

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

Of the 6873 hectares administrated by Busamuzi subcounty, Buvuma district, Uganda, 44% was assigned to oil palm cultivation, with 23% declared as protected forests. This leaves local communities with hard choices about how to meet their needs from the remaining 33% of land. Ecological Trends Alliance, supported by Tropenbos International, worked with the four parishes that make up Busamuzi 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 the 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 Busamuzi subcounty is to become an agricultural hub and the leading exporter of agricultural and livestock produce in Buvuma district”

The need for land use planning

Almost a quarter of Busamuzi subcounty (23%), is protected forest reserves that need to be conserved and restored. So, allocating almost half of the land (44%) 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 four parishes that make up the subcounty, which were then synthesized to elaborate the Busamuzi subcounty Plan.

Community concerns

From the wide range of issues identified in each parish during planning, the most common problems were: low crop production, crop pests and diseases, drought and unpredictable seasons, deforestation, and lake shore, streams and wetland degradation.

Current land use

The different land uses in Busamuzi were defined and mapped in all four 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. All forests in the subcounty, including the area under forest reserve protection status, have been cleared, except for small patches of depleted forest on the southwestern side.

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

Wetlands. Often degraded.

Grazing land. Grazing in cattle owners land, rocky areas and lake shore and wetlands in dry season.

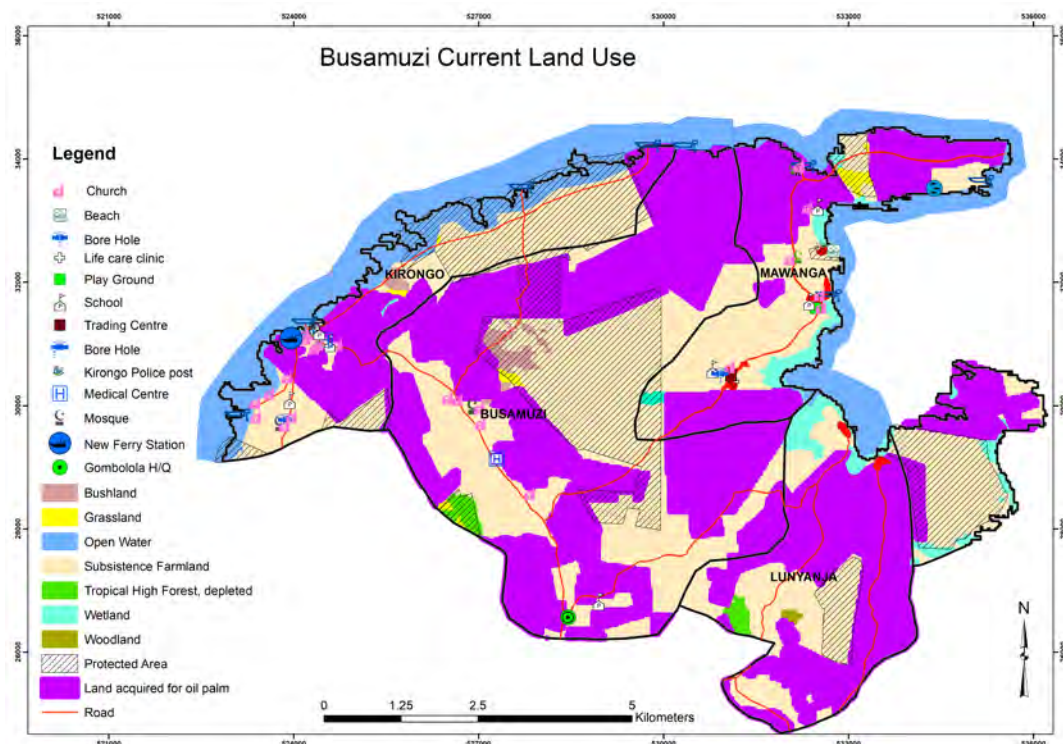
Settlements. Mostly located along roads and next to landing sites.

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 Busamuzi subcounty 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 Busamuzi subcounty land use plan included the following actions.

Forests. Train communities in agroforestry, boundary and on-farm tree planting, and establish tree nurseries.

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

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

Lake shores and riversides. Develop conservation bylaws that ensure buffer zones 100 metres wide on lake shores and 5 metres 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.

Future land use

The map (below) shows an impression of future land use in Busamuzi, 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.

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

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

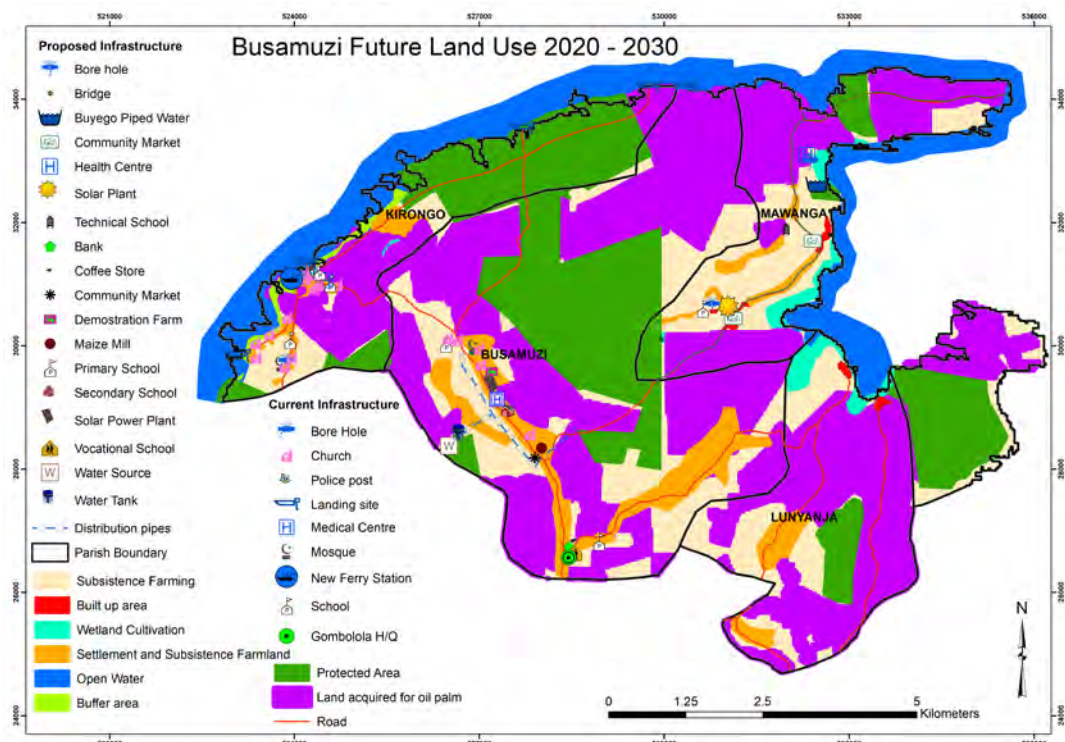
Settlement and subsistence farming. Settlement expansion will be encouraged in these areas only, to leave other land for agriculture.

Water resources. Lake, river 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 landing site, market, playground, solar plant, and an expanded water distribution network.



Map 2. Future land use map

Expected outcomes

The Busamuzi 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, improved livelihoods, household incomes and improved infrastructures. Environmental protection will also be improved in the subcounty, 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 Busamuzi 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

This brief has been produced under the framework of the Green Livelihoods Alliance (Millieudefensie, IUCN NL and Tropenbos International), funded under the 'Dialogue and Dissent' strategic partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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This brief is summarized from: Nangendo G., Kyasiimire B., Opige M. and Ssemmanda R., 2020. *Resource map and proposed land use plan of Busamuzi subcounty, Buvuma District for the period 2019/2020 – 2025/2030*. Ecological Trends Alliance, Kampala. 100pp.

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