

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS ON THE LAKE VICTORIA CRISIS AND STRATEGY FOR THE NEXT STEPS.

October, 2006

Lake Victoria is the second largest fresh-water lake in the world and the largest in Africa. It is the most important source of water in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. It supports the livelihoods of about 30 million people in the East African region, especially for transport, water supply, agriculture, hydropower generation, trade, commerce and tourism. It is the source of River Nile the longest river in the world which runs through Uganda, Sudan, and Egypt before pouring into the Mediterranean Sea. Lake Victoria is mainly rain-fed with its catchments composed of wetlands, forests and several tributaries spread in the whole Lake Victoria basin.

Lake Victoria is also a very important resource for the Nile basin riparian states that include Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Tanzania and Somalia.

Since 2002, Lake Victoria has registered a sharp decrease in its water levels of more than 2.0 meters. This situation is likely to continue, if no immediate and appropriate interventions are made. The decline has had significant negative impacts on the social, economic, cultural and ecological aspects in the whole region. It has also generated a lot of issues, conflicts, challenges and debates.

Since the onset of the Lake Victoria crisis, little has been done to reverse the situation.



A multi-stakeholder workshop on Lake Victoria decline, October 2006

The National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE), with support from IUCN-Netherlands Committee has been able to bring together many stakeholders to discuss and come-up with a strategy to address the crisis. To date, consultative meetings and workshops have been held that have included experts, government technocrats, Members of Parliament, civil society organizations, industry, the media, the academia, researchers, community leaders, among others. The main outcome of the consultative meetings and workshops was a strategy whose purpose would be to contribute to the on-going initiatives and inform future interventions in solving the Lake Victoria crisis.

The causes and impacts of lake victoria decline

According to the Uganda government officials, the main cause of decline of the Lake Victoria water levels is drought. However, recent studies that have been refuted by government suggest that the main cause of the decline of Lake Victoria is over-release of water through the power stations at Jinja at flow rates way-above the agreed curve.

Other causes identified by experts that could have contributed to the decline of Lake Victoria are;

- Wetland and forest degradation in the Lake Victoria catchment area.
- Water extraction for human uses
- Evaporation as a result of increase in temperature.
- Climate change as a result of global warming
- Geological changes
- Earth movements that cause depression
- Annual changes in sunspot numbers over time.
- Siltation as a result of river banks and lake shoreline encroachment for agriculture, industry, settlements and water run-off.

The following factors were also identified to have contributed to the decline of Lake Victoria;

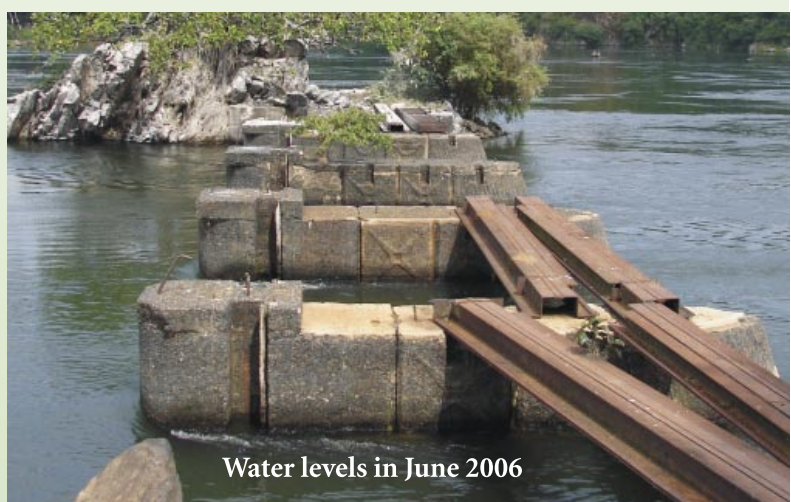
- Inappropriate policies regarding natural resources management and environment planning.
- Inadequate knowledge and awareness of natural resources management.
- Inadequate capacity for management of natural resources sector.
- Concealment of crucial information concerning the Lake Victoria basin that could be important in addressing the Lake Victoria crisis.
- The practice of ignoring the rights of key stakeholders in participating in decision-making regarding natural resource management, especially women and the youth who are the majority.
- The failure to integrate indigenous knowledge and traditional conservation practices in the mainstream natural resources management.
- An ever increasing population that exerts excessive pressure on the natural resources in the Lake Victoria basin.

Impacts

The decline of Lake Victoria water levels has resulted into an emergence of complex impacts with diverse ramifications i.e. political, social, environmental, and ecological aspects, among others.

Enumerated below are some of the impacts identified by stakeholders during the consultative meetings and workshops.

- Insufficient water supply for industrial and domestic use, and energy generation
- Electricity shortage leading to blackouts, load-shedding, increased tariff and high costs of industrial products that has negatively affected economic growth and development in the riparian states
- Environmental pollution as a result of excessive use of diesel generators
- Decline in water quality, which may lead to dirty-water based diseases.
- Reduced fish production and supply, thereby affecting the livelihoods of people in the East African region
- Increased potential for conflicts on water resource-use.



Emerging issues from the multi-stakeholder workshops

Many key issues emerged from the consultative multi-stakeholder meetings and workshops and these include;

- Adherence to the agreed curve remained an issue. Whether operating outside the agreed curve is the main factor responsible for the decline of Lake Victoria, remained unresolved and controversial
- The lake is rapidly receding towards the 1923 lower level and it is unclear whether and when the lake will recover
- The viability of Bujagali dam which is proposed to be constructed 8 km downstream from Owen Falls dam remains a matter of contention
- Concealment and misinformation regarding the actual causes of the decline of Lake Victoria remain an issue
- Despite the efforts to address over-release of water through the power stations at Jinja, the issue remained contentious.
- The manner in which privatization of the energy sector was pursued and implemented compounded the energy problems.

A better approach would have been to establish public-private partnerships in the energy sector

Major recommendations and way forward from multi-stakeholder consultations

As a result of the multi-stakeholder consultations, the following recommendations were made among others;

- More multi-stakeholder forums be held to discuss issues pertaining to the decline of water levels, wetland and forest degradation in the Lake Victoria basin

- A comprehensive and integrated research be conducted regarding the Lake Victoria crisis
- There is need to promote sharing of information between all actors and stakeholders, because concealment of information will hinder effective resolving of the Lake Victoria crisis
- There is need to strengthen capacity for continuous monitoring and evaluation of activities and uses of natural resources in Lake Victoria
- Promote studies on water bodies in the East African region other than Lake Victoria with a view of drawing better planning and management strategies for addressing the water decline in rivers and lakes
- Government should increase emphasis on the development of energy alternatives to avoid over-dependency on hydropower and ensure an energy mix that includes use of solar, biogas, geothermal, bagasse and bio-fuels, etc
- Promote strategies for collaborative efforts with other initiatives in the region that are addressing the Lake Victoria crisis
- Civil society should collaborate with government(s) to promote constructive engagement towards resolving the Lake Victoria crisis
- There is need to use the Uganda Dams Dialogue framework to take the recommendations forward, since Uganda Dams Dialogue is an all inclusive and broad-based multi-stakeholder mechanism. Uganda Dams Dialogue was tasked to select a committee of seven people to prioritize and develop a detailed strategic plan towards implementing the recommendations
- NAPE continues to spearhead the whole process.



A natural wetland

Next steps to address the Lake Victoria crisis

The consultative multi-stakeholder workshops and meetings agreed that the following steps be undertaken in addressing the recommendations of the workshops

1. Prioritizing the recommendations to be undertaken by the committee selected by the Uganda Dams Dialogue Steering Committee. This committee shall be selected at the next Uganda Dams Dialogue Steering Committee meeting before the end of 2006
2. Finalizing, publishing and disseminating the workshop reports to various stakeholders. NAPE was assigned this responsibility to be completed in the first quarter of 2007
3. Developing a detailed strategic implementation plan to address the workshops recommendations. This task was assigned to the committee selected by Uganda Dams Dialogue Steering Committee. This shall be done within 3 months
4. Fundraising for the implementation of this strategy. NAPE was assigned the responsibility of fundraising before the end of 2006.



A harvest from a productive wetland



A degraded wetland

Way forward for Uganda's wetlands

Wetlands are ecosystems that cut across traditional sectors, but are often over-looked. Wetlands in Uganda, like many parts of the world, are surrounded by several myths, beliefs, and disbeliefs. They contribute immensely to climate amelioration. They are important for water purification, storage and flow regulation, flood control and biodiversity.

Therefore, the following need to be done to protect the wetlands:

- Strengthen the current policies on wetlands management by establishing strong mechanisms for enforcement
- Establish mechanisms for restoration of degraded wetlands
- Increase awareness campaign on sustainable use and proper management of wetland ecosystems
- Establish interstate mechanisms for the proper management of shared wetland ecosystems in the Lake Victoria basin
- Involve the local communities in the planning and proper management of wetland resources
- There is need for comprehensive studies on current status, use and management of wetland ecosystems
- Establish interstate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of wetland ecosystems