

# Crackdown on illegal fishing to continue

**Cost.** Illegal fishing in Uganda has caused a reduction in fish stocks, especially in species such as tilapia, Nile perch and sliver fish.



**Operation.** Police officers during an operation to crack down on illegal fishing at Zinga Island in Buusi Sub-county, Wakiso District, recently.

PHOTO BY JOSEPH KIGGUNDU

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**ENTEBBE.** Leaders at Kasenyi Landing Site in Wakiso District have vowed to extend the crackdown on illegal fishing to four more years to control immature fish dealers.

Mr Abdul Mbabaali, the supervisor Kasenyi Landing Site, said the operations against illegal fishing will only cease when the smallest Nile perch sold on the market weighs 50kgs.

"Our target is achievable. Before, those unpatriotic and money-minded dealers invaded our lake,

we were able to catch Nile perch weighing 150kgs, but today, it is a miracle to find such mature fish in the lake. What are harvested are tiny young fish," he said during an interview on Wednesday.

Beach management unit leaders at the landing site are carrying out the operations jointly with the Fisheries Protection Unit, a special unit of the marine Force headed by Maj James Nuwagaba, which the government established early this year to crack down on illegal fishing in the country.

Several immature fish dealers have been arrested and various ungazetted landing sites destroyed

on the shores of Lake Victoria in the districts of Wakiso, Mpigi, Kalangala, Masaka, Kyotera Rakai, Mukono, Buwuma and Buikwe.

Last week, Maj Nuwagala said after pushing the unscrupulous fishermen in a tight corner, some in Buikwe and Jinja have resorted to using poison to catch fish after soldiers under his command confiscated an assortment of illegal fishing gear.

He said the ongoing crackdown on illegal fishing has reduced the vice by at least 50 per cent.

Mr Mbabaali said due to dwindling fish stocks in the lake, their daily incomes have been greatly affected.

Previously, he said the fish catch at Kasenyi was between 60 and 80 tonnes of Nile perch daily, but they currently get only 3 tonnes a week.

"The fishing landing area used to be a beehive of activity a decade ago, but work has since slowed down due to dwindling fish stocks in the lake, we also used to experience regular traffic jam of trucks entering here to load fish, but very few come these days," he said.

Despite being a fishing village, fish at Kasenyi costs between Shs4,000 and Shs17,000. The Nile Perch is the most profitable. A 100kg Nile perch is sold at about Shs1.2m. However, *Ennuuni* (pancreas), is the most expensive part on the Nile perch, a kilogramme costs about Shs800,000.

Although the soldiers spearheading the operation have been accused of brutality and high-handedness, Mr Mbabaali said they are a necessary evil.

He said at least 300 people dealing in immature fish have since January been arrested and 200 confiscated at the landing site.

The fisheries sub-sector contributes 3 per cent to the national gross domestic product (GDP) and 26 per cent to the agriculture sector GDP.

Statistics from the ministry of Agriculture show that the country loses a lot of income in the fisheries sub-sector due to continued use of bad or illegal fishing methods.

Recently, the Minister for Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, Mr Vincent Ssempiija, said whereas government has done its best to stop illegal fishing, fishermen operating at an ungazetted landing sites have adamantly refused to abandon the vice.

Mr Michael Lubuulwa, the officer-in-charge of fisheries in Wakiso District, said more effort is still needed to sensitise the fishing community about the dangers of illegal fishing.

Wakiso District has at least 40 landing sites and Kasenyi is one of the biggest.

## 300

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