

# The diminishing wetlands of Manguo

*A wetland is a unique ecosystem in which stagnant water, either perennial or ephemeral, floods a specific area of land and in which; as a result, anaerobic processes are prevalent. Wetlands have a great contribution to make to the environmental sustainability, in terms of purifying and storing water, processing different nutrients, and supporting various flora and fauna. Indeed, it has been claimed that wetlands are the most bio-diverse of ecosystems, housing all sorts of animal and plant life.*

*In Kenya, wetlands constitute approximately 3-4% of land area or around 14,000km<sup>2</sup> of the land surface. This number fluctuates and can reach 6% during rainy seasons (GOK, 1994<sup>1</sup>).*

Manguo swamp is a major landmark in Limuru located along the Nairobi-Nakuru highway. The swamp is a conspicuous feature appealing to both local and international travelers.

The swamp name was coined in 1926 by the locals who used the swamp water for their laundry.



Figure 1: Manguo Swamp

“Manguo” is the Kiswahili word for clothes but this may also be derived from a Kikuyu word meaning Hippo). Livestock were also brought to quench their thirst. This water source was their life. There was an array of bird species, flamingos, herons, ducks etc. that could be observed from a distance. It is also rumored that hippos once inhabited the swamp, an opinion disputed by some due to the vegetation cover around the swamp. The water from this swamp used to flow to Limuru town and was used by a number of homesteads for domestic purposes. The Manguo Primary School also got its water from this swamp.

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Kenya, 1994, Kenya National Environment Action Plan (NEAP)



Figure 2a: Manguo Swamp in 2002, with limited encroachment.



Figure 2b: Manguo Swamp in 2010, showing some encroachment and development of surroundings.



Figure 2c: Manguo Swamp in 2017, demonstrating extensive encroachment and reclaiming of land.

Fast forward to 2019 and the swamp is under threat (Figure 2). The outlet has been blocked and buildings have been erected on what was once a discharge channel that used to take the water all the way to Limuru town (Figure 3). People have also taken advantage of this to cultivate maize and other crops (Figure 4), further minimizing the discharge from the wetlands and potentially polluting the water with organic waste. There is also a nearby slaughter-house which discharges waste water into the swamp. There are also herds of cows that graze and of course, defecate by the swamp, both of which lead to further pollution of the swamp. According to locals, this is what contributes to the frequent drying out of the swamp. Residents who relied on the water for their domestic use no longer rely on Manguo swamp due its poor state; they now have access to water from boreholes dug by different developmental agencies.

It is not known to what extent boreholes are affecting the wetland, but with uncontrolled abstraction of water, the water table is bound to be reduced and the wetland runs a risk of becoming dry land, thus losing its bio-diversity and beneficial environmental impact. Already, the impact has been felt by locals: the array of birdlife has reduced; flamingos and herons are entirely absent. Ducks are now the dominant fauna that can be observed in the swamp.



Figure 3: Some of the buildings alleged to be built over the former wetland outlet.



Figure 4: Wetland that has been reclaimed and is now being cultivated.

The swamp is in demand with commercial developers, especially during the hot season when it typically dries up. A number of people have visited the area, not to enjoy its natural beauty but to seek to purchase land in order to develop it into hotels and other commercial buildings. Swindlers have conned some into paying for land only for rains to come and submerge their investments.

This demonstrates the negative impacts of anthropogenic factors (human activities) on the environment, which plays a key role in increased vulnerability of people and animal species with respect to adverse climate change. Thus, it is paramount that the Kenyan populace recognizes the vital importance of wetlands, so that this generation would ensure their security for future generations. This is therefore a decisive moment for the relevant bodies to work towards championing the conservation of wetlands by educating the citizens and putting in place punitive measures to prevent further degradation of such vital resources. There is life yet in wetlands.