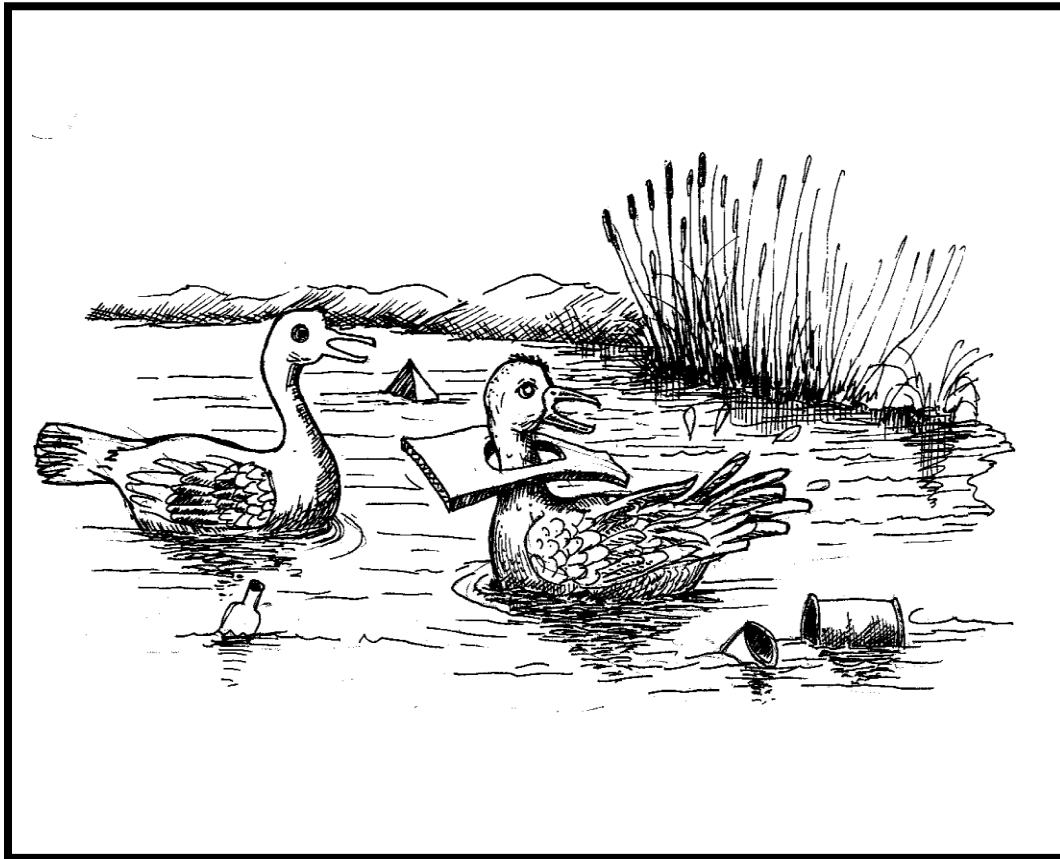




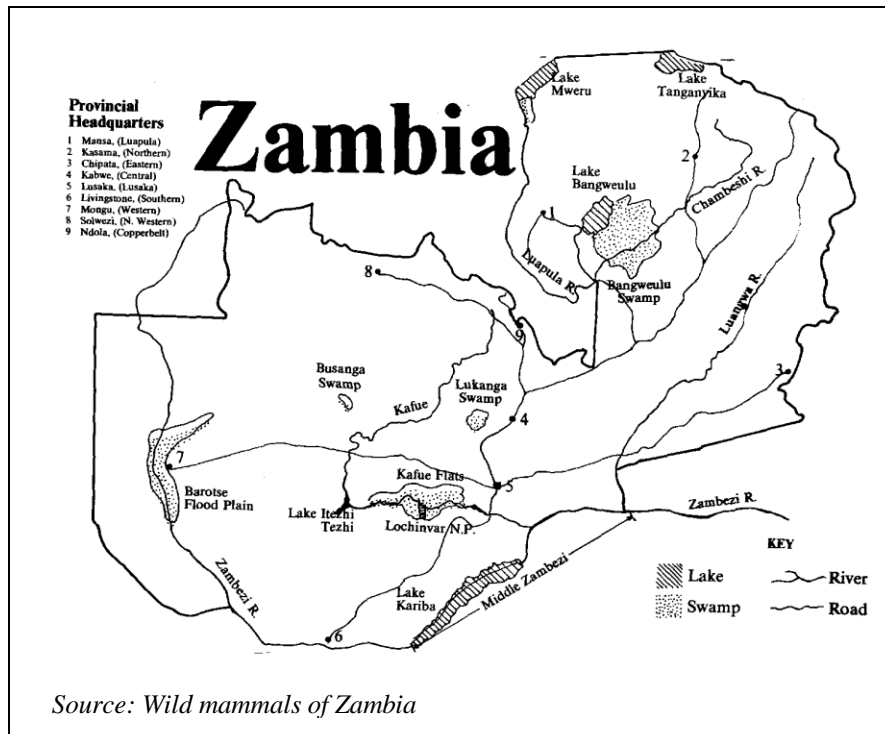
WETLANDS: HABITATS OR WASTELANDS?



Water is a natural resource. It is an important ingredient to all life on earth. Many rural communities depend on natural water bodies for their daily needs. Even though water is very important to all of us, this resource still faces numerous problems all over the world. Zambia is a landlocked country, but although landlocked, she has enough rivers and lakes that provide alternative import and export routes. The rivers, lakes, streams, dambos and flood plains (Wetlands) provide the people of Zambia with food and employment. Unfortunately, most of these wetland areas have little, to no fish because of over fishing!

WHAT IS A WETLAND?

Wetlands have many difficult definitions. In a simple definition, a wetland simply means an area that is wet during most part of the year!



Another way you can tell a wetland is by the presence of many different organisms that are associated

with water. Organisms that are associated with water are also called marine life. These organisms can be animals, plants or birds that live in and near them. Visit a local wetland and see for your self.

Zambia's main rivers include the Zambezi and its main tributaries being Kabompo, Kafue and Luangwa rivers and the Chambeshi watershed. Lakes Kariba, Mweru, Bangweulu and Tanganyika all provide Zambia with her much needed water, fisheries and tourism resources. The Victoria falls being just of the many wetland attractions.

Water is lost from rivers, lakes, streams and dambos through evaporation and from transpiration through plants. This water vapour rises and forms clouds that melt away and come back to earth as rain or snow. This water then collects on the land and flows to rivers, lakes and dambos. There is no new water created at any particular time. All the water we have is merely recycled. That is why water is so precious!

The wetland; Nature's Factory and Home

Water is the most common liquid found here on earth. A liquid is that which flows and changes shape. It usually feels wet. Water is made up of two gases – Hydrogen and Oxygen. Animals, like people, also need water in order to stay alive. Some need lots of it everyday, while others can go long periods without it.

Wetlands provide a perfect environment for plankton and zooplankton that supports millions of aquatic life form.

The fishing industry is an important employer in rural areas. The fish caught other than being sold, constitutes a significant part of the Zambian diet.

Wetlands support plant and animal species that may not be found anywhere else. But unless checked, the spread of agriculture, settlements and the need for firewood may soon cause wetlands and plants to disappear!

The Zambezi river is not only the fourth largest river but also supports the three largest lakes in Africa. Its basin alone has a rich variety of wildlife and fish covering over 50 protected areas. Helping local communities to conserve and use this wetland carefully is the major task of Conservation Lower Zambezi.

Wetlands are as valuable as any other natural resource. They also need the same protection as other resources like wildlife. Once carefully managed, wetlands can contribute to better lives for all local communities. However, the much-needed knowledge about their better management and use is often lacking in most communities!

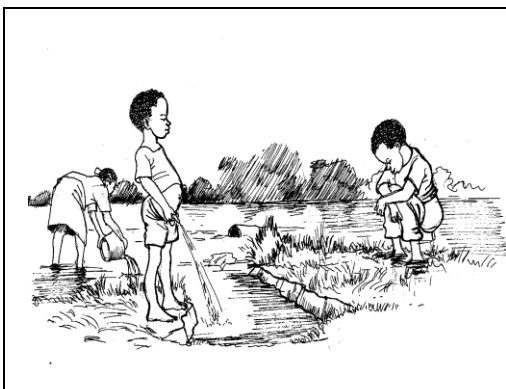
OUR Wetlands under Threat!

Human beings generally threaten many of our wetlands. The reason that this happens is largely because not a lot of people really know how to care for this natural resource.

When we mention natural resources, many communities place a greater value on wildlife. Little do people know that wetlands can equally be at risk just like wildlife!

The following are therefore some examples of how wetlands can be threatened.

a) Poor water management

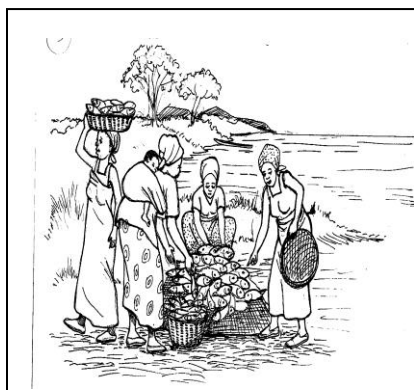
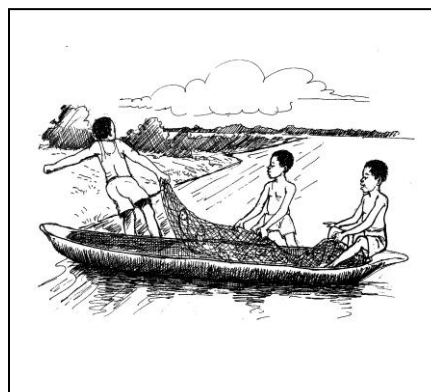


People just do not care very much about communal wetlands. When they go to a wetland near them to wash plates and cups, they leave plastics, papers and tins in and near wetland. These not only make the area very dirty, but also can be a major source of disease. Children while at play can contaminate water through urinating and defecating in it. This is a very bad practice. This does not only affect the people in your

community but also other people using the same water down stream. Others wash cars using oily rags and spillages go into the water as run off. This is very bad and we must stop this. Wetlands are not a dumping site, they are important habitats.

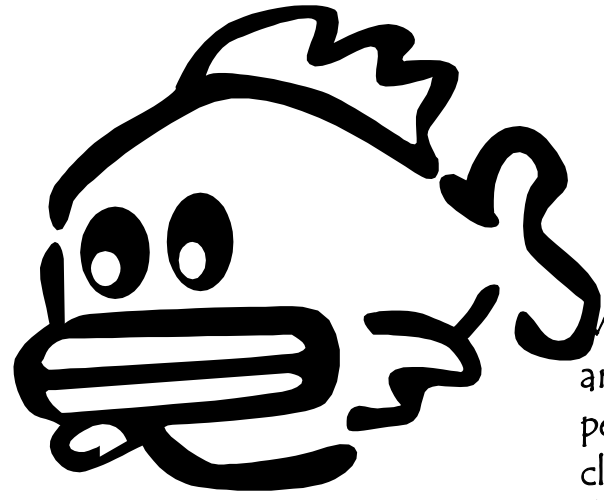
b) Over Harvesting

When we go to the river, we think only of ourselves and take everything as if others have no use for them. We cut trees and reeds, we dam the river and catch so much fish using bad practices like mosquito nets. We even stop obeying the fish ban (December 31st – March 1st) of every year. Surely, nothing lasts forever, all these resources will eventually run out. We need to care for them, nobody can do this better than ourselves!



c) Survival Instincts

The prevailing harsh economic situation in Zambia has forced a lot of people to get into commercial fishing. Even though the reasons may be true, other bad people simply over fish because there is no one to control them. They use bad fishing methods and yet they even know that what they are doing is very bad!



Everyone needs a clean supply of water. We all use water in many different ways. Some use it for washing clothes, others for bathing and cooking. In whichever way, we all depend on water for our livelihood. When we make water dirty, we are making it dangerous for other people and living organisms to use properly. Water, as a natural resource is very valuable to all. Whether you look after your water resources or not is entirely up to you! The choice is yours!

WETLANDS AS A WASTE LAND!

Many people go to the river with all sorts of things and return without them. Where do you think these people throw their litter? – in the river! No body cleans rivers, all that happens is that the rubbish flows down stream and settles in a place where water is not running. Then it starts to rot and causes diseases. That's how water then turns unsafe to drink and use.

When you throw rubbish in a river or stream, you merely transport it from one place to another. In short, all you do is make your rubbish somebody else's problem. This is very bad. Imagine if it were you!

Zambia maybe landlocked, but there is enough water from rainfall and wetlands, all we have to do is know how to collect and harvest water properly.

Rural communities collect and use water effectively because they only have limited amounts at a time. This is a better way of treating our water. Wetlands are not dumpsites for our rubbish, they are valuable tanks created for our use. !

The Forestry Law is still being re-done. This means that it may not sound very friendly to you as a community member. Consult a

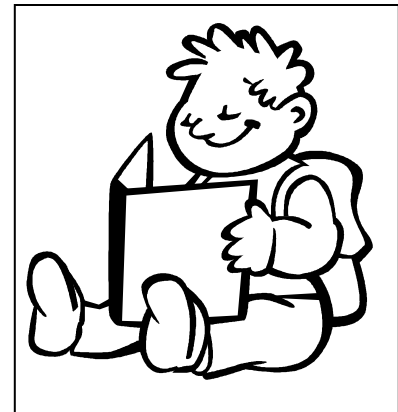
Forestry Officer or a member of your Community Resource Board (CRB) on how forestry resources can better be utilized by community members.

HOW CAN MY SCHOOL PROTECT THE WETLANDS IN MY AREA?



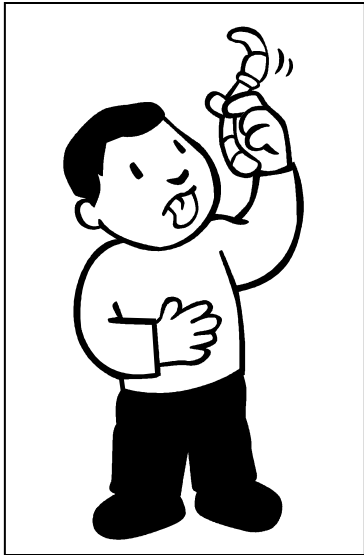
1. Always avoid making communal water dirty. You are not the only one using that water. You should know that the wetland is not a dumpsite, throw all rubbish in the dustbin. If possible take your litter with you after swimming and put it in the right place!

2. Learn as much as you can about wetlands so that you can contribute to their conservation. Wetlands are usually polluted because people do not know how to conserve and keep them clean.



3. Ask a fisheries Officer to assist you set up a school fishpond. The community can learn how to set this up so that they reduce pressure on the wetland.

4. Give a talk about your local wetland in a PTA meeting. It is important that you make people realize the problem of not caring for water before it is too late. Good Luck!



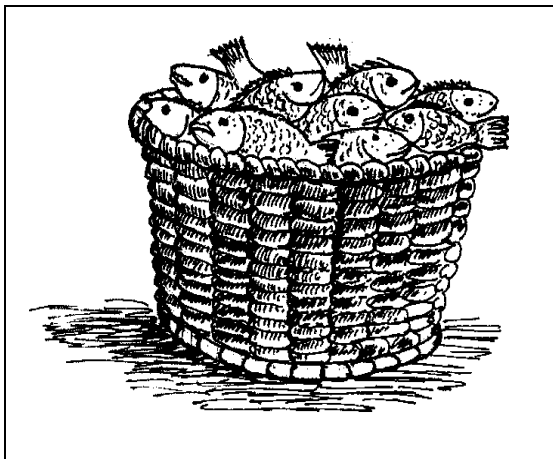
HOW CAN MY COMMUNITY ASSIST CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN MY AREA?

If you live near a town, invite a Fisheries Officer to give a talk in your school or community. Ask them about how ordinary community members can get involved in the protection of wetlands.

Communities have the right to get involved in the conservation of natural resources in their area.

This decision is entirely up to them!

Educate community members on the dangers of using bad methods of fishing especially using nets of the wrong sizes including mosquito nets. These bad fishing methods can lead to the depletion of well-stocked fishing areas.



Visit your local fisheries office and get the latest legal net sizes for your area. Share this information with others because many people are ignorant about them. This may be the reason why there is so much illegal fishing!

Do not support fishing methods that allow the use of poison, mosquito nets, fish baskets or traditional practices that destroy a lot of animals living in the wetland. This is against the fisheries law.



Report any bad fishing practices to the Chief. Traditional leaders know how to deal with any person that is found killing fish without a local permit.

Allowing rural communities to take part in conserving wildlife and fish is the only way that they can benefit more from natural resources that are generally protected by law!

OUR WETLANDS, GOING... GOING... SAVED!.....

*When communities meet at
CRB & VAG meetings, they only
concentrate on talking about
the conservation of wildlife
resources. Wetland resources
need protection too!*

Fish is not the only source of protein. There are other alternatives for protein too, like Beans and groundnuts. Avoid over fishing during the fish ban of December 31st – March 1st of every month

**Some important
facts U should
know!**

Activity

This activity will assist you teach and learn about wetlands. Before you start, read a little about wetlands. You will discover that they are not dumpsites but important habitats too.

1. Visit a wetland near you. Find a place to sit where you can see a large part of the wetland.
2. Make a list of all the things that you can see - mammals, reptiles, birds and amphibians. Also make a list of all the things that show that humans have been there
3. Using your careful analysis, what do you think the general benefits of a wetland are?

As a follow-up lesson, stress the importance of wetlands to communities. Go through the information provided on the ecological importance of water. Ask each group to make a poster on what they have learned. Go through the posters interpreting the meaning of each of poster. This will assist the pupils understand wetlands better.

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