now estimated generate US\$2 billion annually to the economy. National parks have continued to be the hubs of the tourism industry, thus significantly contributing to national economic development. Globally, the tourism sector accounts for 10% of the job market. The world's fisheries resources is estimated to employ approximately 200 million people, providing about 16% of the protein consumed worldwide and have a value estimated at US\$ 82 billion.

Livestock sector is an important component of the national economy. The sector is estimated to contribute 15% to the agricultural economy, representing about 5% of the overall national GDP. For local communities, livestock is an integral part of their livelihoods for example cattle from which they can get milk, meat and other products for use at household level but can also sell them to raise income. There are cultural values associated with cattle for example the Ankole cows in western Uganda.

Perhaps for this year's WED celebration it very important to look how biodiversity both inside and outside protected areas in northern Uganda is important for sustaining livelihoods of local communities. The conservation of wildlife should therefore be everyone's responsibility. Every Action Counts.