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## Estimating Willingness to Pay as a Driver of Socio-Economic Transformation in the Yala Wetland Community

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### Abstract

The economic value of ecosystem goods and services provided by the Yala swamp ecosystem wetland was estimated using the Deliberative Choice Experiment Approach as a first step towards providing a social and economic base for promoting transformation and sustainable utilization of the wetland. The objectives of this study were to determine the social and economic factors that influence the willingness to pay for the ecosystem services and to estimate the willingness to pay level for the conservation of the Yala swamp ecosystem. The attributes assessed included fish richness and abundance (FISH), conservation of biodiversity area (IBA), Crop farming (FARMING), grazing area (GRAZING), and Wetland Management (GOVERNANCE), and price of vehicle (COST). Fishery, farming, grazing, and governance were found to be significant at the 5% confidence level thus affecting WTP. The mean willingness to pay for the improvement of governance attribute is the highest which is 3 bags of maize and it is significant at a 5% level. The mean willingness to pay for the improvement of IBA (Importance Bird Area) and farming is 0.12 bags of maize respectively. The respondents are willing to pay for two bags of maize for the improvement of fishery attributes in the ecosystem. Finally, the respondents are willing to pay for two bags of maize for the improvement of the grazing attributes. The research findings suggest that market-based conservation schemes aiming at improving the provision of ecosystem services through incentives for ecosystem services providers can be formulated to target specific interventions in the Yala swamp. The study demonstrates that governance is an important factor among the local communities and needs to be resolved if meaningful wetland-based development is to take place.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic transformation, Yala wetlands, willingness to pay

