



World Fisheries Day 2014

Some questions before the proposed Nile Perch fishing ban on Lake Victoria could be implemented

'The East African Community should take measures for managing the lake as a single eco-system with multiple but harmonized jurisdictions and, controlled access in order to avoid tragedy of the commons' - Participants of Regional Stakeholders Conference on the Status of the Fisheries Resources of Lake Victoria and Their Management: Concerns, Challenges and Opportunities held at Entebbe Imperial Resort Beach Hotel, Uganda, 24th-25th February, 2005:

Fishing in Lake Victoria supports the livelihoods of over 30 million people either directly or indirectly providing food and income.

The Lake Victoria fishery has come under increasing pressure in the last two decades. Fish production peaked in the early 1990s and currently catches of most species are showing downward trends. Despite this, there is greater demand for fish of Lake Victoria, chiefly Nile perch (*Lates niloticus*) and 'dagaa' (*Rastrineobola argentea*), in the export market and for fishmeal respectively, as well as for domestic consumption.

The decline in fish quantity and quality in Lake Victoria has been largely blamed on unlicensed fishing techniques and fishermen. For example, the Lake Victoria biennial fisheries frame Survey (2012), by Kenya Marine Fisheries Research Institute (KEMFRI) called for the control of introduction of new fishing methods on the lake. According to KEMFRI, fishers nowadays only catch Nile perch, tilapia or *dagaa* but again most are caught while young further threatening future fishing opportunities.

The demand for Nile perch in European countries has intensified its commercial significance. For example, in Uganda fish is the second highest foreign exchange earner, next to coffee. High demand for fish, driven by local population growth and the growth of both regional and international markets, has led to over exploitation of fish in Uganda's lakes over the past decade. Regulations made it illegal to catch immature fish but the practice has continued. The resultant overfishing has led to an alarming decline in Nile perch stock in Lake Victoria. It is therefore clearly evident that some control measures need to be put in place to allow the fish stock to regenerate.

A framework survey conducted by Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO) in 2010 around Lake Victoria beaches revealed that fish breeding grounds had been extensively destroyed further jeopardising interventions for the regeneration of fish stocks.

Concerns

The current proposal to implement a periodic ban on fishing of Nile Perch on Lake Victoria, raises certain fundamental questions that need to be confronted by Partner States:

- a. What will happen to millions of people whose livelihoods depend on fish and related resource from Lake Victoria?
- b. What will happen to the communities who rely on fish as the core part of their nutrition?
- c. Before the ban is effected, how far will it incorporate the lessons from the current Lake Victoria Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS) efforts?
- d. How will the proposed fishing ban be enforced to avoid pitfalls met in implementation of existing MCS measures?
- e. What steps are in place to cultivate full support from Beach Management Units (BMUs), communities / fishers, local leadership and opinion leaders who are key to success of this intervention?

EA SusWatch Network is of the opinion that, unless properly executed the fishing ban will negatively affect the millions of poor community members living in the Lake Victoria basin and whose livelihoods depend either directly or indirectly on the fishing in Lake Victoria. For example, there is potential for the fishing ban to affect hundreds of fish processing plants around Lake Victoria and thousands of employees in the fish market chain. Ultimately, the nutrition of the millions of the community members around Lake Victoria who depend on Nile perch as a source of protein shall be affected, while the environmental situation stands to degenerate further as people search for alternatives, without guidance from relevant authorities across the Lake region.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the lack of commitment by the three Partner States (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) has continued to frustrate regional initiatives towards conservation of the fishery resources in Lake Victoria. For example, they have failed to fully honour their pledge of remitting an annual contribution of six hundred thousand US dollars (\$600,000) towards the 'Operation Save Nile Perch (OSNP)' initiative thus jeopardising the mission under the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organisation.

EA SusWatch believes that a blanket ban on fishing in Lake Victoria will be a mission in futility if the fundamental issues are not addressed and affected communities offered alternative livelihoods.

In view of the above, EA SusWatch Network urges the EAC Partner states of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda to show commitment towards the conservation of fishery resources in Lake Victoria by addressing the following salient issues:

1. **EAC Partner States should lead the way in compliance:** Partner States should without any further delay fulfil their financial obligation to ensure that the 'Operation Save Nile Perch (OSNP)' takes off.
2. **Fast-track harmonisation of fisheries and fisheries resource management legislation:** The EAC Partner States need to fast track the harmonisation of existing fisheries and fisheries resource management laws in order to pave way for smooth implementation of existing regional action policies and plans, for example the Regional Plan of Action for Management of Fishing Capacity on Lake Victoria, and the Strategy and Action Plan for Monitoring, Control and Surveillance of Fisheries on Lake Victoria
3. **Facilitate Community compliance:** There is an urgent need to facilitate the medium to long-term operations of Beach Management Units in view of their clear mandates as enshrined in the BMU legislations, as well as regularly involving them in planning, decision – making and regular interface with other actors related to fisheries and fisheries resources management in Lake Victoria (for example through the National Committee for Lake Victoria as directed by the LVFO Council of Ministers (Dar es Salaam, June 26, 1999).
4. **Scale-up alternative livelihood opportunities:** Individual and collective EAC interventions in the Lake Victoria should prioritise investment and support scale-up of tried and tested alternative livelihoods for communities. For example, support for successful aquaculture models, income generation activities through lending schemes and replicable conservation models like the LVEMPII Community Driven Development subprojects and from the Mount Elgon Region Ecosystem Conservation Programme (MERECP).

The East African Sustainability Watch (EA SusWatch) is a network of CSOs from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania constituted by: the Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD), Sustainable Environmental Development Watch Network (SusWatch Kenya), and Tanzania Coalition for Sustainable Development (TCSD). EA SusWatch Network vision is "A world where sustainable development principles drive social and economic development processes". EA SusWatch Network Regional Secretariat is hosted by UCSD in Kampala, Uganda. More: www.easuswatch.org

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