

A Monthly from the East African Sustainability Watch Network founded by Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD), Tanzania Coalition for Sustainable Development (TCSD) and SusWatch Kenya

East African CSOs provide comments to EALA on the Draft Lake Victoria Law



The East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) is considering the Lake Victoria Basin Commission Bill (2019) with the aim of enacting the Lake Victoria Basin Commission Act which will be an act of the East African Community (EAC). The object of the Bill is to provide for the Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC) as an institution of the EAC, and is premised on Chapter Nineteen of the Treaty for the Establishment of the EAC, particularly Article 114, under which the Partner States agreed to cooperate in the management of their water and marine resources, and specifically, to establish a body for the management of Lake Victoria.

Until January 31, 2020 the Committee on Agriculture, Tourism and Natural Resources of EALA is collecting views from the stakeholders on the Bill, which is accessible for download on the LVBC website www.lvbcom.org and the East African Community website www.eac.int.

The Bill provides for the LVBC whose objectives shall be to promote equitable economic growth; measures aimed at eradicating poverty; sustainable utilization and management of natural resources; the protection of the environment within the Lake Victoria basin and compliance with safety of navigation.

On September 4, 2007, UCSD, Tanzania Coalition for Sustainable Development, SusWatch Kenya (EA SusWatch Network) and the East African Communities Organization for management of Lake Victoria resources (ECOVIC) submitted comments on the then LVBC Bill, 2007 Supplement to the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) that was under consideration during this period (10 – 29 September 2007). Unfortunately it has taken this long to come back for public review. Nevertheless, building on this earlier submission, EA SusWatch Network together with INFORSE East Africa have pointed out some issues for the Lake Victoria Commission Bill (2019). Based on a practitioner point of view, the CSO networks have pointed out the following issues for the attention of the EALA Committee on Agriculture, Tourism and Natural Resources:

- Section 11(4): National Focal Points has a better elaboration of the roles of the National Focal Point than the previous version. We are of the view that this could be expounded further in conformity with the regionality of the Commission and in support of local and national actions that contribute to the regional cooperation on sustainable development of Lake Victoria in view of the regional and global challenges like e-waste, climate change, pollution, and illegal fishing practices, among others that do not respect borders.
- Given the current state of affairs (evidenced by numerous scientific reports on the declining environmental health with repercussions on the 40 million dependent communities), the role of oversight for Lake Victoria needs to be given more prominence and clear responsible institution(s). In particular the CSOs have raised the questions: Who takes regional responsibility for lack of implementation of the harmonised laws, standards, and other regionally set obligations? ; Where can stakeholders openly air their complaints, suggestions regarding the (above) regional mandates and responsibilities that are not being discharged at all / fully?; and intergenerational equity (the right to development of the present and future generations in the Lake Victoria region)

Read the Lake Victoria Commission Bill (2019) from: <https://bit.ly/2uHqRdc>

East Africa Needs to be on ‘Radar’ in 2020 - the ‘Super year’ for Biodiversity



In 2020 the Convention on Biological Diversity will adopt a post-2020 global biodiversity framework as a stepping stone towards the 2050 Vision of “Living in harmony with nature”. According to the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) secretariat, 2020 is a ‘Super Year’ for biodiversity, but it depends on the outcomes of 5 major Global moments.

These include the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) that will take place in July 2020; the negotiations on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) for the first time,

that is expected to agree for the first time!) a Global Treaty to protect and restore the High Seas; The 75th birthday of the United Nations will be celebrated during the opening of the UN General Assembly where Global leaders are expected to take this opportunity to declare a ‘Planetary Emergency’ and present actions on how to address it; The UN Nature Summit hosted by the Convention on Biological Diversity in October in China is where a new global framework will be agreed that aims at reversing the catastrophic loss of nature by 2030; At the UN Climate Summit (COP26) in November in Glasgow, countries have the opportunity to present improved national climate action plans which include Nature Based Solutions, helping to keep global warming below 1.5°.

But what is at stake in East Africa in relation to biodiversity? How can East Africa step up in 2020 and take urgent action to protect and restore nature in light of the current climate crisis along with the planetary emergency? Who should take lead on these tasks building on the momentum of the about global moments?

According to the East African Community, the region is well endowed with a variety of ecosystems that provide varied services, as well as habitats for a wide range of species. Burundi has 13 protected areas covering 100,000 ha of land. About 172,000 ha (or 6.7%) of Burundi is forested. These ecosystems harbor 2,500 higher plant species, 145 bird species, 107 mammal species, 79 reptile species, 18 amphibian species and 5 fish species. East Africa hosts part of the global biodiversity hotspots that include the Coastal forests of Eastern Africa, the Albertine graben, and Lake Victoria.

A Regional assessment report (2018) on biodiversity and Ecosystem services for Africa by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) noted that biodiversity and nature’s contributions in Africa are economically, socially and culturally important, essential in providing the continent’s food, water, energy, health and secure livelihood, and represent a strategic asset for sustainable development and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the Assessment also notes that the current loss and decline of biodiversity, which is due to human activities, is reducing nature’s contributions to people, and undermining human well-being. Unregulated land cover change, i.e., habitat change and over-exploitation, has been the primary cause of biodiversity loss to date, but given Africa’s extreme vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, climate change is likely to be a dominant driver of change in the future. The likely doubling of Africa’s population by 2050, coupled with rapid urbanization, will place tremendous additional pressure on the continent’s biodiversity and nature’s contributions to people. A similar view was shared in the UNEP / WCMC mid-term review (2016) of progress towards the Aichi biodiversity targets (that are to be replaced by a new global framework later on this year), identified several threat to biodiversity in Africa that identified the negative impacts of climate change on species and ecosystems as exacerbating the effects of human-induced pressures.

Therefore, for East Africa, the ‘super year 2020’ is the time for stewards at all levels to reflect on how to reverse these negative trends based on the existing plans and frameworks (for example the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans). This requires fast tracking of their implementation (through scaling up human and sustainable financing, coherence and coordination of institutions, policies, strategies and legislations) given the level of insufficiency in safeguarding the fast disappearing species and ecosystems (what is termed as a ‘planetary emergency’)

Above all, East Africa needs to be on the ‘radar’ (given the global climate emergency), due to growing number of climate change related effects including 2019 Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), attributed to the abnormal wet conditions in Africa; and the current locust plague. Part of this efforts should be to strengthen East African Community Partners’ Climate Plans in 2020 (Nationally Determined Contributions) to embrace local solutions, in addition to strengthening resilience and coping mechanisms for both people and the nature on which they depend.

East Africa Should Address Weaknesses in Implementation of the Aichi Targets in the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework



As part of 2020, the “Super Year” for nature, Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, the acting executive secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), warns that “humanity will have given up on planet Earth if world leaders cannot reach an agreement this year to stop the mass extinction of wildlife and destruction of life-supporting ecosystems.”

The current Strategic Plan of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2011-2020) with five interdependent Strategic Goals, includes the 20 time-bound, measurable targets (Aichi targets) to be met by the year 2020 (expiry date).

It is for this purpose that Parties to the CBD are currently negotiating a Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, scheduled to be completed this October 2020 in Kunming, China at fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15). COP15 is therefore expected to update the Convention’s strategic plan adopting a new strategic framework the Post 2020 global biodiversity framework.

The UNEP/WCMC Report (2016): The State of Biodiversity in Africa provided a Mid-term review of progress towards the Aichi biodiversity targets. According to the assessment that used a five-point scale, results for 3 targets (Target 4 – Sustainable production and consumption; Target 5 - Habitat loss halved or reduced; Target 12 - Extinction prevented, showed a move away from target (things are getting worse rather than better).

On the other hand, there was no significant overall progress (overall, we are neither moving towards the target nor moving away from it) Target 6 -Sustainable management of marine living resources; Target 8 - Pollution reduced; Target 9 - Invasive alien species prevented and controlled; Target 10 - Pressures on vulnerable ecosystems reduced; and Target 15 - Ecosystems restored and resilience enhanced

Aichi Biodiversity Target 12 calls for the establishment of conservation plans for species that are most threatened with extinction. Thus, a primary step to achieve Aichi Target 12 is to understand the extinction risk posed to species through making conservation assessments of targeted species. Achievement of Target 12 is linked to progress towards many of the other Aichi Targets. Species threat assessments form the baseline of biodiversity data to inform decision making, for example for the identification of sites for Protected Areas (Target 11), ensuring no species is threatened through trade (Targets 4 and 6) and for the control and eradication of alien invasive species (Target 9). According to the UNEP/WCMC Report (2016), the major cause of species declines in Africa is the loss of habitat. In addition to habitat loss, the other main threat to African species is human use, which includes many different subsistence uses (for example timber, firewood, medicines, and bush meat).

The UNEP/WCMC Report (2016) warns that there is considerable pressure on some of the iconic species in Africa: elephants and rhinos, gorillas and chimps, lions and other predators. Much of this pressure comes from the illegal trade in wildlife for various uses: ivory for carvings, rhino horns and lion bones for Asian medicines, chimps and gorillas for pets and for food, etc. This crisis is affecting populations of many species and is posing a very significant conservation challenge.

Hence for East Africa, the post 2020 global biodiversity framework needs to build on progress made in implementation of the Aichi targets secure their continued implementation. As summed up by Friend of the Earth International’s submission on the post-2020 Framework, ‘Over and above the existing Aichi targets, there is need to: halt the drivers of biodiversity loss and ensure regulation is in place to do so; monitor investment that is harmful for biodiversity and set up plans to stop it; give full cooperation and enhance the role of Indigenous peoples and local communities, who are proven to be the best guardians for biodiversity; and increase biodiversity in areas where humans live’

More about preparations for the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework: <https://www.cbd.int/conferences/post2020>