

Wetlands degradation threatening environment

SEBASTIAN MRINDOKO

Rufiji

TANZANIA'S development planners are not giving adequate attention to wetlands conservation, resulting into their loss,

the Country Director for the World Conservation Union (IUCN), Mr. Abdulrahman Issa, has cautioned.

He said wetlands degradation and loss pose a severe threat to both development and conservation goals, and impact negatively on some of the world's poorest communities.

Speaking at a workshop held over the weekend at Mtanza-Msona Village in Rufiji District, Coast Region, to raise local awareness on the importance of wetlands conservation, the IUCN representative deplored poor consideration of wetlands in decision-making.

He said that when decisions are made to invest funds, or to manage land and resources, they rarely take note of the biological, ecological, development or economic value of wetlands.

The development planners remained largely unaware of the potential impact of the

wetlands degradation on economic livelihood and poverty indicators, he argued.

He said that according to research findings, the wetlands managing authorities have traditionally made little efforts to demonstrate or act on those links or to feature poverty and livelihood concerns into the ground conservation activities.

"As it has been learned in Mtanza-Msona, wetland goods and services are often particularly important for poorer and more vulnerable groups, who lack alternative sources of income and subsistence and have weak access to basic services," he said.

"According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), the biodiversity of inland waters appear to be in a worse condition than that of any other system where it is speculated that 50 per cent of inland water, excluding large lakes, has been lost globally," he added. He further said that apart from the long use of different techniques in assessing the wetlands biologically, economically and livelihood values and trends separately, there is a lack of available methods to assess the inter-linkages and connectivity

between health and economic status.

The IUCN Director congratulated the people of Mtanza-Msona Villages for their cooperation in the project of 'strengthening pro-poor wetland conservation using integrated biodiversity and livelihood assessment'.

The assessment focuses on poverty-environment relationships and investigates the dependence and use of wetlands resources.

It also aims at mapping the general socio-economic conditions and wetland species and habitats that exist within the village, in addition to investigating the use of wetland resources and the implications of this use on conservation and the local economy and livelihoods.

The project in Mtanza-Msona has been formulated as a follow-up to the IUCN-Government of Tanzania Rufiji Environmental Management Plan (REMP), in response to requests from the national partner agencies with the assistance of the Institute of Resource Assessment (IRA) of the University of Dar es Salaam and the Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH).