

Project Update: July 2010

After a number of meetings and consultations, the Ondiri, Nyongara and Rungiri Water Resource Users Association were registered last week. This Water Resource Users Association, whose acronym is ONRUWRUA, is meant to promote conservation and benefit sharing of the waters of the Ondiri Swamp, the Nyongara River which flows from the swamp, and the Rungiri Dam, located a short distance away.

Ondiri wetland is located within close proximity to Kikuyu town. It is an important wetland since it forms the headwaters of Nairobi River within the Athi drainage basin. The area is a unique wetland with macrophytes growing on a floating peat, making it Kenya's only major quaking bog. Peat occurrence in Kenya is scattered and limited to mountainous areas with most valley bottom wetlands having been drained for farming and settlements. In spite of this uniqueness, the wetland is characterized by poor or scanty information on its ecology, utilisation and threats as is the case with most small wetland ecosystems in the country.

Ondiri Swamp faces several conflicts as far as water use is concerned. There is the danger of siltation as soil from the riparian farms gets washed down to the swamp, especially after heavy rains. This soil is accompanied by fertilisers and pesticides which render the water unsuitable for drinking. Harvesting of swamp vegetation for fodder is another source of conflict since the harvesters cut the vegetation and leaves the swamp bare, which means that evaporation takes place faster. Recently, real estate projects are coming up and there is a lot of waste, both solid and liquid, that finds its way into the swamp

Fifty percent of Kenyans obtain their water directly from water sources rather than through improved water supply systems. As a result, the country is at a high risk of losing water catchments and sub-catchment areas, and further disintegrating secure water resources in the future. In order to address this, the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, through the Water Services Trust Fund (WSTF) and the Water Resource Management Authority (WARMA) has started a financing window of protection and management of water at the local level, known as the Water Resource Users Associations (WRUAs).

A WRUA is the name given to a community group which is focused on the management and conservation of the water resources of a particular area, stream, or aquifer. But while the formation of WRUAs has already started in the country, awareness among communities on the benefits of the associations is low and the capacity for conflict transformation is also low. Form a Water Resource Users Association (WRUA) for the swamp. This is a community group that will be focused on management and conservation of the water resources of the Ondiri swamp

The WRUA has the following objectives and functions:

- Promote controlled and legal water use activities.
- Promote good management practices to make efficient and sustainable use of the water resource.
- Promote water conservation practices to ensure sufficient water reserves that meet the demands of the environment, the wildlife, the livestock and all the stakeholders.

FOWCON has also set up a website (www.fowcon.org) that will be highlighting the activities of the organisation from time to time.

