

# East African Civil Society Watchdog Project for Sustainable Development in the Lake Victoria Basin

Kenya Organization Environment Education  
(KOEI)

Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development  
(UCSD)

Tanzania Coalition for  
Sustainable Development  
(TCSD)

*“Our environment, the world in which we live and work, is a mirror of our attitudes and expectations.”* - Earl Nightingale (US Motivational writer and Author, 1921 – 1989)

## **Karibu to WSF Nairobi 2007: Another World is Possible for Sustainable Development!**

The Seventh Edition of the World Social Forum (WSF2007) will take place in Nairobi from January 20 – 25, 2007 with a theme: *“People’s Struggles, People’s Alternatives”*. From its modest origins in Porto Alegre in the year 2001 with a firm belief that “Another World is Possible”, the World Social Forum has mushroomed into a global counter-force challenging the assumptions of neo-liberal policies that have over the decades devastated Southern economies; marginalized women; disenfranchised youth; intensified the destruction of the environment; and deepened the exploitation of poor peoples around the world.

From Porto Alegre to Mumbai to Bamako to Caracas, Karachi and now Nairobi, the forces and the contingents of the World Social Forum have collectively expanded the democratic spaces of those seeking concrete, sustainable and progressive alternatives to imperialist globalization. WSF2007 will be an opportunity to showcase Africa and her social movements; Africa and her unbroken history of struggle against foreign domination, colonialism and neo-colonialism; Africa and her rich heritage of natural wealth, cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity; Africa and her reputation for embracing communities from around the world; Africa and her contributions to world civilization; Africa and her role in the quest for another possible, more progressive global human society.

KOEI, UCSD and TCSD are national networks that are part of the *Sustainability Watch* (SusWatch); a network of civil society organizations in 15 countries in the global South (Africa, Asia and Latin America), working to promote governments’ accountability on sustainable development through ongoing qualitative monitoring and constructive dialogue at the national and International levels, supported by the Danish’92 group. SusWatch focuses on the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the context of monitoring the implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. By doing so, SusWatch seeks to increase Southern civil society networks ability to engage more effectively in advocacy for pro-poor sustainable development.

The 17 SusWatch countries are, in Africa; Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe, in Latin America; Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua; in Asia, SusWatch is in the Philippines, Nepal, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

While the SusWatch Network recognizes the great achievement of the global community in forging international agreements to these issues, KOEE, UCSD and TCSD strongly believe that the world will never truly make poverty history unless world governments implement these agreements within their respective borders.

The three networks have contributed to the first International Sustainability Watch Report that focused on existing implementation barriers hindering the effective realization of sustainable development goals in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The process leading to this Report started in 2005, when the national networks in all the 15 participating countries produced *National Sustainability Watch reports* - independent assessments on progress in pursuit of international sustainable development targets and commitments at the national level.

Among others, the first International SusWatch Report focuses on, the level of (internal and external) financial resources allocated to sustainable development, actual implementation barriers to sustainable development; and linkages between poverty, environment, sustainable development and good governance. The Report therefore provides governments, civil society and donors with a useful perspective on how to improve the capacities to overcome the current implementation crisis in pursuit of poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.

### **Scaling up *SusWatch* in East Africa: focus on Lake Victoria**

As a result of the above report the three networks have agreed to work together to scale up the Sustainability Watch project in East Africa focusing on Lake Victoria. They recognize that the issues and challenges of achieving sustainable development including poverty and deprivation, related large-scale agricultural development, dwindling catchment forest resources, pollution from industries, provision of alternative affordable energy options for the fast growing population, water transport issues and challenges, state of fisheries in a global market, state of water and sanitation in the growing urban areas around the lake, are so broad that no one agency can be able to design interventions to adequately overcome them and realize it single handedly.

Therefore, the scale up of the SusWatch project in the Lake Victoria basin is against the backdrop of limited opportunities for Civil Society engagement with other key stakeholders and decision makers. The three networks also recognize that there is minimum engagement at local levels due to lack of capacity, information about sustainable development (including roles, responsibilities, possibilities and challenges towards sustainable development) amongst the communities.

The three year project (December 2006 – November 2009) supported by the Sweden Agency for International Development (Sida) / Lake Victoria Initiative seeks to: mainstream citizen participation in policy development, implementation and monitoring of sustainable development objectives and poverty reduction outcomes within the three national SusWatch partner

networks; Strengthen the capacities of participating organizations to effectively contribute to, and undertake advocacy and lobbying on sustainable development issues in the Lake Victoria basin; scale up networking and information sharing on sustainable development in the Lake Victoria basin in order to build synergies with other stakeholders including the (East African Community) EAC, Parliamentarians, bilateral and Multilateral donors, for greater impact in lobby and advocacy for sustainable development policies.

The three networks will therefore work to inform and influence the diverse and growing stakeholders of the East African integration particularly in the Lake Victoria basin so that they act in consonance and in support of the consultatively agreed regional vision for Lake Victoria. Specifically the project will target to influence ongoing work related to Lake Victoria development including the decision-making processes of Council of Ministers for Lake Victoria, work of Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC), work planned under phase II of Lake Victoria Environment Management Programme (LVEMP2) and the Nile Equatorial Lake Subsidiary Action Programme (NELSAP); and policies of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) through its relevant committees.

On the occasion of the World Social Forum in Nairobi, January 20 – 25, 2007, UCSD, KOEE and TCSD would like to join the rest of Global Civil Society by contributing to the agenda for international solidarity in defence of the environment and in pursuit of a nuanced pro-poor sustainable development path. The three Networks will share the key findings of the International SusWatch Report as it relates to Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania; and will organize a dialogue on Lake Victoria at WSF2007 acting as a platform for communities, groups and other interested actors to discuss the challenges facing the Lake and how to scale up civil society participation and a sustainable development society.

## **Key findings on blockades to Sustainable Development in East Africa**

Notwithstanding the diversity of contexts and cultures in the 15 countries analysed (including Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda), it was a common finding that strategies to achieve sustainable development have not been effectively implemented at the national level. The following **key barriers** to sustainable development have been identified:

- ***Market-oriented economic/trade development frameworks*** that do not pay serious attention to environmental constraints and do not invest sufficiently in mitigating the environmental impacts of development processes. For example in Uganda, budget allocations (as a percentage of the total budget) to health (one of the poverty reducing/ social sectors) was reduced by 26% from US\$ 508.66 billion in 2005 /6 to US\$ 375.38 billion in 2006/7 (UDN, 2006).

- **Weak governance** translating into an inability to produce enough equitable economic development and social services to catch up with population growth, a reluctance to challenge unfair trade liberalization regimes and to ensure investment in environmental protection.

This is also manifested by outright corruption and weak public financial management, aggravated by the lack of accountability to citizens, to be upheld by civil society. For example though the three governments of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania have ratified or accented to various international Conventions and Agreements on the importance of the Environment, only a small group of persons are privy to these instruments and as such the wider population has not gained from them (EAC secretariat, 2005). For example although Uganda Kenya and Tanzania are signatories to various Conventions on toxic chemicals and wastes, human health and the environment continue to suffer as a result of continued pollution of Lake Victoria ecosystem from both point and non-point contributions.

- **Weak sustainable development strategies and implementation** indicated by the lack of fully functioning, coherent and decentralized strategies, institutional mechanisms and capacity for sustainable development implementation, proper monitoring with emphasis on the interaction between poverty, environment and governance, and with extensive civil society participation, particularly at the community level. For example, the East African Community (EAC) suffers a challenges of coordination of the diverse actors who continue to carry out many interventions and investments in the Environment and Natural Resources Sector, but in a manner that may not holistically contribute to development in the sector (EAC secretariat, 2005).
- **Inconsistent policies**, where sustainable development principles are institutionalised in national laws, but are contradicted by investment and other policies at the expense of the environment, since few governments invest sufficiently in mitigating the impacts of natural resource exploitation. This is made worse by existence of *obsolete* policies and laws in the 3 countries due to lack of deliberate temporal review mechanisms that take into account regional and global development processes. For example the Uganda Local Government Act (1997) lists functions delegated to local governments by Central governments, some of which have other laws that are ill equipped to facilitate implementation of decentralised functions, under which they are supervised. For example the Public Health Act 1935, and Animal and Disease Act 1918 (Uganda SusWatch Report, 2005).
- **Inadequate resources** as demonstrated by the low public and private investment in sustainable development and the continuing imposition of some misguided conditionalities in official development assistance (ODA), as well as the highly unsustainable debt problem, which significantly restrains the capacity of countries to achieve the objectives of sustainable development. For a country where 23% of all the children under 5 are malnourished, Uganda faced a staggering 197 conditionalities attached to World Bank development finance grant (Eurodad, 2005).

In Tanzania, though certain economic sectors like mining, construction and manufacturing have seen dramatic growth over the last couple of years, agriculture - the sector which employs 71% of Tanzanian workforce – has grown dismally slow due to IMF conditionality (TASOET, 2006).

At the regional level, though the activities of the EAC have been growing, there is yet to be a corresponding increase in the partner countries' and development partner funds.

## **Proposed alternatives to support a more sustainable development paradigm in East Africa**

Interventions towards achieving sustainable development have been made more difficult due to problems associated with governance especially corruption, prevailing poverty levels where the three countries remain classified as Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). In order to secure a more sustainable development path, KOEE, UCSD and TCSD propose the following alternatives as a bridge for sustainable development to prosper in East Africa:

- East African Governments should seriously and urgently adopt national development strategies aimed at accelerating implementation of the MDGs (as all governments committed themselves to doing at the 2005 World Summit). Furthermore, though there are national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) in the three East African Countries, there is still a gap in fully customising the (EAC) regional cooperation in these national development strategies. **We specifically call on the EAC to seek more active involvement in the development of subsequent national PRSPs, and to put in place mechanisms to synthesize perspectives and understanding from individuals and groups with different backgrounds in the forthcoming EAC / Swedish Lake Victoria strategy review process so that a richer appreciation of regional cooperation for Lake Victoria make sense to all.**
- **Governance structures at national (and regional levels) should be strengthened.** The primary responsibility for implementing sustainable development lies at the national level. Progress hinges crucially on the nature of the development policies as well as political will, financial resources, consolidation of good and democratic governance and strengthening of public institutions' capacity. **Although programs for institutional capacity building in law enforcement and other fields may be useful, nurturing a culture of openness and transparency on public policy decisions (where communities along with technocrats, politicians, private sector, civil society and development partners are involved) to build trust remains a substantive gap especially at national levels.** Conflict amongst these multiple actors should be expected and must be taken as a signal for opening up a debate, but not closing it down. If this is taken on along with timely dissemination of information and consultation with stakeholders, as agreed in Principle 10 of the Rio

Declaration, KOEE, UCSD and TCSD believe that there is a likely to be a surge in citizen participation and responsibility in pursuing sustainable development in the Lake Victoria basin and beyond.

- **Governments, the EAC and development partners should strengthen local community action.** Sustainable development requires the **localization of the MDGs and other international obligations related to sustainable development.** KOEE, UCSD and TCSD believe that Community based organisations, local governments and other grass root level stakeholders are best placed to adapt and make them locally relevant according to local priorities and needs.
- **Donors and other development partners to East Africa should cut back the number of binding and non-binding conditions attached to their lending.** In particular, the World Bank should stop its tendency to micro-manage reform in these countries which results in crooked settings of development priorities with sustainable development continuing to be at the lowest end.

### **Join us during the WSF 2007 in Nairobi January 20 – 25, 2006!**

To express your solidarity for sustainable development and the environment please join KOEE, UCSD and TCSD; and other SusWatch activities as follows:

- ❑ **Neglected Commitments, Neglected Hopes for Another World** – A civil Society Assessment on Implementation Barriers to Sustainable Development in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Sustainability Watch Network) on January 23, 2007
- ❑ **Public participation in transboundary water resources within a market economy: challenges, opportunities and lessons for Lake Victoria**
- ❑ **Advocacy for multi-stakeholder dialogues in large infrastructure development in Africa** – Presentation of an assessment study by African Rivers Network / National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) and ANEW

**For more information about the *East African Civil Society Watchdog Project* and the *International Sustainability Watch Report*:**

#### **Uganda**

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#### **International Sustainability Watch Report:**

[http://www.suswatch.org/index.php?option=com\\_remository&Itemid=90&func=fileinfo&id=105](http://www.suswatch.org/index.php?option=com_remository&Itemid=90&func=fileinfo&id=105)