

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS FOR WETLAND MANAGEMENT: LESSONS FROM UGANDA

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Abstract

Approximately 11,268 km² of Uganda's wetlands were lost between 1994 and 2008, representing a 4.7% decline in only 14 years. In response, the government working with civil society actors put in place and tested a unique governance arrangement for wetland management that included a strategic partnership with civil society, local governments and communities. The uniqueness sought to address capacity gaps, representation, accountability and sustainability which were lacking in previous wetland conservation initiatives in the country. The aim of this study was to identify the emerging institutional arrangements and assess their effect on management of wetlands. The study used a qualitative approach including analysis of documents, 36 key informant interviews and two focus group discussions in Isingiro district between October 2013 and June 2014. Three Community Conservation Areas (CCAs) were established protecting 13,184ha of highly bio-diverse wetlands. Three community based organisations have been established, officially registered and recognised by local governments to manage the sites. Their management roles and responsibilities are clear, including management of revenue from eco-tourism and fishing. Community Environment Conservation Fund (CECF) has been established to sustainably catalyse functionality of the local governance arrangements and adoption and replication of wise use activities. Killing of birds has been reduced and catching immature fish has drastically reduced at these Ramsar sites and important bird areas (IBAs). The implication is that strategic partnerships between state, non-state actors and communities with clear roles, responsibilities and benefits enhances conservation and access to these resources.

Key words: Governance arrangements, strategic partnerships, communities, important bird areas