

# WETLAND CONSERVATION IN LAGOS STATE

Inter-Ministerial Online  
Discussion

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For Lagos Urban Development Initiative & Lagos Wetlands Advocacy Group  
Supported by Heinrich Böll Stiftung

## **Date & Time**

1 September 2020

11:00 am - 1:00 pm

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## **Panelists**

Monsurat A. Banire, Lagos State Ministry of Environment

Kofo Adeleke, Independent Development Consultant

Olamide Udoma-Ejorh, Lagos Urban Development Initiative

## **Moderator**

Ashade Abdulsalam, Green Janitors Lagos

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## **Workshop Goal**

This campaign workshop is to further accentuate the importance of conserving the remaining wetlands in Lagos State. It also seeks to stimulate and encourage conversations especially among relevant stakeholders on the benefits of preserving our wetlands whilst presenting creative ways of harnessing and maximising the potentials inherent in their proper management.

## **Panelists Presentations**

The first speaker, **Ms. Adeleke** began with a presentation on defining wetlands and their importance to Lagos state as cradles of biodiversity. She highlights its function as a habitat to aquatic life but most importantly, its function as a hydrological and flood control; stabilizing water tables by holding rainfall. In terms of its economic benefit, Ms. Kofo discussed the provision of food and medicines to communities, transportation, tourism, and recreation. For coastal cities spending a large number of resources on flood control like Lagos, the hydrological management from wetlands particularly serves as an economic benefit.

Ms. Adeleke proceeded to discuss the Ramsar convention signed in 1971 and the commitment from signatories like Nigeria for the restoration of wetlands and wise use of resources moving forward. She also highlights the mention of wetlands in terms of the restoration and conservation in the Nigerian Constitution, reminiscing on her experience as a young schoolgirl in 2002, presenting an exhibition titled "Wetlands are not wastelands" on the 2nd of February known as World Wetland Day.

Continuing the conversation with the early days of wetlands in Lagos. Ms. Adeleke underlined the influence of increasing urbanization and human activities in the loss of over

70% of wetlands since 1965, resulting in a great loss of rich biodiversity along the coast of Lagos. To emphasise the possibility and vitality of incorporating the remaining wetlands into the urban city, similar efforts from Wenzhou Ecological Park in China and the London Wetland Centre situated in the heart of London were highlighted. Examples of areas with such potential in Lagos are the National Theatre and Opebi Gorge. The National Theatre site in Iganmu was also noted as one of the last open spaces of substance in central Lagos that resembles the natural environment of Lagos.

Still focused on the impact of urbanisation and development on wetlands, the destruction of wetlands in the Lekki peninsula as development has transformed the area over the past 20 years was emphasised. The Lekki peninsula now includes areas like Ikoyi, Victoria Island, and Lekki which are all situated on what were previously wetlands. One of the key examples of events highlighted was the creation of the Lekki Free Trade Zone that led to massive deforestation around the area. Although there were policies at the time to protect large trees, plant new trees, and preserve 798,06 hectares of land for green areas, swamp-land, and floodplains as a habitat for existing wildlife, there is a lack of data to confirm any implementation during that process.

Like the Lekki peninsula, Ms. Adeleke highlighted the Amuwo Odofin local government area as a natural wetland that has become rapidly urbanised and still in danger of being completely lost. The ignorance of the benefits to flood control in similar areas like Onigbongbo Village and lack of monitoring and protection for the remaining wetlands is also emphasised.

Finally, the importance of involvement from all ministries in wetland protection was discussed, while recognising the efforts from both the Office of Environmental Services and the Office of Drainage Services to highlight the critical need for environmental management. To that effect, two wetland areas in Badagry were proposed to be fenced off for that purpose and this led to her concluding remarks, on the need for more clarity and information on the current status of these areas, exact locations, and full disclosure on management practices for the wetlands in Lagos.

Progressing from the discussion on Lagos Wetlands, **Ms. Monsurat A. Banire** presented on behalf of the Permanent Secretary, Office of the Environment Services, Ministry of the Environment. Ms. Banire continued the discussion by highlighting the policies and laws in place to protect the wetlands in Lagos. She stated the efforts of the Lagos State Government to identify wetlands in 2009. The project was concluded with a report identifying 31 wetlands in Lagos, out of which are largely encroached due to the rate of urbanisation. The inevitability of encroachment in Lagos as an urban area was discussed, but particularly on the need for regulatory actions that manage the situation. A vivid picture of a future with increasing floods, water and food shortage, drought, and poor

water quality if we fail to control the rate of encroachment on wetlands in Lagos was also described.

Following this grim future for Lagos without the wetlands, Ms. Banire proceeded to discuss the efforts of the state government, particularly the Ministry of Environment to ensure sustainable wetland management in Lagos. These included;

1. Organising yearly stakeholder forums to discuss the challenges and sensitise participants on wetland management practices.
2. Collaborating with Non-government Organisations on projects that emphasise the importance of wetland management like the Lagos Wetland Campaign.
3. Research collaborations with educational institutions such as the University of Lagos and using the outcome as tools in policy design, wetland management and biodiversity conservation that also intertwine with various economic activities in the state.

Ms. Banire continued with highlighting the challenges with wetland protection that the Ministry is also making effort to address. This included the non-regulation of fishing activities and the establishment of containers siting on wetland areas like Abgara. The effort by the state government to sensitise and sanction offenders was also stated, while highlighting the lack of capacity and policies under the Office of Environment services to enforce the laws under the marine aspect. Due to these issues, the 2009 report submission earlier stated, is being reviewed to push for the 2006 wetland policy draft forward. Ms. Banire emphasised the importance of reviewing the 2009 report in order to update the data on the extent of encroachment, exact delineation and location, characteristics, and economic activities surrounding the wetlands. She also highlighted the importance of engaging the local communities in the process.

In her concluding remarks, Ms. Banire shared some recommendations underlined below, to ensure sustainable wetland management in Lagos.

1. Involvement of all relevant stakeholders in wetland management and biodiversity conservation initiatives in Lagos.
2. Collaboration with researchers locally and internationally and underlying MDAs for effective and efficient land use, prioritising the marine and wetland areas.
3. Initiate and enact laws, policies, and other implementation tools with legal backings
4. Sanctions and penalties for communities converting wetlands to wastelands and refuse dumps.
5. Identifying wetlands of international standards for listing on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to protect its unique biodiversity e.g the wetlands in Badagry.

Ms. Banire re-affirms the role of government in policy-making but emphasises the need for collaboration from all Lagosians especially on the potential for eco-tourism. She also states the need for advocacy and empowerment of the local communities, especially the youths

as a part of the campaign for change. The presentation was concluded by stating the willingness of the government to ensure wetland protection in Lagos and collaborate with the people.

Concluding the presentations for the evening, **Olamide Udoma-Ejorh** proceeded with a discussion on making the wetlands work in Lagos. Some of the ideas to preserve the wetlands included;

1. Maintaining the remaining wetlands and stopping human activities.
2. Wetland enhancement by introducing more aquatic life and biodiversity
3. Introducing tourism and urban agriculture to wetland areas
4. Commeratoring wetlands as a conservation site, natural reserve, sanctuary, or a green zone.

Olamide progressed in the conversation by highlighting how we can develop the wetlands into something beneficial for Lagosians and the State while preserving its ecological services. A reference to this future featured the efforts of her organisation, Lagos Urban Development Initiative to implement a Linear Park project in Lagos State. The Linear Park project is the first intersection example between NMT and transport policies linking neighborhoods between Ojota, Opebi, and Maryland. Some of the key features of the proposed park include;

1. **Incorporating Eco-friendly activities:** The dominant activities in the wetland areas will include agriculture, recreation, and non-motorised transportation.
2. **A Lagos green corridor:** It is a starting point for a green corridor, linking the various wetlands in Lagos.
3. **An opportunity for the local bike industry:** The park includes an 8km bike lane with suitable infrastructure to encourage more cycling as an alternative means of transportation and improve the congestion in the city while creating an opportunity for work in the bike industry.
4. **Incorporating urban agriculture:** The park has an urban agriculture aspect and will integrate local farmers and create more opportunities for farming in Lagos.
5. **Flood control:** The Linear Park Project is largely focused on addressing the flooding situation in Lagos and links into certain Sustainable Development Goals, including Target 6.6, Target 11.3, and Target 13.1
6. **Wetland Protection:** The preservation of the wetlands is also a major goal for the Linear Park Project and is intended to meet the requirements of Target 12.2 and 15.1 in the Sustainable Development Goal.
7. **Food Security:** Technology will be introduced to ensure farming on wetlands is possible all year round and improve the possibility of food security for communities in Lagos. Farmers will also be able to supply goods to surrounding neighborhoods, processing industries, and ultimately improve the cost of transportation for food supply.

8. **Security and Safety:** The development of the park along the abandoned site will increase activities and improve security and safety for surrounding communities.
9. **Research and Training:** The park will include a training center for school children and a research center for local fruits and vegetables.
10. **Recreation:** To restore the wetlands and biodiversity lost over the years, the Linear Park is proposing recreation activities like bird watching and a boardwalk trail for residents and visitors to explore the wetlands.

Olamide also emphasised the motives of the park beyond recreational benefits, but to mainly ensure the protection of wetlands and discouraging encroachment along the 3km stretch. Examples of similar park implementations in other countries were also highlighted like the Al-Azhar Park in Egypt, which was originally a landfill but ecologically rehabilitated as a city park, and the Park Connectors in Singapore that link the wetlands across the city. In her concluding remarks, Olamide emphasised the importance of the Ministry in actively participating in these discussions that highlight the steps to moving forward and acting on the outcomes.

### **Main Questions and Discussions**

1. The issue of encroachment in most communities like Oworonshoki seemed to be largely influenced by the community leaders selling of land on the wetlands. What methods have the Ministry of Environment adopted to address this issue of selling wetlands? Or are they a part of the system?
  - All land within the state falls under the jurisdiction of the Lagos State Government. Therefore, there is a process to the acquisition of land within the state and mapped out details in the master plan, to ensure allocation does not occur on land for public use, infrastructure, or areas like the wetlands. Individuals are advised to request access to the Lagos State Master Plan through the Ministry of Physical Planning, the Land Bureau, or the Local Government.
  - Despite the efforts of the State Government to ensure protocol and procedure, community leaders have always been a challenge. The State Government plays no role in the construction of houses in wetland areas and assures that such illegal developments are sanctioned.
  - Community leaders are more included in the process of sensitisation by the State Government to ensure commitment to the process.
  - The 2009 wetland report is currently under review and will be publically available for Lagosians.
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2. There are different stages of acquiring land that involves several government agencies. What are the attempts of the Ministry to push for collaborative efforts

amongst government agencies to uniformly advocate on the management of natural resources like wetlands?

- There are frequent meetings between government agencies, land MDAs, and relevant stakeholders to deliberate on the issue of preservation in Lagos especially as the current administration is set on the agenda of sustainable development.
  - Private sector collaboration is also important on the journey to sustainable wetland management. One way to protect the wetland is to plan out more activities like the Lagos Linear Park. It is helpful in limiting the housing pressure on unoccupied spaces like wetland areas. Initiatives like the Lekki Conservation Center (LCC) under the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) need to be replicated around Lagos.
  - The State Government is also open to receiving proposals from private organizations.
3. The report providing details on the wetlands is a crucial material on the agenda for wetland protection and has unfortunately taken so much time to be readily available. Are there any internal or external monitoring mechanisms for this review process because it seems this conversation keeps reoccurring through the years?
- The challenge with the earlier report is the lack of updated information on the current situation. A monitoring committee was set up late last year and updating began in January 2020. It is an ongoing process, so a certain date for its completion cannot be determined at the moment.
  - The report is aimed to inform the economic actions of the government towards ecotourism and it is important to cover details beyond the location of wetlands. The report will also include a documentation of the quantity and types of species and the uniqueness in each wetland area.
  - The current map is available only on request to the relevant authorities involved in the documentation process.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Discussing the way forward;

- This is a critical time for the wetlands around the National Theatre as Lagosians are more interested in the plans by the government. It is important to use spaces like this for the purpose of education and tourism in Lagos.
- Documentation is crucial to ensure protection of the wetlands. It is essential to have all materials (e.g. maps, reports etc) on the wetlands readily available to the public. There should be external and internal monitoring of the wetland report review to ensure the process is completed.
- Wetland protection is an intensive process and requires the collaborative efforts of professionals and private organizations. Sponsorships and investments are also important to complete programs and plans by the State Government.

- The Ministry of Physical Planning is key to addressing the issue of wetland encroachment in Lagos. There needs to be more effort to regulate and monitor planning approvals in communities and ensure full compliance with the planning laws guiding the state.
- Enforcement is key in the process of monitoring wetland encroachment. It is important to have a task force under government agencies dedicated to monitoring development around the wetlands.

## **Recommendations**

### Community Groups

- Should work together with Local Government to create a whistleblowing platform that will inform Local Government when there are any issues on the wetlands.

### Academics and Researchers

- The Wetlands Advocacy Group can work with academics and Local & State Government to support the mapping of wetlands and how protections and rehabilitation can happen.

### Local Government

- The State Government needs to work with Local Government officials to ensure there is full compliance with the planning laws guiding the State - eyes on the ground
- A whistleblowing platform should be developed so people can report issues happening on the wetlands. This can be at different community levels.

### Ministry of Environment and Relevant MDAs

- The Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development, Ministry of Environment, Office of the Surveyor General and Lands Bureau needs to regulate and monitor planning approvals to ensure encroachment on the wetlands does not occur.
- All wetlands in Lagos State need to be mapped and signposted (LUID, academics and other NGOs can support with this). These locations need to be shared with the public, so there is general knowledge on what wetlands are protected.
- There needs to be a plan for wetlands protection in Lagos State - this can be majority private sector led. But an enabling environment is needed - e.g. a guide on how to bid for a space, what type of development is preferred, etc.
- There should be a task force under the Ministry of Environment dedicated to monitoring development around the wetlands.
- The Ministry of Environment should build a strong relationship with community stakeholders at local level, especially the Obas (King) and Baales (Land owner).

These community institutions are very important because they have direct access to the land and choose to sell them at will.

- We understand that there is a National Theatre Committee thinking about how to develop the space/wetlands around it. It is important to use spaces like this for the purpose of education and tourism in Lagos and the Linear Park Project is a good example of how this can be achieved.

### **Participants**

- MoE (Confirmed)
- SDG (Confirmed)
- MoA (Confirmed)
- MoWaterfront & Infrastructure(Confirmed)
- MoTourism, Arts and Culture (Confirmed)
- LASPARK (Confirmed)
- Lagos Wetlands Advocacy Group

### **Lagos Wetlands Advocacy Group**

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