

KASAIJA RALLIES UGANDANS TO PROTECT ENVIRONMENT

PHOTO BY JULIET KASIRYE

By Juliet Kasiry

Ugandans have been rallied to take the lead role in the protection of the environment because it has a direct influence on the performance of the economy.

The appeal was made by finance minister Matia Kasaija during the closure of the ninth Uganda Water and Environment week (UWEWK2026) at the Ministry of Water and Environment head office in Luzira, Kampala, on Friday.

CLEARER GOVERNMENT PATH

“Environmental degradation currently imposes high costs on our economy, effectively undermining our development efforts. However, as Government we now have a clearer path forward regarding the protection of water and environmental resources,” he disclosed.

To restore a degraded ecosystem, Kasaija emphasised that the restoration of wetlands, forests and the catchment areas is not optional, but also

a mandatory investment for future safety and economic productivity. Protection of natural resources, according to Kasaija, is essential for the agriculture, energy and tourism sectors, which drive our economy.

According to the wetlands mapping exercise conducted in 1994, Uganda’s wetland coverage stood at 37,559.4sq. km (15.6% of the country’s surface area). This included both intact and degraded wetlands. Currently, the wetlands coverage stands at 22,457.4sq.km (9.3% of the country’s surface area).

This year’s UWEWK was held under the theme: *Water and Environment for an Inclusive and Prosperous Uganda*.

ADOPT DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

To combat pollution and climate change, Kasaija advised the water and environment ministry to not only partner with the private sector, civil society, academic institutions and local communities, but also leverage the innovations of the



Delegates interacting during one of the UWEWK sessions in Luzira, Kampala on Friday

youth, particularly those using digital solutions for water and environmental monitoring and management.

During the commemorations of Water Week, development partners, civil society organisations, private sector, government officials, representatives from cultural institutions and Members of Parliament discussed approaches and solutions to address water, environment, and climate change challenges in Uganda.

WATER MANAGEMENT

The Tenfold Growth Strategy, growing our economy from \$50b (sh180 trillion) to \$500b (sh1,800b) by 2040, according

to the finance minister, is impossible without sustainable water management and environmental protection.

Kasaija’s remarks were contained in his speech delivered by the Minister of Water and Environment, Sam Cheptoris.

Addressing participants, Cheptoris said, as a ministry, they are committed to protecting the gains by managing climate risks, restoring degraded ecosystems, such as forests and wetlands and enforcing environmental policies to secure water supply for agriculture and tourism. Improved water resource management, according to Cheptoris, supports industrialisation, agricultural and

tourism growth, which are vital for economic transformation.

“Access to water not only improves health and hygiene, but it also unlocks education and restores dignity, especially for girls,” he added.

SHARED NATURAL HERITAGE

The deputy resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme, Ian King, said this year’s UWEWK coincides with the global observance of several international days dedicated to our shared natural heritage. That is World Water Day, International Forest Day and World Meteorological Day.

King said the global action and national solidarity of

World Water Day, under the theme, *Water and Gender Means Where Water Flows, Equality Grows*, reminds the world that inequalities deepen where access to safe water and sanitation is limited.

“We do understand that women and girls, who often bear the burden of water collection, are disproportionately affected and under-represented in water governance. Since water is a human rights issue, during the discussions, we have strongly underscored the importance of inclusive water resource management for Uganda’s development priorities,” King stated.

HUMAN CAPITAL

He said water is a development issue that correlates strongly with the human capital needed to advance Uganda’s growth ambitions.

According to the water ministry statistics, as of June 2025, safe water coverage in Uganda stood at 70%. About 20% of the villages, or roughly about 30% of the population, do not have access to safe and clean water.

During the closing of UWEWK, the permanent secretary of the water and environment ministry, Dr Alfred Okidi, said this year’s commemorations were guided under four critical sub-themes including, the role of water and environment in achieving Uganda’s 10-fold growth strategy.