

Losing wetlands to grow crops

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Getting enough to eat is a basic human need – but at what cost to the environment? Research published in BioMed Central's journal *Agriculture & Food Security* demonstrates that as their crops on higher ground fail due to unreliable rainfall, people in countries like Uganda are increasingly relocating to wetland areas. Unless the needs of these people are addressed in a more sustainable way, overuse of wetland resources through farming, fishing, and hunting will continue.

In 2009 it was estimated that about a third of Uganda's wetlands had been lost to growing [crops](#) and grazing. While the environmental significance of wetland loss is important, so are National Food Security targets and the Millennium Development Goal of halving the number of people who suffer from hunger by 2015. In order to evaluate how people are using the wetlands researchers from Makerere University, Uganda, with financial support from IDRC surveyed residents living in either Lake Victoria crescent, Kyoga plains, and South Western farmlands.

The survey revealed that more than 80% of people in these areas use wetland resources including collecting water, catching fish, hunting bush meat (Sitatunga, a type of antelope, and wild rat), and harvesting wild fruits and vegetables. Some of these they consume but others they sell in order to be able to buy food. Over half admitted to growing crops in the nutrient rich soil wetlands with its ready water supply. The families who were most likely to use the wetlands in this way were the ones who had the least access to other sources of food.

The locals blame their bad harvests on global warming, and as global

weather systems change this can only get worse. Dr Nelson Turyahabwe explained, "Food insecurity is a real problem across the world. In Uganda the families most at risk tended to have younger or female household heads, or were less educated. Large families were also at high risk of not having enough to eat. In these cases use of wetlands allows families to survive. In designing sustainable use policies for [wetlands](#) the needs of humans also needs to be considered."

More information: *Agriculture & Food Security* 2012, 2:5
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