

**The East African Communities' Organization for Management of Lake
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**Beach Management Units: Overview of the Mandate,
Structures, Challenges and Proposals for their strengthening
and improvement**

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1. Background

The three East African Partner States sharing Lake Victoria, namely, the Republic of Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and the Republic of Uganda formed the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization by signing a Convention in 1994 to jointly manage the fisheries of Lake Victoria. The objective of the Organization are to foster cooperation, harmonise national measures and develop and adopt conservation and management measures for the sustainable utilisation of the living resources of Lake Victoria. Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization is a specialised and autonomous regional institution of the East African Community (EAC) mandated to coordinate the management of the fisheries resources of Lake Victoria. (*EAC, 2000, 2003, 2004*).

In the past, the Partner States promoted community participation, basically, through consultations, training, research, provision of social infrastructure and project implementation. The fisher communities' involvement in fisheries management was limited to consultation and policy implementation, with negligible contribution to policy development. The evolution of the fisheries from artisanal to commercial and industrialisation to serve the growing domestic, regional and international market demands led to a multiplicity of factors. The fishers were exposed to outside influence, which affected their perception and knowledge. Fishing pressure and the use of illegal gears and methods increased. The immediate cash transactions, particularly in the Nile perch fishery, attracted more entry into fishing, processing and trade and the ready market encouraged heavy investment in industrial fish processing.

The requirement to conform to international fish quality and safety standards led to frequent bans imposed on fish exports to Europe between 1998 and 2001. The crossborder fishing conflicts in 2001/2002 highlighted the need for good neighbourly co-existence amongst the fisher communities across the borders. The conflicts also expounded the urgency to harmonise the fisheries laws and for the communities to understand their own country's laws and those of their neighbours (*LVFO, 2004, 2006*). These and many other underlining factors showed that resource users should cease to be mere recipients of policies and measures and should be directly involved in issues that directly affect their livelihood. The situation called for new approaches that could allow direct involvement of the fishers in policy decision making and resource management.

In 2002, the LVFO Council of Ministers adopted the co-management approach in the management of Lake Victoria fisheries resources and approved the Beach Management Units (BMUs) as the foundation for co-management. Co-management is defined as "a partnership that harnesses the knowledge and capacities of those who have a shared interest in the sustainability of a fishery towards promoting this common end" (*LVFO, 2005*). On Lake Victoria the partnership is between the fisheries resource users and Government. The BMUs concept started in Tanzania in 1998, with the support of the

World Bank/GEF funded - Lake Victoria Environment Project (LVEMP 1), as an initiative to involve fishers in fisheries management.

2. Formation of BMUs

The “Beach Management Units (BMUs)” is defined as an organisation of *fisher folk at the beach* (boat crew/baria, boat owners, managers, charterers, fish processors, fish mongers, local gear makers or repairers and fishing equipment dealers) *within a fishing community*.

The LVFO through the Implementation of a Fisheries Management Plan (IFMP) project, funded by the European Union, supported the formation and re-formation of the Beach Management Units (BMUs in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Fisheries Co-management is one of the components of the Fisheries Management Program under the Lake Victoria Fisheries Management Plan. Immediately after the adoption of the BMU concept, the LVFO Co-management Regional Working Group (RWG) embarked on the task of developing and harmonising operational guidelines for BMUs, which was concluded in May 2005. Out of 1500 fish landing beaches, the fisher communities formed 1069 BMUs around the lake in accordance with regionally agreed Harmonised Guidelines for Beach Management Units (2005) (*LVFO, 2007*).

The formation of the BMUs in Uganda began in 2005 and was completed that same year. In Kenya, the reformation of BMUs started in September 2005 and finalised in September 2007 with registration by the Department of Fisheries. In Tanzania, the reformation process began in March 2007 and was completed with registration in September 2007. The formation and reformation involved sensitization of fisheries staff, government officials, local politicians and fishing communities. The election of a BMU committee followed the harmonized and national BMU guidelines. By December 2007 all the Partner States had legally empowered the BMUs (*LVFO, 2008*).

After the election all BMUs were provided with training in BMU operations (orientation), fisheries management, financial management, making of bylaws, and some in fish handling. The BMUs have received support from fisheries staff through mentoring visits, through which information and advice is provided. The BMUs have been involved in various data collection including being enumerators in Catch Assessment Surveys, Frame surveys, Socio-economic surveys and RPOA-Capacity activities (*LVFO, 2008*).

3. Harmonised BMU Guidelines

The Harmonised BMUs Guidelines (HBG) set out the structure and functions of BMUs and a table of indicators for assessing the performance of BMUs. The HBG stipulates that a BMU must be at a gazetted or designated fish-landing site, within existing local government boundaries and an operational area that has a well-defined boundary, agreed in consultation with local government/local fisheries staff. A BMU must have at least 30 boats and those with less must join with other nearby landing sites to reach or exceed this total. The joint BMU should be registered under the name of the beach with the largest

number of boats. In cases of geographical or administrative difficulties the Local Government Administration and the Fisheries Department officials provide guidance.

3.1. BMU Committee

The BMU Committee should have 9-15 democratically elected members by the BMU Assembly, who should include the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer, and any other post defined by National Guidelines or by the BMU Assembly. Sub-committees headed by members of the main committee may be formed as needed and depending on the BMU's bye-laws.

The representation of the BMU committee should be approximately as follows:

- (a) 30 % boat owners;
- (b) 30 % crew (fishing labourers/barias who do not own boats);
- (c) 30% other stakeholder groups (including fish processors, boat makers, local gear makers or repairers, fishing equipment dealers and managers);
- (d) 10% fish mongers/traders. (LVFO, 2005)

4. Mandate of BMUs

The mandate of the BMUs is enshrined in the BMU Assembly which is the supreme organ of the BMUs. The BMU Assembly is empowered to elect, approve and remove the BMU Committee members. The Assembly approves the BMU management and development plans, budgets, audited accounts and byelaws presented by the BMU Committee. The BMU assembly also has the powers to disqualify a BMU member if is a habitual offender in fisheries malpractices; or repeatedly displays behaviour damaging to BMU objectives.

4.1. Functions of BMUs

The BMU Committee derives its powers from and serves the BMU Assembly. The functions of the BMUs performed by the BMU Committee are stipulated as follows:

- (a) In collaboration with central government or local government, maintain and keep a register of all boat owners and their fishing equipment, fishers and BMU members operating from the beach;
- (b) Decide on local markings for identification of fishing gears and outboard engines by licensed fishers;
- (c) Participate in vetting of boat owners and fishers for licensing and, in collaboration with government officials, ensure licenses are granted to those registered with the BMU;
- (d) Propose bye-laws for endorsement by the District Authorities and enforce them;
- (e) Identify fish breeding areas on the basis of indigenous knowledge and identify and clearly demarcate prohibited fishing zones;
- (f) Undertake Monitoring, Control and Surveillance in collaboration with the relevant authorities;
- (g) Assist in the collection of data for Frame Surveys, catch monitoring and socio-economic investigations, using agreed formats;

- (h) Inspect and record visiting boats and give permission to land where appropriate;
- (i) Improve sanitation and hygiene at landing sites
- (j) Network with other BMUs to ensure marketing and fair pricing of fish and fish products;
- (k) BMU committee should be part of the development organ in their areas of jurisdiction;
- (l) Preparation of annual workplans, budgets and present them to the BMU Assembly for approval;
- (m) Formulate funding proposals, make financial reports and present them to the BMU Assembly for approval.

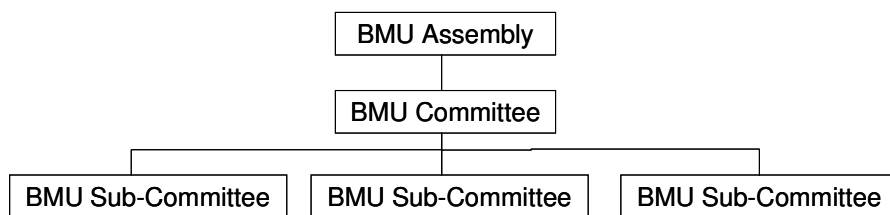
The roles of the BMU Committee Office bearers are derived from the above function and responsibilities.

The BMUs can generate some of the funds from the fisheries industry for funding their operations.(through membership fee, fisheries tendering systems, service charges on the use of BMU assets; landing site user fees; movement permit, fines levied for infringements of bye-laws; micro-projects). The BMU can acquire assets but the BMU Committee must first seek approval of the BMU Assembly before the acquisition.

5. Structures

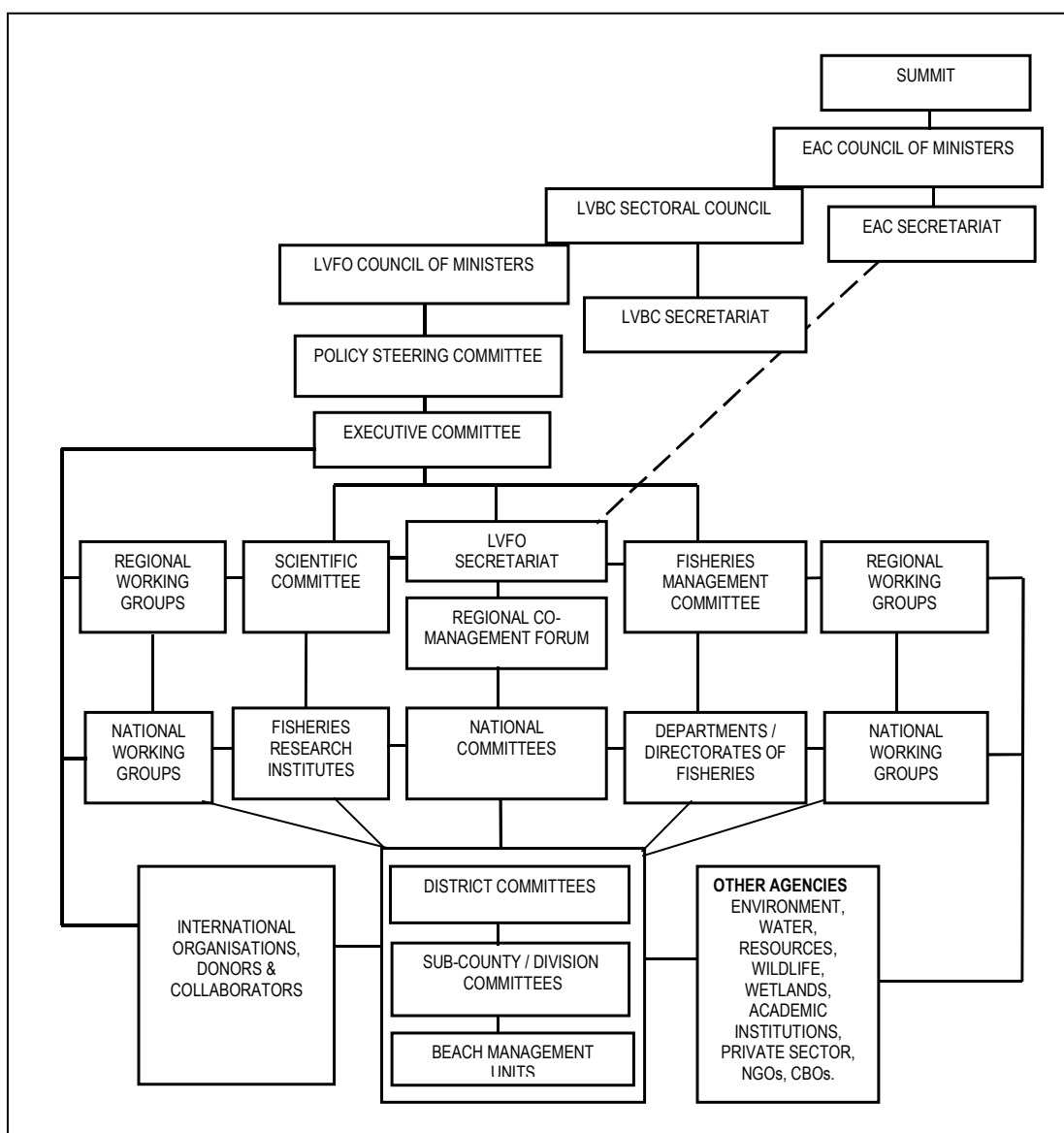
The BMU may associate with other BMUs to form higher BMUs networks for purposes of developing lake wide management plans. The BMUs can also associate with other agencies to form co-management committees up to the national and regional level.

Fig 1: BMU Organogram



The BMU Committee, in the performance of its functions should consult and cooperate with local governments, relevant agencies of central government and lead agencies.

Fig. 2: LVFO Organogram



Source: LVFO, 2005

6. BMUs network

The BMU have formed networks up to National level in Kenya and Uganda and up to District level in Tanzania. A regional BMUs network will be formed and this will represent the BMUs in LVFO Fisheries Management Committee, Scientific Committee and National Committees. The National Chairpersons from Kenya, Uganda and the interim Chairperson from Tanzania for the first time attended, as observers, the Second Emergency Session of the LVFO Council of Ministers held on 3rd – 6th November 2009 in Nairobi, Kenya to review the implementation of the Council of Ministers decisions to remove illegal fishing and illegal trade in undersized fish from Lake Victoria (LVFO, 2009).

6.1. Benefits of BMUs in Fisheries Co-management

Fisheries co-management, as stipulated in the HBG, is expected to:

- a) allow incorporation of knowledge and understanding of all stakeholders in the decision-making and harnessing of their diverse capacities in implementation
- b) facilitate infusion of resource users' indigenous and practical knowledge with technical knowledge empowering them to address local overexploitation or destructive fishing activities; and, to lobby for suitable changes in policy.
- c) allow the incorporation the fishers' views on the design and implementation of management interventions, boosting the legitimacy of the agreed regulations and increase fishers' willingness to adhere to them.
- d) facilitate increased local data collection and information exchange between resource users and government agencies, thereby, reducing government costs and further improves management decision making.
- e) enhance the position of disadvantaged groups by giving them direct representation in decision making.
- f) provide resource users access to the benefits that can be derived from collective action, which include increasing the security of fisher livelihoods (by reducing thefts, piracy and inter-group conflicts), sustainability of fish catches, improving value added and better fish prices.
- g) enable service providers to build awareness and capacity across a wide variety of issues, such as HIV/AIDS, alternative income generating activities and savings mobilisation (LVFO, 2005, 2007).

Benefits realised by BMUs include:

- a) Legal right to control access in fishing, particularly through vetting fishers for licensing and participating in MCS.
- b) Fishers are developing a sense ownership of the resource. Fishers suggest stern measures, such as a closed season for the recovery of the Nile perch, which shows great concern..
- c) BMUs are used as entry points for programs geared at improving the welfare in the fisher communities.
- d) Fishers are being involved in policy decision making forums such as, consultative meetings and workshops and the LVFO Statutory meetings.
- e) Improved quality of data collection, for example, the data collected by BMUs on RPOA-Capacity Project is being used to monitor fishing effort on Lake Victoria.
- f) The BMUs have established networks up to the national level, which has increased their visibility.
- g) Fish handling has improved due to improvement in hygiene. Each BMU has a sanitation and hygiene committee which is responsible for the cleanliness of the beaches. Since 2002 no fish bans have been imposed on fish exports from Lake Victoria.

- h) Politicians now look at BMUs as viable constituencies and some BMUs have used this opportunity to lobby for community facilities, particularly through the Constituents Development Fund (Kenya and Uganda) and Local government (Tanzania).

Challenges

The major challenge to BMUs is to assure livelihood for their communities through proper management and sustainable wise use of the fisheries resources. A number of factors that impinge on the BMUs operations affect their efficiency and effectiveness, and these include:

a) Declining fish stocks

A decline in fish stocks result in reduced catches and incomes, which directly affects the livelihood of the fishers. In 2007 the catches remained close to 1 million tonnes but the beach value reduced by 22% due to decrease of high value Nile perch and dominance of low value dagaa and other pelagic species. The Nile perch catches reduced by 18% and the value decreased by 34% whereas the Dagaa catches increased by 33% the value increased by 19% (*Muhoozi, et al., 2008*). In view of increasing market demand and lack of alternative livelihood, the fishers are propelled to increase fishing effort/pressure, increase illegal fishing and illegal trade in undersized fish, among others. The LVFO has come up with a Nile perch recovery plan which is being implemented by the Partner States (*LVFO, 2008*). In February 2009 the Council of Ministers adopted a number of measures for the Nile perch fishery which limits the minimum gillnet mesh size to 7 inches and hook sizes of 9 – 4 as well as a minimum mesh size net of 10mm for Dagaa/Omena/Mukene fishing (*LVFO, 2009*).

b) Law Enforcement

Participation in law enforcement complicates the BMUs' position as exploiters of the resource and as enforcers of fisheries measures. The lack of clear understanding of the BMUs role in enforcement, weak fisheries laws, non-deterrent penalties and BMU bylaws, political interference including arbitral release of culprits and impounded goods, lack of sustainable financing of BMU monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) patrol operations, inadequate support from police/security organs, low political will and commitment, poor cooperation between BMUs and District Officials and lack of reciprocal reward to successful BMUs are major concerns to BMUs. The LVFO through the EU-funded IFMP has supplied 35 patrol boats with engines to districts around the lake to be used for district and interdistrict patrols (*LVFO, 2007*).

c) Sustainable Funding

Lack of sustainable funding hinders the operations of the BMUs. Roles have been handed down to BMUs with no requisite financial support. BMUs are expected to generate funds from their operations, such as tendering for government revenue collection at the beaches, landing site user fees; movement permit, fines levied for infringements of bye-laws, which are highly variable sources. Poor saving, credit and investment culture amongst the fishers, poor record keeping, resource mobilisation and

financial management affect the operations of the BMUs. A study was carried out to assess the accessibility of banks for BMUs and identify financial institutions and accounts of most relevance to the BMUs. Only 30% of the artisanal fishers, fish traders and processors have bank accounts (*Yongo, at el, 2008*), in banks located in distant towns. The LVFO also commissioned a study on sustainable funding of BMUs to advise on the best mechanism to fund the BMUs operation. During the LVFO Monitoring and Outreach Mission around Lake Victoria undertaken in March – April 2009, the Directors urged the District leaders to plough back some of the revenue generated from fisheries to the BMUs, particularly to support MCS activities (*LVFO, 2009*)

d) Marketing

Marketing issues are complex because of they expose the vulnerability of the fishers. The lack of preservation facilities and negotiation skills lowers their bargaining powers. BMUs complain of unfair trade and practices between the fish factories and fishers, low fish prices at the beaches, high prices of fishing inputs and demand for undersized fish by fish factories and regional traders. The need to conform to international fish quality and safety requirements in the absence of basic fish handling facilities at the beaches is also a major concern. Less than 1% of the 1433 fish landing beaches on Lake Victoria have cold rooms (*Yongo et al., 2008*). The LVFO/IFMP with EU support is constructing fish landing facilities at 18 beaches around the lake to provide fish handling and preservation facilities (*LVFO, 2004*).

e) Fishing conflicts

Fishing conflicts including insecurity and piracy have been major concerns since the fishing became a booming business. Crossborder fishing conflicts between neighbouring BMUs is a result of competing for the lucrative fishing grounds, with Nile perch being the underlying cause. Of recent these have been manifested into national boundary conflicts on Migingo Islands (2009). Conflicts within a BMU, between BMU leaders or law-abiding fishers with illegal fishers have resulted into threats to BMU leaders, destruction of property and loss of life. Theft of fishing gears and fish and ambush of fishers on water have resulted into loss of money, equipment, lives and increased insecurity. The LVFO was instrumental in handling the crossborder conflicts of 2001/2002 and developed a regional strategy on crossborder fishing and fish trade being implemented by the Partner States (*Sobo, at el, 2006*)

f) Fishers vulnerability

The vulnerability of fishers is intensified by poor access to social services. The fishers' priority concern is more on welfare issues such as HIV and AIDS rather than resource sustainability (*Nyeko, 2008*). This perspective affects the functionality of the BMUs as fisheries management institutions. The fisher communities lack most of the basic services such feeder roads, schools, health facilities, water and sanitation facilities, community centres, electricity and water transport. The LVFO/IFMP with EU supported the construction of social/community infrastructure at 15 beaches around the lake which includes classroom blocks, health centres, water and sanitation facilities. HIV and AIDS prevalence is high amongst the fisher communities, particularly the island communities. The LVFO developed a regional strategy for improving the health status of fishing communities, particularly with respect to HIV/AIDS and water borne diseases

(bilharzias) in 2006. The Organization is implementing, with the support of the EAC/AMREF Lake Victoria Partnership, a regional project on HIV and AIDS amongst the fisher communities, that aims at establishing a network to ensure that HIV and AIDS services reach the communities (*LVFO,2007*)

7. Monitoring of BMUs Performance

The first annual performance monitoring of BMUs was carried out in September 2007. Out of 1069 BMUs 1002 (94%) were monitored. The 6% were not monitored due to the limited time, funds and personnel to complete the field work. The results showed that:

- a) BMUs performed fairly well in administration, particularly in representation and participation of boat crew and women in BMU Committees. But need to improve in updating BMU registers and in calling regular meetings.
- b) Many BMUs performed poorly in the area of financial management and require more support and technical guidance.
- c) Development of BMUs plans was a major problem and need followed-up. Many BMUs did not have plans and those who had them, they had not been approved by the BMU Assembly.
- d) The approval of fisheries by-laws by government was a serious bottleneck in Uganda and Tanzania, which has to be addressed.
- e) A few BMUs had met, and undertaken activities, with neighbouring BMUs
- f) BMUs have not undertaken many fisheries management activities beyond patrols.
- g) Many BMUs are collecting revenue, but the Fish Movement Permit has not been as actively implemented in Kenya and Tanzania as it has in Uganda.
- h) It is difficult to make an effective assessment of the impact of co-management on the fisheries and livelihoods, but the results provide a baseline for future monitoring.

Best practices noted through the performance monitoring included:

1. The use of transparency boards to display daily revenue promotes transparency and trust within BMUs,.
2. BMUs which won tenders in Uganda and Tanzania for the collection of tax for local government had more income than those that have not won a tender.
3. BMUs in Mpigi and Rakai Districts in Uganda adopted photo registers, where each member gives a passport size photo to the BMU for inclusion in the BMU register. This assists with tracking fisherfolk and promotes the accuracy of records.
4. The performance monitoring exercise provides essential data for monitoring progress in the performance of BMUs over time. (*LVFO, 2008*)

8. Role of NGOs in BMUs

The roles of the various key players in co-management are clearly stipulated in the HBG. The Non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and Community based organisations (CBOs) are expected to contribute to capacity development of BMUs and lobbying for improvement in the delivery of services to the fisher communities. The major roles of NGOs/CBOs as stipulated in the HBG are::

- (a) Train BMUs and local government, based on training needs assessment;

- (b) Participate in co-management institutions at all levels;
- (c) Disseminate information on co-management and fisheries technologies;
- (d) Provide credit support on appropriate; gears, fishing methods, boat designs, propulsion and processing technologies;
- (e) Assist fishing communities in developing their savings capacity;
- (f) Assist with the development of alternative income generating activities within fishing communities;
- (g) Provide some rural development services e.g. schools, dispensaries, etc.;
- (h) Advocacy for fisheries stakeholders' rights and positively influence national policies and laws;
- (i) Advocacy for control of HIV /AIDS and other STDs within fishing communities;
- (j) Advocacy against child labour

Proposals for strengthening and improvement of BMUs

BMUs can be strengthened and their performance improved with support from within their communities, local government, central government, NGOs, CBOs and development partners. Well-coordinated and focused single source interventions or collaborative support can widen the platform of the BMUs to voice their concern and be heard. Areas proposed for support include.

- a) Capacity building of the newly elected BMU Committees in various areas of BMU operations and administration;
- b) Continued sensitisation of the BMU Assembly on BMU operations and fisheries measures;
- c) Establishment of BMUs networks and Co-management Committees up to national and regional levels;
- d) Sensitisation of political leaders, judiciary and the police on dangers of illegal fishing and trade in undersized/immature fish;
- e) Support of BMU MCS patrols and data collection, etc.;
- f) Updating and harmonising fisheries policies, laws, and BMUs bylaws;
- g) Integration of BMU plans in District Development plans;
- h) Sensitisation of local government officials on BMUs roles and functions;
- i) Provision of fish landing infrastructures and social services to BMUs;
- j) Support BMUs to form Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOs) or micro-financing schemes;
- k) Support BMUs to form marketing organisations and training in negotiation skills;
- l) Support BMU members to diversify into alternative livelihood;
- m) Establish mechanism for government to plough-back part of the revenue generated from fisheries to BMUs;
- n) Encourage BMUs crossborder and internal collaboration, including exchange visits; and
- o) Build BMUs capacities in conflict management

- p) Establish Private (NGOs/CBOs) and Public Sector partnership in co-management, including building capacities of BMUs.

Conclusion

The BMUs are young, vulnerable and still need to be nurtured with encouragement and technical and financial support to become more efficient and effective in their performance. BMUs can also be used as entry point for extension of services to the fisher communities, particularly in areas outside fisheries, such as, health, environment, alternative livelihood, education and infrastructure development. The NGOs/CBOs have a critical role to play in advocacy, lobbying and capacity building in human rights and welfare issues of BMUs. They should exploit co-management, which facilitates private sector, civil society and public sector partnerships to harness their capacities to build synergies for the improvement of livelihood of the BMUs on Lake Victoria

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