

Wetlands on the international agenda

Previous international forums – such as the 13th session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development – have noted the interdependent relationship between ecosystem, health, human well-being and economic growth. But this repeated acknowledgement has had little or no impact on actual decision-making in the development and water sector. Many donors, policy makers, development and conservation NGOs continue to view providing water for people and conserving wetlands as two separate and often conflicting aims. This view has led to missed opportunities.

If we are to meet the Millennium Development Goals and targets, specifically the ones on combating hunger and providing access to drinking water and sanitation, we must start working on better management of wetlands. Wetland conservation and management is a necessary component of progress rather than a luxury that only wealthy nations can afford.

Restoring the waterbalance in destroyed peat forests in Indonesië



Why are wetlands so important

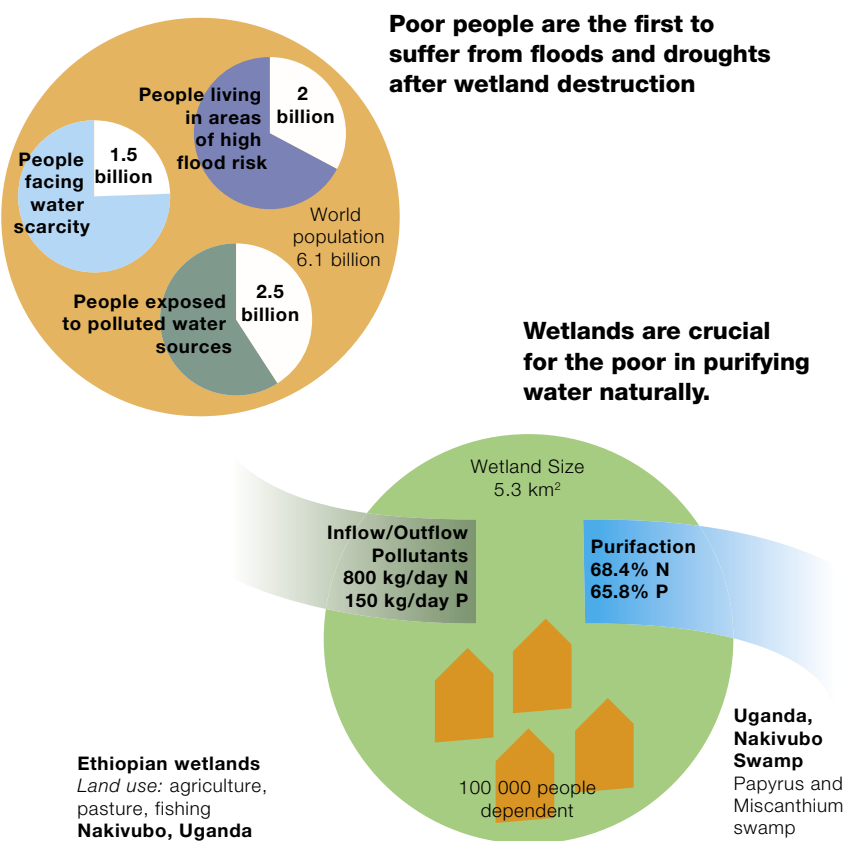
Wetlands are a vital link in the water cycle. They hold the key to water supply and sanitation and provide the basis for livelihoods, such as those based on fisheries, forms of agriculture, transport and construction materials. They are not a luxury for the sake of nature; nor are they just one of the many important ecosystems. Wetlands are a source of life for many socially and economically excluded people, who are at a higher risk of experiencing poverty shocks resulting from natural and man-made disasters, and may be adversely affected by bad water and land use policies. Between 1.5 and 3 billion people worldwide depend on groundwater for their water supply, much of which is generated through wetlands.

The UN - Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) recently reported an estimated global value of wetland ecosystem 'services' for people. The MA

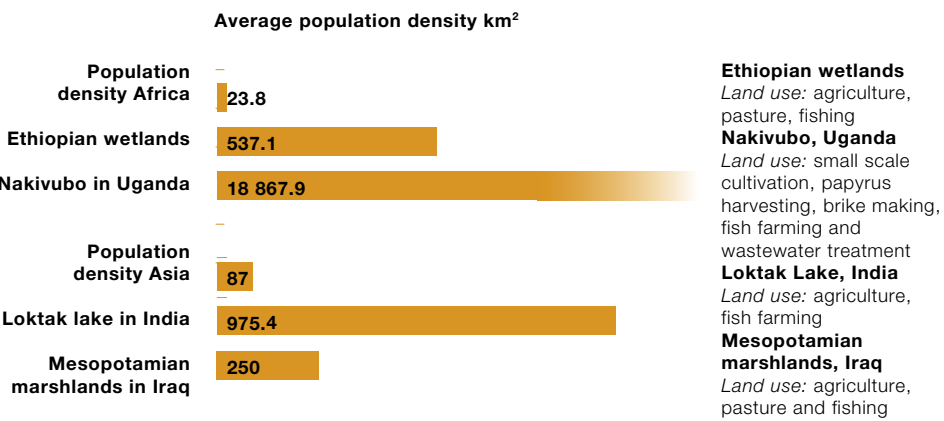
suggested an amount of US \$15 trillion per year, some 45% of the total value of all of the planet's natural ecosystems. However, inland and coastal wetlands are being lost faster than any other ecosystem and the demand on these services is intensifying worldwide. Aid and development measures designed to reduce poverty or to provide water and sanitation are not safeguarding the ecosystem services that wetlands provide; often these are making degradation even worse. Wetlands International predicts increasing poverty due to decreasing availability and access to wetland resources unless development policies drastically change.

Wetlands are rapidly destroyed; the poor suffer first

Destruction of wetland ecosystems is taking place at an alarming rate. We face large scale diversion of water for irrigation, burning and exploitation of peatland, extensive drainage of marshes and pollution of lakes and rivers. This causes increasing problems for poor people in developing countries. These people depend on productive wetland areas to catch fish, harvest reed, feed their livestock and practice small-scale farming. They depend on naturally purified water supplies.



Wetlands can provide livelihoods for large numbers on small areas



Some examples of our current work

All over the world, we are working with local communities, development organisations, governments and others to manage and restore wetlands and all their values. We do this not only to support the people and nature of these areas, but also to demonstrate that wetlands are vital to reach commonly shared goals in nature conservation, economic development and poverty reduction.

Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Project

Putting the importance of wetlands for poverty reduction on the political agenda. By working on inter-sectoral outreach, policy development, partnership development and demonstration projects, we will influence development and conservation policies; focus on Africa, South East Asia and South America. (funded by DGIS, Netherlands)

Green Coast Project

Restoring the natural coastal ecosystems and livelihoods in the tsunami-affected countries. Together with WWF, IUCN and Both Ends, we support ecosystem and livelihood restoration in five tsunami affected countries in South and South-East Asia through technical assessment, influencing restoration policies and providing small grants for community-based projects. (funded by Oxfam-Novib, Netherlands).



The Himalayan Initiative

Degradation of Himalayan wetlands can have devastating effects on nature and people's livelihoods downstream, including water provision in Bangladesh, China, Pakistan and India. We are mapping and determining priorities for wetlands and water management in the upper catchments of the Himalayas. (Funded by the EU).

Two major lake systems - Chilika Lagoon and Loktak Lake, India

Here we worked with local communities and development authorities to investigate the social, cultural, environmental and economic impacts of alternative water management scenarios, resulting in altered development plans that will benefit nature and (extremely poor) people in North East India.(Funded by India-Canada Environment Facility)

Management and restoration of Peatland forest in Indonesia

Together with several partners, we will restore and manage peatswamp forests in connection with biodiversity, climate change and local livelihood priorities. Building on decades of working with communities and government on peatswamp restoration (funded by DGIS, Netherlands).

Inner Niger Delta, Mali

Water infrastructure Development can benefit some groups in society whilst pushing others in wetland areas into poverty. We have looked at different dam management scenarios. The current and proposed dams in the upper Niger can now be seen in the light of the balance of benefits and negative effects on nature and people in the Inner Niger Delta.(funded by Partners for Water, Netherlands)





Mission:

To sustain and restore wetlands, their resources and biodiversity for future generations.



How you can join us in our mission

Wetlands International is an independent, global non-governmental organisation, active in all regions of the world. Many partners are already working with us to achieve our mission:

- We work with a staff of over 200 people with 16 offices worldwide
- 60 governments and many NGOs are members of Wetlands International. They support our work and guide our organisation.
- Over 2000 specialists support our work scientifically.
- We have formal partnership agreements with the Convention on Biological Diversity, The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention on Migratory species.
- Many private companies, governmental and non-governmental organisations are close partners in our projects.
- We consult and work with development and aid agencies.

We are always on the lookout for new partners to work with us on our mission, in our projects all over the world. Governments and NGOs can become guiding members or partners in projects; companies are invited to work together on wetland protection or to support specific projects; NGOs both in the conservation and development sector are vital partners for joint projects.

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Poverty reduction depends on wetlands

Wetlands are a source of water, food and income for the majority of the worlds' indigenous people. However, most development plans and water schemes do not include wetlands, resulting in their degradation, further contributing to poverty. Wetlands International works globally with communities, governments and the private sector to manage and restore wetlands for water and livelihoods.

We cordially invite you to contribute and collaborate.



Fotocredits: Leo Swarts, Marcel Silvius and Alue Dohong