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## World Wetlands Day 2015 celebrated

The World Wetlands Day 2015 was celebrated on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015 at Atebwo primary school, Nandi County. The event was geared towards creating awareness on wetlands conservation as well as commemorating the day the Ramsar Convention was entered.

The celebrations started earlier with a courtesy call to the Nandi County commissioner, Matilda Sakwa and H.E governor Cleophas Lagat who briefed the guests led by NEMA chair, Maluki Mwendwa, NEMA DG Prof. Geoffrey Wahungu, KWS DG Mr. William Kiprono, WRMA board Chair, Mr. Peter Kiilu, Nandi County executives, MCAs among other high profile guests who flanked their leaders.



A section of dignitaries when they paid a courtesy call to Governor H.E Dr. Cleophas Lagat in his office [PHOTO: ERIC NYAGA / NEMA]

The convoy of cars then proceeded to Atebwo primary school where the public had already gathered waiting for the dignitaries to arrive for commencement of the event. The procession to the Kibirong wetland was then flagged off by the governor.



Nandi governor, H.E Cleophas Lagat (holding the flag) flagging off the procession [PHOTO: ANTONY MWANGI / NEMA]

The much awaited celebrations had been preceded by two build up events; the Kibirong community road race marathon and a panel discussion in Siaya on Yala Swamp. There was also a tree planting session as well as exhibitions by the stakeholders such as NEMA, WRMA, KWS, and KFS among others.



NEMA DG Prof. Geoffrey Wahungu making his key note address during the celebrations [PHOTO: SAMWEL IRUNGU / NEMA]

NEMA DG Prof. Geoffrey Wahungu was quick to thank all the people who had made the event successful and those who had participated in gracing the event. "As the lead agency in matters of environment, NEMA continues to work hand in hand with all the stakeholders to ensure wetlands and the environment in general remains a priority for the Authority" the DG said.

As part of NEMA's commitment to conserve the wetlands and other resources, the Authority among many other things has: guided development of integrated management plans for various wetland ecosystems in the country; inventoried wetlands across the country to enhance monitoring and tracking of ecological changes in the wetlands; participated in the wetlands mapping exercise and developed Kenya's first wetlands and continuously undertaken monitoring of wetlands to ensure wise use and curb any practices on wetlands that may result in degradation and over exploitation of these ecosystems



Nandi governor, H.E Dr. Cleophas Lagat making his remarks during the event [PHOTO: ERIC NYAGA / NEMA]

Nandi County Governor H.E Dr. Cleophas Lagat expressed his concern over the state of wetlands in Kenya. "Management of wetlands requires a collaborative effort," he added. He stated that wetlands and forests have continually been degraded despite efforts by government agencies to safeguard them.

He was grateful that NEMA had seen it important to celebrate this year's World

Wetlands Day in his county. "My government recognizes that wetlands are the earth's kidneys through their hydrological and chemical functions and are a key resource in promoting the County socio-economic development," the governor said. He added that the commemoration of the event was a platform through which public awareness should be raised about the values and benefits of wetlands as well as sustainable development and wise use of wetlands. He urged the public to work together with the government to secure our environment and mitigate against climate change.



NEMA Board Chair, Mr. Maluki Mwendwa making his remarks during the celebrations. [PHOTO: ANTHONY NGARE / NEMA]

Speaking during the event, NEMA board chair, Mr. Maluki Mwendwa stated that the year 2015 provides a platform for the United Nations International Year of transition from the Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals.

The WWD 2015 theme highlights the need for sustainable management of wetlands for the present and future generations which is in line with our pursuit of Kenya Vision 2030. He added, "We must monitor and stop the negative implications which may result from our activities. These are issues such as overfishing, excessive hunting of birds and animals, over abstraction of water, pollution due to excessive fertilizers and reclamation or complete drainage of wetlands. All these could emerge as outcomes due to an excessive load on wetlands therefore completely destroying them".

Essentially, the conservation of wetlands is pivotal if at all we are to safeguard our future. “Nandi County is endowed with many wetlands comprising of rivers, lakes, swamps, dams and springs among others contributing immensely to the socio-economic and ecological development. Despite the myriad of functions performed by wetlands, the threats faced by these wetlands are due to inadequate information and lack of recognition of the values that wetlands play towards achieving a sustainable environment”, Maluki said.



A wide shot of Kibirong wetland, the focus of this year's celebrations. [PHOTO: ANTHONY MWANGI / NEMA]

The chair reiterated that NEMA recently developed a five year integrated management plan for Kibirong Wetland Ecosystem that seeks to reverse the degradative actions that have impeded the sustainable management and utilization of this once bountiful ecosystem. This Management Plan aims at promoting conservation and sustainable utilization of the Wetland resources within the Ramsar Convention's Wise-use Principle.



KWS DG Mr. William Kiprono speaking during the celebrations [PHOTO: ANTHONY MWANGI / NEMA]

KWS Director General Mr. William Kiprono who represented the CS, Judi Wakhungu, Environment, water and natural resources read her speech that highlighted the need to join hands in safeguarding the wetlands for future generations. There is also the need to work with Counties to restore and rehabilitate wetlands to curb threats resulting from human activities.

### World Wetlands Panel Discussion Held

The World Wetlands panel discussion was held on 27th January, 2015 at the Agriculture Training Centre (ATC) in Siaya County. This was the second build up activity for WWD 2015, dubbed Balancing Conservation and development: the case of Yala swamp. The aim was to raise awareness, and build capacity on how to strike a balance between human development and biodiversity conservation.



NEMA DG Prof. Geoffrey Wahungu (standing) responding to issues raised during the panel discussion at ATC in Siaya. [PHOTO: AGNES KAMIRI / NEMA]

The Yala Swamp wetland was recently accorded reserve status and is one of the few remaining extensive freshwater wetlands in Kenya. The challenges and threats facing the swamp includes; over-exploitation of wetland (natural) resources, yala swamp drainage, reclamation and conversion, Environmental Degradation and public health issues, among others.

The Panelists were: Prof. Geoffrey Wahungu, Director General, NEMA; Mrs. Sarah Ondego, CEC, Environment, Water and Natural, Resources Siaya County; Dr. Romulus Abila, Southern Eastern Kenya University (SEKU); Dr. Paul Mworia, Nature Kenya; Mr. Elijah Obadha, Yala Wetland Environmental volunteer; Mr. Alfred Otieno, Seje Safe Water, Siaya County; Ms. Faith Lelei, Dominion Farms Ltd. Yala Swamp; Mr. Sabuni Wanyonyi, Regional Manager, LVSWCA and Mr. Maurice Ogoma, Ecofinder Kenya.

Also in attendance were the Chief Officers from the County, in charge of Environment and Tourism among other stakeholders. At the end of the discussion participants were able to put into context and dissect economics of yala swamp, how they can manage and sustain a green and climate-smart investment, as well as financial mechanisms or incentives for Biodiversity conservation for the important and highly vulnerable and threatened Yala swamp.

In his closing remarks, the Director General Prof. Wahungu, thanked Mr. Ramburu who was the panel discussion moderator, for guiding the participants all through the session, the Siaya County Government for their genuine interest and support, the panelists for their contribution, and the participants. He said that NEMA will work with the County Government to save Yala.

### More Photos on WWD 2015



A procession marching towards Kibirong wetland [PHOTO: ANTONY MWANGI / NEMA]



(From left) NEMA chair, Mr. Maluki Mwendwa, Dr. Ayub Macharia, DG Prof. Geoffrey Wahungu consult at the celebrations. [PHOTO: ERIC NYAGA / NEMA]



NEMA chair, Mr. Maluki Mwendwa planting a tree at Atebwu Pry School. [PHOTO: SAMWEL IRUNGU / NEMA]

### WWD2015 coverage on Twitter

[@NemaKenya]

NEMA Kenya @NemaKenya · Feb 2

The conservation of wetlands is pivotal if at all we are to safeguard our future.- NEMA board chair during WWD 2015 marked in Nandi county.

NEMA Kenya @NemaKenya · Feb 2

Wetlands are critical as they hold a high number of plant and animal species compared to other ecosystems.- NEMA DG Prof G. Wahungu

NEMA Kenya @NemaKenya · Feb 2

Let's work together to secure our environment and to mitigate against climate change.- Nandi Gov. Dr Cleophas Langat.

**Words by: Samwel Irungu, Agnes Kamiri & Anthony Ngare**

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