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## Earth Day 2013: The ‘Face of Climate Change’ in the Lake Victoria basin

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**Face of Climate Change:** Landslides destroy property and lead to loss of lives in Eastern Uganda (Mountain Elgon) Photo: UCSD



**Face of climate change:** Crop (maize) failure due to delayed or poor rains. Photo: UCSD

Climate is East Africa’s most valuable natural resource that is a key determinant of the status of other natural resources (water, land, plants and animals) on which the economic and social development of this region depends. The [Lake Victoria basin](#) for example, like many parts of East Africa is vulnerable to undesirable effects of climate change that equates to the ‘real’ face of climate change, because of the low adaptive capacities.

However, it should be noted that this face of climate change is regularly reinforced by existing weak institutional capacities – local authorities, lack of skills on climate change adaptation and inadequate skills on disaster management, lack of equipment for disaster management, limited financial resources, poor planning, and above all, economies that entirely depend on exploitation of natural resources (wood, fish, agriculture, water, mining, wildlife and climate itself). There are observable changes in climate as evidenced by the increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.

Therefore, the ‘face of climate change’ to the ordinary resident of the Lake Victoria basin that currently supporting about 35 million people in Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda comes in form of impacts on their daily lives and sources of livelihood. It is a largely a burden to many people in this region especially on key sectors of their local economies like energy and agriculture.

### **Energy access: Reducing biomass with no options in sight**

In relation to energy, climate changes adversely is adversely affecting energy access mainly in form of firewood, charcoal for domestic use, bakeries, brick baking and other small / medium scale industries on which many people depend.

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The immediate result is scarcity and lack of affordability. In turn, communities resort to any remaining trees, vegetation cover within their reach (including catchment areas like wetlands, forest reserves and so on) resulting in degradation of key local catchment areas, siltation of rivers and streams, low fish catches, declining water quality and rising conflicts over access to water resources.

This is the case for many remnant natural vegetation cover around Lake Victoria in areas like Mwanza, Shinyanga regions in western Tanzania; Masaka, Mpigi and Mukono districts in Uganda and, Nyanza province in Kenya.

### **Agriculture: floods and droughts**

In relation to agriculture, the changing rainfall patterns (sometimes delayed or extended) come with a cost that exemplifies the face of climate change to the majority small scale farmers in the Lake basin.

On one side, sporadic extended rains (El Nino events) that produce abnormally high amounts of rainfall have turned out to be a nuisance as planted seeds rot due to excessive water in the soils, result in floods with loss of lives, property and creating food insecurity.

This is the case of the Buluckeke mudslide in Eastern Uganda where 15 houses were buried in late 2012. The same ugly face of climate change has continuously been experienced in Budalangi in western Kenya, where people continually keep losing property and rebuild their houses only for the floods to affect them again.

On the other side extended dry seasons (in the form of temperature raise and reduction in rainfall) have the effect of water scarcity for domestic and animals resulting in conflicts, more time being spent to look for water by children and women, food insecurity and increasing food prices leading to food shortages, nutritional deficiencies.

For the fisher folk, dry season results in low catches and loss of incomes, as well as failure of their boats to anchor due to reduced water levels. Higher temperatures may have an impact on fisheries productivity, the ecology and species composition in the lake ecosystem, in addition to the directly or indirectly impact on livelihood of the poor local communities (Hepworth et al., 2008).

### **What can be done?**

The [East African Sustainability Watch Network](#) – EA SusWatch Network (comprising Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development, SusWatch Kenya and Tanzania Coalition for Sustainable Development) have since 2011 been implementing a regional civil society monitoring project for Phase II of the [Lake Victoria Environmental management Project](#) (*LVEMPII CS Watch Project*).

Under this intervention, EA SuSwatch has assessed the East African Community Climate Change Policy (EACCCP) with regard to rural energy supply.

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This has been summed up in the *Lake Victoria Climate Brief No.1* that noted that use of energy (currently over 90% of the people use wood fuel) is a prerequisite for virtually all economic activities and crucial in accessing sufficient amounts of energy at acceptable cost to address the energy poverty that is rampant in this region.

The Lake Victoria Climate Brief No.1 argues for *more investments in innovative rural energy solutions in poor communities within the LVB* (and East Africa in general) that can also change the ‘face of climate’ *change*.

Specifically *the Brief* makes recommendations to the East African Community and other development actors in relation to the need for more sensitization of actors, local leaders and decision makers on its existence; and its wider popularization throughout the region, and streamlining institutional framework for its implementation; promotion of rural energy access (firewood, charcoal and briquettes, biogas, hydroelectricity, solar energy and liquefied petroleum gas and other options to wood fuel) in the Lake Victoria basin.

The *Lake Victoria Brief No.1* can be downloaded from here: <http://tinyurl.com/c7g55ma>