

Participatory land use planning in Nairambi subcounty— Empowering communities for sustainable development

Of the 7571 hectares administrated by Nairambi subcounty, Buvuma district, Uganda, 37% was assigned to oil palm cultivation, with 29% declared as protected forests. This leaves local communities with hard choices about how to meet their needs from the remaining 34% of the land. Ecological Trends Alliance, supported by Tropenbos International, worked with three of the five parishes that make up Nairambi subcounty to achieve food security and sustainable land management through a new land use plan. This was developed through dialogue and participatory processes with communities in each parish to ensure that the plan promoted inclusive decision making and monitoring. This infobrief presents the vision, goal and objectives identified by communities to move the subcounty towards more sustainable land use, and outlines the main issues and recommendations to address these challenges.

Recommendations

for Buvuma District government

- Use the land use plan to build partnerships with development agencies and cultural institutions, encourage them to align activities with the plan, that support sustainable development in the subcounty.
- Encourage communities to adopt and implement the plan, respect bylaws, and pay local taxes, so local revenue can be returned to fund other components of the land use plan for community benefits.
- Include the activities in the land use plan into subcounty and district annual plans, so they can better align with the national development legal framework and qualify for funding from money received by the district.

for the Ministry of Agriculture

- Put local communities at the centre of the design and implementation of land use plans, as the only way to use optimal land planning that supports local livelihoods and protects the environment.
- Incentivize Oil Palm Uganda Ltd (OPUL) to apply its corporate social responsibility strategies to fund activities that support local land use plans and the restoration of forests and wetlands.
- Encourage a fair distribution of land resources between the oil palm industry and local smallholders and make efforts to diversify livelihoods to guarantee the long-term prosperity of residents.

“The vision of Nairambi subcounty is to be a productive, well-educated and prosperous community with food security and improved household income serving as a food hub for export”

The need for land use planning

Almost a third of Nairambi subcounty (29%), is protected forest reserves that need to be conserved and restored. So, allocating 37% of the subcounty’s land to be converted to oil palm means that much less land will be available to support local livelihoods. The land allocation for oil palm cultivation largely ignored the needs of the local parishes, who were not properly consulted during decision making. As such, improved land use planning is needed to better accommodate the needs of all local people, guaranteeing food security and protecting the environment. The land use plan summarized here is the result of a truly participatory planning process carried out by three of the five parishes that make up the subcounty, Namugombe, Buwanga and Magyo, which were then synthesized to elaborate the Nairambi subcounty Plan.

Community concerns

From the wide range of issues identified in each parish during planning, the most common problems were: deforestation, low crop production, crop pests and diseases, poor farming methods, and excessive wind.

Current land use

The different land uses in Nairambi were defined and mapped in all five parishes, leading to the current land use map (below), the most relevant for planning being:

Oil palm. Land acquired for oil palm cultivation covers a large area of the subcounty.

Forests. Most of the forests in the subcounty, including the area under forest reserve protection status, have been cleared and converted into farmland. In Magyo and Buwanga, there are a few patches of forest left.

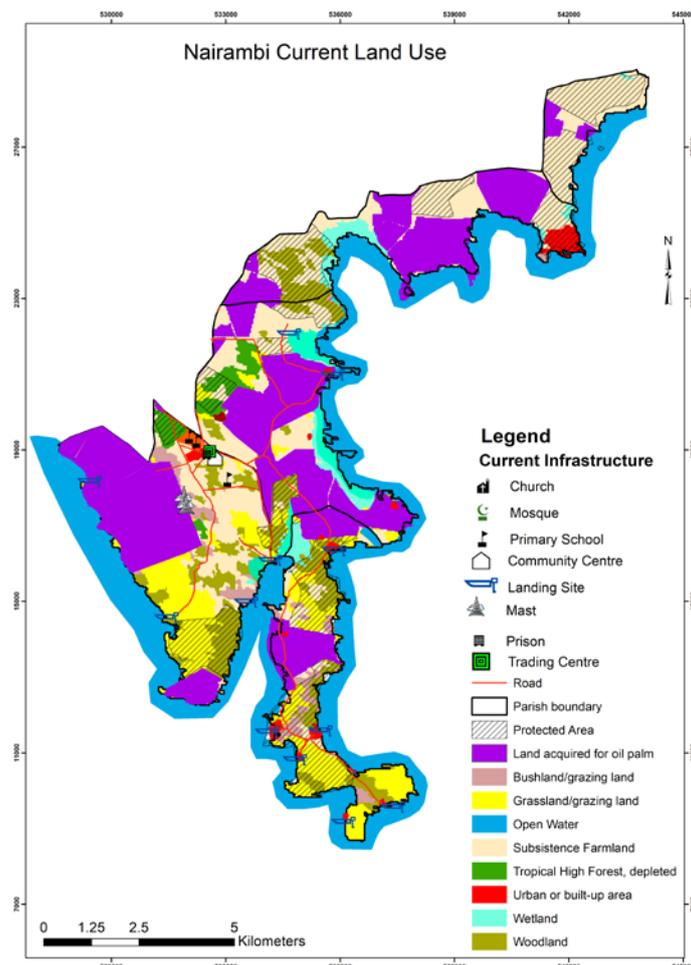
Woodland. Scattered woodlands in all parishes except Lufu, both within and outside protected areas.

Agricultural land. Most of the available land in the subcounty is under subsistence farmland with intercropping.

Grasslands. Located in every parish, these are mainly rocky areas that cannot be used for agriculture.

Wetlands. Often degraded.

Settlements. Mostly located along roads and landing sites.



Map 1. Current land use map

Aims of the land use plan

These were agreed after close consultation with communities in all parishes, to reflect their priorities and respond to their most pressing land use issues.

The goal. Increased land productivity in Nairambi subcounty for sustainable development and improved food security and household income.

Objectives. To (i) increase forest cover, (ii) adopt improved farming systems, (iii) protect buffer zones around lakes, streams and rivers, (iv) restore wetlands and use them sustainably, and (v) protect fragile hilly areas.

Taking action

Communities and their leaders developed an action plan to guide them on the interventions to take, to tackle the problems identified and to reach their agreed objectives. The plan also includes the resources needed and the responsibilities of each stakeholder for the implementation of the plan. Specific actions for each parish were outlined in subsequent parish level plans. The Nairambi subcounty plan included the following actions.

Forests. Train communities in agroforestry, practice boundary and on-farm tree planting and establish a tree nursery.

Agriculture. Train communities in sustainable land management, plant cover crops and trees, mulching, zero tillage.

Crop and livestock pests and diseases. Improve pastures, treat and dip animals and organize sensitization meetings.

Lake shores and riversides. Develop conservation bylaws that ensure buffer zones 100 m wide on lake shores and 5 m along riverbanks, and plant trees and grass in these areas.

Wetlands. Develop bylaws, categorize wetlands to guide agricultural activities, allow natural regeneration and plant wetland trees at degraded sites.

Fragile hilly areas. Develop bylaws, establish soil and water conservation structures, plant native trees, promote natural regeneration and zero tillage.

Future land use

The map (right) shows a futuristic impression of the land use in Nairambi, which will only be achieved by an effective implementation of the activities proposed in the action plan.

Oil palm. Land acquired for oil palm plantations will be planted with as a monoculture crop. It is envisaged that agroforestry trees will be planted along roads to act as windbreaks and for wood supply.

Forests. After restoration, continuous forest cover will be found in protected areas. Restored areas previously degraded and additional tree cover on farms as woodlots or agroforestry.

Subsistence farming. Improved farmland and increased crop yields through better farming methods, agroforestry, better access to extension services and finance and more intensive, mechanized agriculture. Additional settlements will not be encouraged.

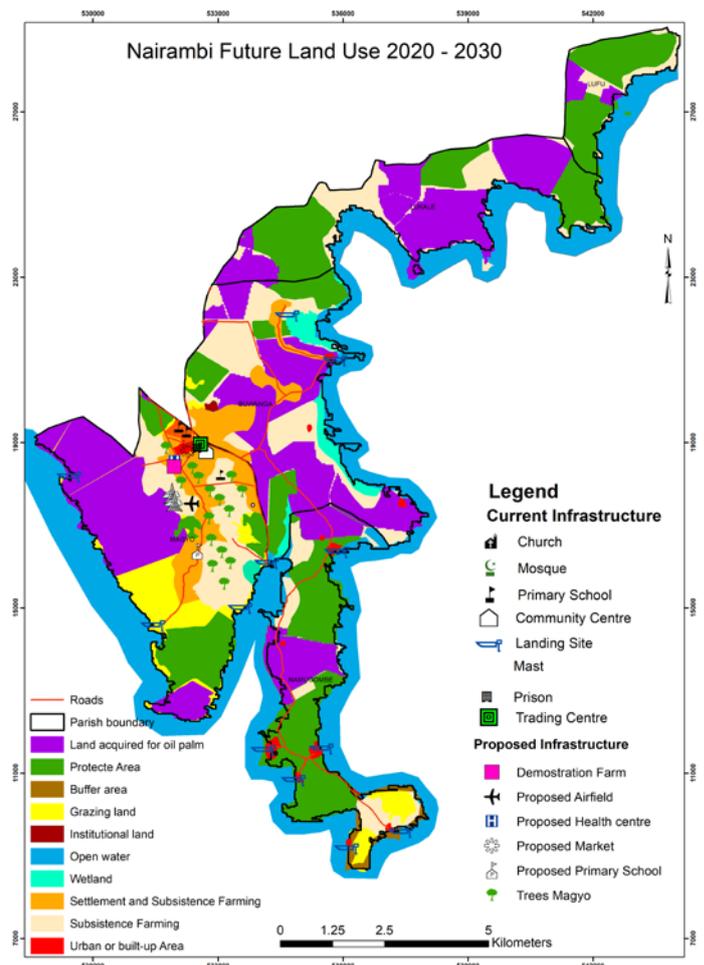
Settlement and subsistence farming. Settlement expansion will be incentivized in these areas only, to leave other land for agriculture.

Water resources. Protected lake shore with 100 m of vegetation as buffer areas, rivers and stream banks planted with suitable tree and grass species, improving quantity and quality of well and spring water for domestic use.

Wetlands. Once restored, they will also be better protected by enforcing bylaws and statutory requirements.

Settlements. Better defined limits to prevent further fragmentation of agricultural land.

Infrastructure. New demonstration farm, an airfield, a health centre and a market.



Map 2. Future land use map

Expected outcomes

The Nairambi land use plan aims to increase the prosperity of the subcounty's population through more sustainable management of natural resources and improved agricultural practices. Implementing the plan will lead to increased land and livestock productivity, food availability, control of crop pests and diseases and household income, and improved livelihoods and veterinary and extension services. Environmental protection will also be improved in Nairambi, as well as health and education services. The process has also improved inclusive decision making and local governance.

Working together

As described in the action plan, putting the land use plan into practice requires commitment and collaboration from every stakeholder. From the local community to the District Council, people agreed to be assigned different roles and responsibilities to ensure that planned activities are implemented in a timely and effective manner, with progress also being adequately monitored against agreed indicators. Elaborating the land use plan shows that placing local communities at the centre of planning revealed valuable insights to better achieve an optimal and equitable use of land within Nairambi subcounty.

Methodology

This land use plan was developed using participatory land use planning. This is a systematic process, taking into consideration national level guidance, but mainly engaging local community stakeholders.

1. **Preplanning.** Collect biophysical and social data, prepare base maps and draft land use/ cover maps.
2. **Community dialogue.** Develop a common vision, set goals, and agree an action plan to tackle the identified land use issues.
3. **Brainstorming.** Identify problems, coping strategies and solutions through community group discussions, and draw up current and future land use maps.
4. **Transect walks.** Visit as a group the problematic sites and sites for future development, taking GPS readings at each.
5. **Elaborating the plan.** Use official government maps to demarcate the community maps and combine parish plans into a subcounty level plan

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