PRESS RELEASE

Growing A Movement for Bottom-Up Peatland Protection

2–5 June 2026 | Kisumu, Kenya

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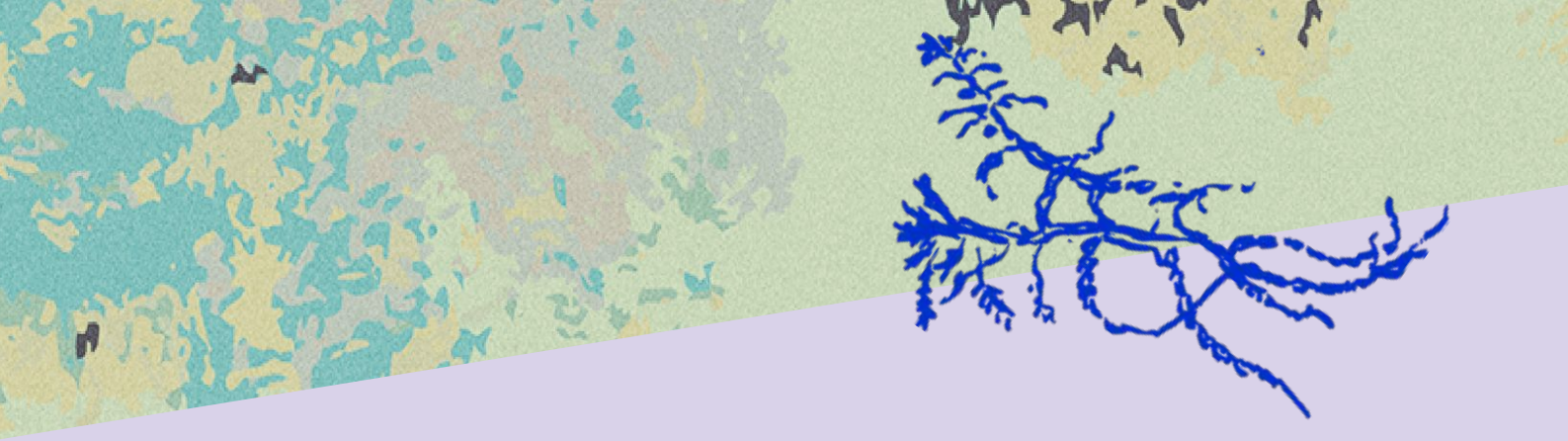
INSIGHTS INTO THE VENICE AGREEMENT ON PEATLAND'S 2026 GATHERINGS IN KISUMU, KENYA, AND IN PEATLANDS ACROSS 21 COUNTRIES

The Venice Agreement on Peatlands (VA) celebrates the success of its third biennial workshop series: 277 peatland custodians and collaborators – including artists, scientists, Indigenous leaders, activists, conservation practitioners, policymakers, community organisers, and cultural workers – from 21 countries came together across 18 Underground Workshops and an International Workshop in the papyrus wetlands of Nam Lolwe / Lake Victoria, Kenya. Weaving the ecological realities of the Nam Lolwe / Lake Victoria basin into a global conversation, the gatherings brought together knowledges from communities caring for peatlands in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, England, Germany, Iran, Kenya, the Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Romania, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and the USA.

The Third Global Workshop in Kisumu, Kenya, was timed to coincide with **World Peatlands Day (2 June 2026)** and **World Environment Day (5 June 2026)** and brought together more than 40 practitioners from Africa, the Americas, and Europe. While the histories, realities, and futures of African peatlands and their communities formed the grounding context for this transnational encounter, the gathering also built on experiences in bottom-up peatland protection generated through the Underground Workshops held in peatlands around the world.

Starting on World Peatlands Day, exchanges, artistic programming, field visits, and collaborative discussions focused on peatland protection, restoration, and reciprocal approaches to ecological care. Themes running throughout the 2026 gathering included decolonial conservation, the rights of peatlands, intersections of ecological and social justice, local vocabularies and lived knowledges, community-led stewardship, legal innovation, cultural revitalisation, and practices of reciprocal care between human and more-than-human communities.



At a time of accelerating ecological breakdown, with the Ebola crisis in East Africa, the war in Iran, the genocide in Gaza, and the rise of authoritarianism and militarisation around the world serving as acute reminders of the inextricable link between ecological and social realities that directly affect participants and their communities, the Venice Agreement seeks to nurture forms of collective responsibility toward the living worlds that sustain us.

INSIGHTS INTO FOUR DAYS OF EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGES AND STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION BETWEEN COMMUNITIES CARING FOR THEIR PEATLANDS

Day 1: Showcasing African Peatlands and Conservation Initiatives

The Third Global Workshop started with a showcase of African wetlands to celebrate World Peatlands Day on 2 June 2026. Participants shared insights into peatlands and the conservation initiatives they are involved with across East Africa, specifically in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and the Congo Basin. Speakers highlighted both the challenges and opportunities facing the diverse peatlands of Africa and the communities who care for them.

The gathering received an official welcome from **Judith Oluoch, the County Executive Committee Member (CECM)** in charge of Environment, Water, and Climate Change in Kisumu County, Kenya. She emphasised the importance of the wetlands along the shores of Nam Lolwe / Lake Victoria as shared ecosystems of regional and global significance, and called for collective conservation efforts across communities, sectors, and national borders.

Day 2: A Living Menu of How-Tos

The second day of the workshop, held at Tom Mboya Labour College, was dedicated to creating a **Living Menu of How-Tos** – a collection of practical, community-led tools for peatland action. Participants explored what the growing Venice Agreement community can do to support local peatland conservation efforts. Collective reflection on how knowledges, experiences, and resources can be shared across the growing peatland protection movement led to discussions about how to strengthen connections between communities working in peatlands around the world, and how to communicate the importance of these remarkable wetlands more widely. The group recognised the abundance of the international network of peatland custodians, organisations, artists, scientists, and activists already present at the gathering, as well as its power to amplify local voices and stories. The collectively operated digital commons for community exchange, peatland education, and transdisciplinary collaboration, **VA Commons**, launched during the Third Global Workshop and will offer a much-needed tool to implement and share this “Living Menu of How-Tos.”

Day 3: Learning from Dunga Swamp and the Venice Agreement Community Framework

Guided by **Ecofinder Kenya**, the Kenyan hosts of the VA Third Global Workshop, Day 3 brought participants to the local papyrus peatland and community where their work is based: **Dunga Swamp**. The conservation and community workers offered insights into the relationships between wetland ecologies, livelihoods, and everyday life in Dunga, and introduced local fishermen and women who spoke from their experiences.

After the tour, the group gathered at the Dunga Wetland Education Centre, Ecofinder's home base, to take part in ***Peat Pen Pals***, an ongoing initiative run with the youth-led peatland justice network **RE-PEAT**. The initiative invites people to write a letter to an as-yet-unknown pen pal, sharing what makes their local peatland special – through words, marks, or drawings, and in any form that carries some peat love. Around 50 letters were composed during the workshop, with half travelling to Chile and the other half to the UK, where they are now waiting to be handed over to their recipients.

The gathering closed at Grace Onyango Social and Cultural Centre in four stages. The group collectively reviewed the new Venice Agreement Community Framework, a proposal by the Organising Committee for the community-based self-organisation of the VA and for a collective agreement towards mutual care, accountability, and becoming. Through drawing and mark-making, participants reflected on the learnings and experiences from the past days, as well as their local foundations for peatland work, transforming them into ideas, gestures, and visual traces. These will inform the design of the **2026 Venice Agreement poster** (see below). The internal programme concluded with a ceremony of reflection and commitment, asking: what are we taking with us from this gathering, and what can we return – to the Venice Agreement community, to our local hosts, and to the peatlands that brought us together?

In the evening, the **WETSOUND Live Radio Show**, aired from Grace Onyango Social and Cultural Centre in collaboration with Radio Nam Lolwe FM and community radios in Valparaiso/Chile, Nairobi/Kenya, New York/USA, Barcelona/Spain, and Rotterdam/Netherlands, closed the Third Global Workshop with a public celebration. An initiative of **Sensing Peat** and artist and radio poet **Yasmeen Al-Qaisi**, the artistic radio action wove voices from the group and from Dunga communities, stories, songs, music, and live recordings from the papyrus swamp into a live broadcast (see below).

Day 4: Collective field trip to Yala Swamp

The last day of the gathering took participants beyond Kisumu to **Yala Swamp**, one of Kenya's largest freshwater wetlands and an ecologically significant peat-forming landscape on the northeastern shores of Nam Lolwe / Lake Victoria. The group visited different sites across this remarkable ecosystem, learning about its diverse flora and fauna, its role in water regulation and flood mitigation, and its importance as a habitat for countless species of birds, fish, reptiles, and plants.

Fed by the Yala River before it reaches Nam Lolwe / Lake Victoria, the swamp acts as a vast natural filter, helping to regulate water quality and supporting the livelihoods of surrounding communities, whose relationship with the wetland has been shaped over centuries. Alongside thriving wetland habitats, participants witnessed the pressures facing the ecosystem, including drainage, land conversion, and large-scale agricultural development. A visit to nearby sugarcane plantations offered a tangible reminder of the competing demands placed on these landscapes and the ongoing challenges of balancing economic development with long-term ecological health.

PARTICIPANT REFLECTION ON KEY TAKEAWAYS

"There is a need for robust efforts to raise the visibility of African peatlands; establishing context-specific definitions and generating reliable, comparable data on these peatlands are paramount first steps. Peatlands ought to be understood through local vocabularies, and their protection should be grounded in local knowledge, systems, and lived experiences to strengthen local action and ownership. Youth can play a key role through on-the-ground conservation, community education, scientific research, and technology-driven advocacy. The VA gathering featured WETSOUND Radio, demonstrating how media and the arts are valuable tools for raising awareness of peatlands as spaces of deep cultural, ecological, and ethical significance."

Joshua Amaitum, peatland community worker and conservation expert at FAO, participating from Uganda through the Peat4People project, reflects on key takeaways from the VA Third Global Workshop in Kisumu.

TOOLS FOR BOTTOM-UP PEATLAND PROTECTION DEVELOPED BY THE VA IN 2026

Worldwide Underground Workshops

Local initiatives are the heart of peatland conservation. Underground Workshops organised in different peatland communities around the world create spaces for activating peatland realities locally and gathering tools for their protection. As with past gatherings in Venice (2022) and Torres Vedras (2024), the Underground Workshops preceded the international event as the living, distributed core of the VA itself. From Argentina to Uganda and from Australia to Norway, 18 VA Underground Workshops activated local action and trans-local solidarity around one of the planet's most vital yet threatened ecosystems.

The Venice Agreement on Peatlands 2026 Poster

Every two years, the poster design is adapted to reflect the latest workshop and is directly shaped by its participants. Marks, drawings, keywords, and phrases gathered during the workshop feed into the redesign of the Venice Agreement poster. Its colours and graphic layout shift slightly each time, responding to the specific context of the gathering. The 2026 poster was designed by [name] in collaboration with participants from the 2026 VA workshop.

[LINK]

VA Commons: A Living Menu of How-Tos

In Kisumu, the VA launched a collectively operated digital commons for community exchange, peatland education, and transdisciplinary collaboration. Over the coming months, materials, stories, research, artistic practices, and organising tools emerging from peatland communities and collaborators around the world will be collected within the VA community. From autumn 2026, the platform will share these materials, including documentation of local actions, participatory conservation initiatives, arts projects, educational and policy materials, community knowledges, scientific and transdisciplinary research, and stories shared through oral, written, musical, and audiovisual forms.

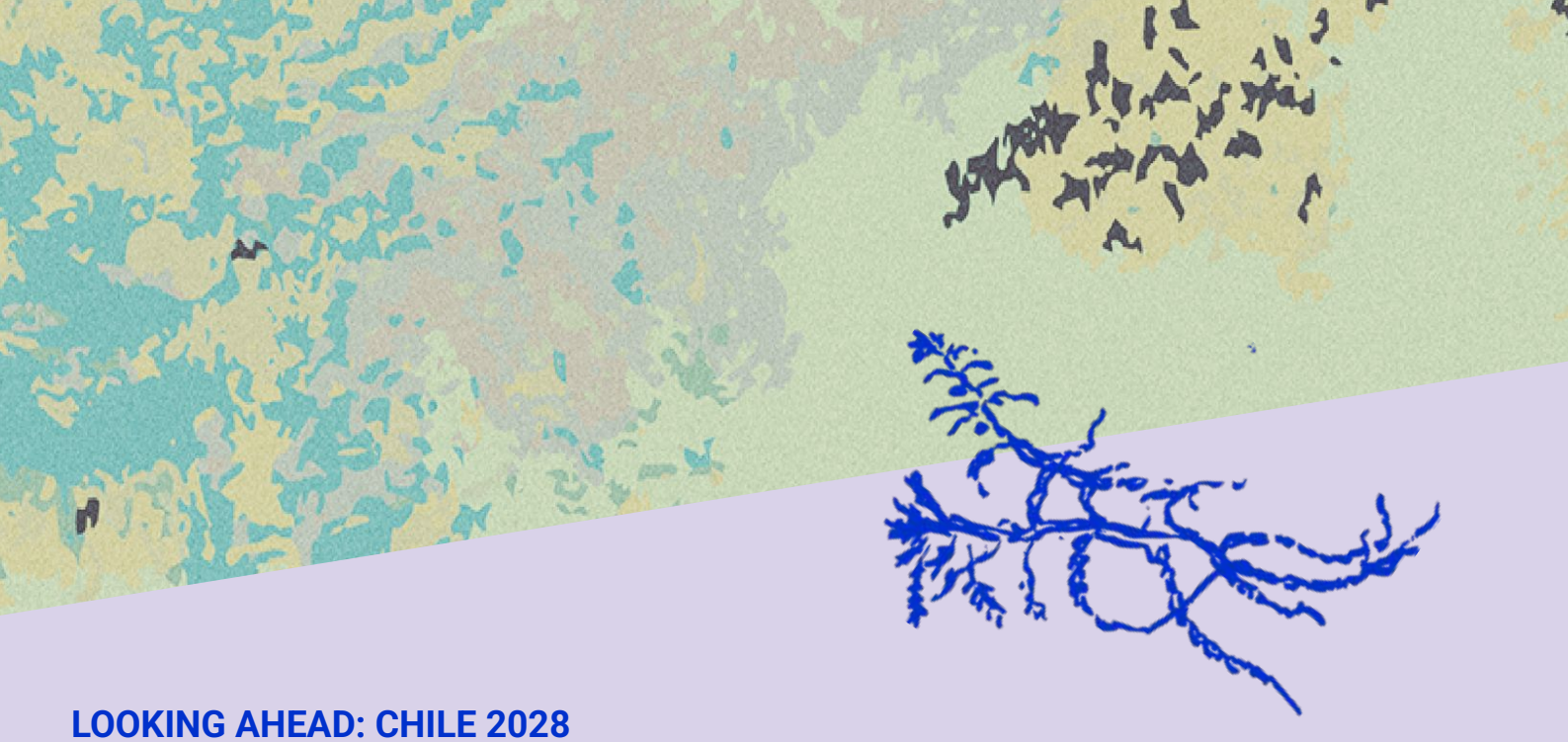
https://theveniceagreement.net/communities_map.html

WETSOUND Radio – Listening to Swamps to Imagine Otherwise

WETSOUNDS is an artistic radio action that aired from Dunga Swamp and Kisumu to give voice to the Venice Agreement gathering of peatland custodians. An initiative of **Sensing Peat** and the **Institute of Multi-Species Singing**, in collaboration with **Ecofinder Kenya**, **Radio Nam Lolwe 97.3 FM** (Kisumu), **pantea**, **Associació So, Soundcamp Cooperative**, and **Uhenga**, the participatory and mobile radio broadcast stories, sounds, music, and ways of imagining and relating to wetlands, alongside cultural practices, conservation experiences, and restoration initiatives shared by peatland inhabitants from the region, the African continent, and beyond.

A recording of the live radio show, originally aired on 4 June 2026 from Mama Grace Onyango Cultural and Social Center in Kisumu, is available online, together with broadcasts from Radio Nam Lolwe 97.3 FM and community radio stations around the world:

https://theveniceagreement.net/wetsound.html



LOOKING AHEAD: CHILE 2028

The Venice Agreement on Peatlands is a living process that continues to grow through each gathering, each underground workshop, and each new relationship formed across peatland landscapes. Building on the momentum of the 2026 workshops, the organising committee is pleased to announce that the Fourth Biennial International Workshop of the Venice Agreement on Peatlands will take place in Chile in 2028. Returning to one of the landscapes where many of the ideas that gave rise to the Venice Agreement first emerged, the next gathering will continue to strengthen reciprocal exchange, community-led peatland protection, and transdisciplinary collaboration across the growing international peatland movement.

CREDITS

The 2026 gathering in Kisumu, Kenya, and the accompanying global Underground Workshops were organised by the **VA Organising Committee** – **Antonieta Eguren**, **Camila Marambio**, **Caroline Vitzthum**, **Cisca Devereux**, **Fernanda Olivares**, **Leonard Akwany**, **Miguel Geraldes**, **Nicole Püschel**, and **Suza Husse** – together with **Ecofinder Kenya**, **RE-PEAT**, **WCS Chile**, **Sensing Peat**, **the Michael Succow Foundation** (partner in the **Greifswald Mire Centre**), **Hach Saye**, **W-U-Replay**, and the **United Nations Environment Programme's Global Peatlands Initiative (GPI)**.

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