

Participatory land use planning in Buvuma Town Council subcounty—Empowering communities for sustainable development

Of the 4429 hectares administrated by Buvuma Town Council subcounty, Uganda, 30% was assigned to oil palm cultivation, with 21% declared as protected forests. This leaves local communities with hard choices about how to meet their needs from the remaining 49% of land. Ecological Trends Alliance, supported by Tropenbos International, worked with the five parishes that make up Buvuma Town Council 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 Buvuma Town Council is to be renown commercial farmers and livestock keepers for sustainable development and poverty reduction”

The need for land use planning

A fifth of Buvuma Town Council subcounty (21%) is protected forest reserves that need to be conserved and restored. So, allocating almost a third of the land (30%) to be converted to oil palm means that much less land will be available to support local livelihoods. The land allocation for palm oil 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 the five parishes that make up the subcounty, Buwanga Ward, Buwanga Central, Walwanda Ward, Mazinga and Tome, which were then synthesized to elaborate the Buvuma Town Council land use plan.

Community concerns

From the wide range of issues identified in each parish during planning, the most common problems were: low agricultural productivity, low soil fertility, crop and livestock pests and diseases, poor farming methods, deforestation and forest degradation, and the degradation of lake and river banks.

Current land use

The different land uses in Buvuma Town Council 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. In reserves but mostly degraded, with only few on-farms trees.

Agricultural land. Subsistence farmland with mixed cropping.

Wetlands. Often degraded.

Grazing land. Available in all parishes except Walwanda ward.

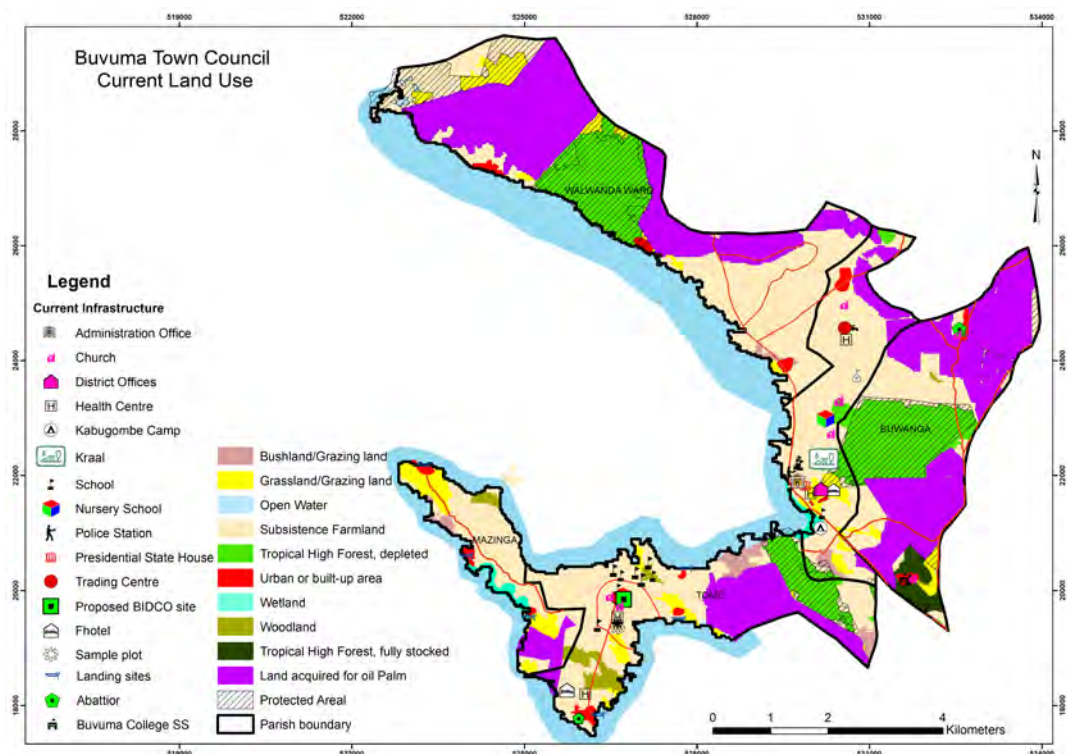
Settlements. Mostly located along roads.

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 Buvuma Town Council for sustainable development and improved living standards.

Objectives. To (i) increase forest cover, (ii) improve land care to restore soil fertility, (iii) adopt improved farming systems, (iv) protect buffer zones around lakes, streams and rivers, and (v) restore wetlands and use them sustainably.



Map 1. Current land use map

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 Town Council plan included the following actions.

Forests. Training in agroforestry, tree planting and tree nursery establishment.

Agriculture. Training in sustainable land management, mulching and zero tillage.

Animal diseases. Improve pastures, treat and dip animals and organize sensitization meetings.

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

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

Forests. Continuous forest in protected areas. Restored areas previously degraded and additional tree cover on farms.

Subsistence farming. Improved farmland through increased 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. Lake, rivers and stream banks protected 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.

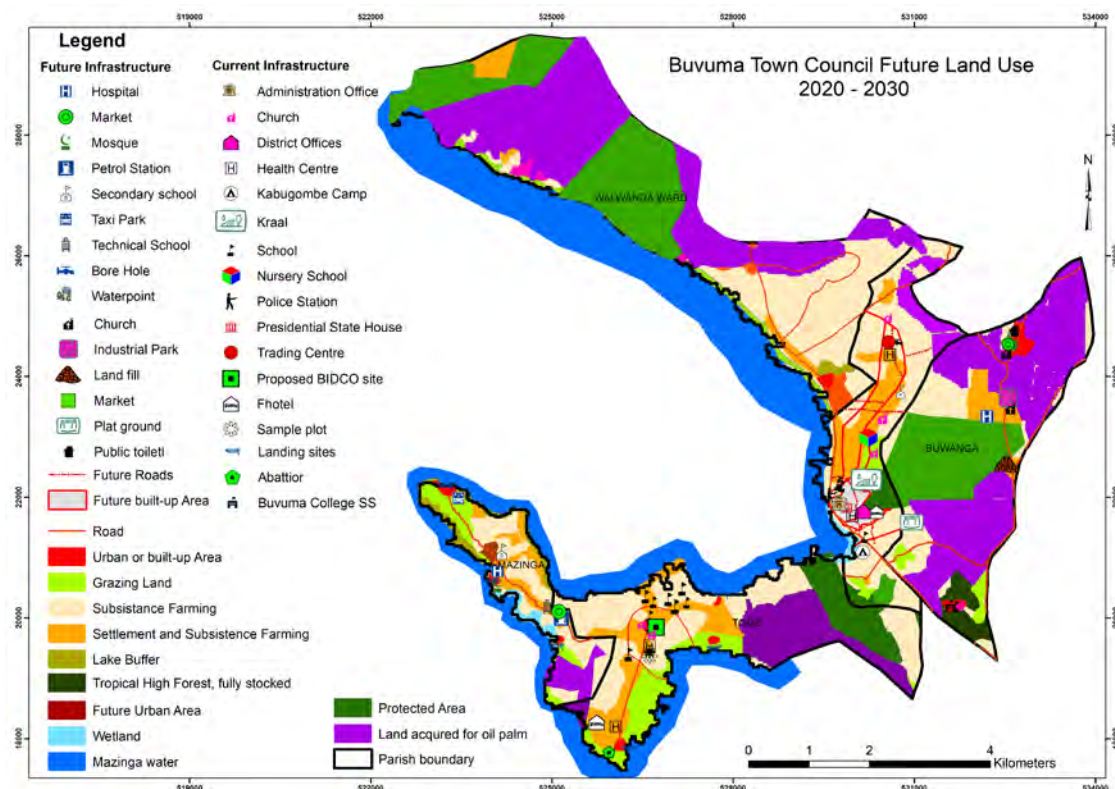
Settlements. Better defined limits to prevent further fragmentation of agricultural land.

Infrastructure. New and upgraded roads, an industrial park, education centre, playground, and commercial centre.

Future land use

The map (below) shows a futuristic impression of future land use in Buvuma Town Council, but this will only be achieved by effective implementation of the activities proposed in the action plan.

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



Map 2. Future land use map

Expected outcomes

The Buvuma Town Council 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, control of crop and livestock pests and diseases, food availability, livelihoods, and household incomes. There will also be improved environmental protection including from strong lake winds, and improved 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 Buvuma Town Council 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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