

ing practi...
Ms Monica Atukunda, a resident of
Kira Road in Jinja City, expressed con-

... 3,000 people
drown annually in Uganda, an average
of nine deaths daily, making drowning
a significant public health crisis.

vision, enforcing safety standards and
certifying lifeguards could help curb
preventable deaths.
In response, Swim Safe Uganda has
launched a three day National Life-

ter and solar energy solutions in East
Africa).
Speaking to the *Daily Monitor*, the or-
ganisation's chief executive officer, Mr
Moses Kalanzi, said the training intends

cue someone from the water, admini-
ster first aid, and stabilise a victim as
they wait for emergency medical ser-
vices. We have emphasised the impor-
tance of calling for professional help in
case of emergencies," he said.

The selected fishermen
must be experienced,
trustworthy, actively
involved in legal fishing,
and passionate about
protecting the lake re-
source.

BY DAVID SEKAYINGA
& AL-MAHDI SSENKABIRWA

The government has officially
launched the process of select-
ing indigenous fishermen to take
charge of managing Lake Victo-
ria's resources. This comes a month af-
ter President Museveni dissolved the
existing fisheries management com-
mittees.

In a December 26, 2025 directive an-
nouncing the desolution of the com-
mittees, the acting Director of Defence
Public Information, Col Chris Magezi,
ordered the formation of new struc-
tures composed of indigenous fisher-
men and investors.

According to the letter, the formation
of the new committees will be overseen
by the Deputy Chief of Defence Forc-
e and Inspector General, Lt Gen Sam
Okiding, alongside the Chief of Defence
Intelligence and Security, Maj Gen Rich-
ard Otto.

The Kalangala Resident District Com-
missioner, Mr Fred Badda, last week
said: "Our office has been directed to
start the process of identifying credible
indigenous fishermen to serve on the
new Fisheries Management Commit-
tees from the district level down to the
landing site or village level."

He added that selected fishermen
must be experienced, trustworthy, ac-
tively involved in legal fishing, and pas-
sionate about protecting the lake re-
source.

Committee composition

According to documents seen by this
publication, five-member vetting com-
mittees will be established at every
sub-county and district level to scruti-
nise landing site committee members.
The District Security Committee will
then forward the names for approval,
in a process overseen by UPDF authori-
ties.

Under the proposed structure, each
landing site committee will com-
prise a chairperson aged 50 years and
above who must be a boat owner plus
a female vice chairperson aged 50 years
and above involved in fishing. The other
members include a publicity and
mobilisation officer, youth representa-
tive, a security and defence representa-
tive, a general secretary, and a women
representative.

The committee members will serve
two terms of two years each but people

Govt to restore L Victoria control to local fishermen



View of Nkese Landing Site in Bubeke Sub-county, Kalangala District. PHOTO/DAVID SEKAYINGA

who served on the dissolved com-
mittees are not eligible for reappointment.

Mr Badda said the new committees
will be tasked with enforcing stricter
fishing regulations aimed at curbing
illegal fishing and restoring declining
fish stocks.

"Among their duties will be prevent-
ing the use of illegal fishing gear and de-
structive fishing methods, banning the
use of strong solar-powered lights for
night fishing, and ensuring that all fish-
ermen possess valid permits issued by
the fisheries office," he said.

The guidelines further propose out-
lawing fishing in designated breeding
zones, capping the number of boats
per landing site at 66, and limiting indi-
vidual fishermen to a maximum of 10

BACKGROUND

The indigenous-led manage-
ment model was first requested by
the fishermen three years ago, ar-
guing that the Fisheries Protec-
tion Unit (FPU) had failed to pro-
tect the lake.

FPU came into existence after
illegal fishing reached alarming lev-
els in 2017. It is mainly composed
of UPDF soldiers and aims to crack
down on illegal fishing on water bod-
ies. Uganda's fishing business re-

Expectations.
Committee members
should know that they
are here to serve,
not to earn a salary.
If they fight illegal
fishing practices, they
will benefit from in-
creased fish catches,
otherwise, they will be penalised-
Mr Joseph Ssenkunbugu, a fisher-

boats per landing site. There will also be
mandatory registration and number-
ing of all boats for security and moni-
toring purposes, while prohibiting per-
manent structures within 200 metres
of the shoreline.

lies primarily on capture fishing
from its large lakes, particu-
larly Lake Victoria, which supplies
the majority of fish for export (Nile
perch and tilapia) and domestic
markets (Mukene).

Aquaculture is also a growing
sector, with a focus on tilapia and
catfish, serving as an important al-
ternative to declining natural fish
stocks. The sector is a vital source
of income and food security for
many Ugandans, but faces chal-
lenges like illegal fishing and over-

These reforms come amid long-
standing concerns over illegal fish-
ing practices, declining fish stocks,
and allegations of corruption with-
in previous enforcement struc-
tures involving soldiers of the UPDF
Fisheries Protection Unit (FPU).

Response from fishermen

Mr Joseph Ssenkunbugu, a fisher-
man at Kasenyi Landing Site in Mu-
goye Sub-county, Kalangala District,
welcomed the reintroduction of indig-
enous fishermen-led committees, but
blamed past failures on the defunct
FPU.

"These indigenous fishermen com-
mittees worked well in the past, but
were let down by soldiers under the

FPU. Some officers took bribes from the
arrested and released them," he said.

He claimed that previous committees
were often selected by the FPU and in-
cluded individuals who extorted mon-
ey from fishermen.

"I am glad they were dissolved," he
added. Mr Ssenkunbugu, however,
urged the government to set clear pen-
alties for committee members who fail
to perform or solicit bribes from illegal
fishers.

"Committee members should know
that they are here to serve, not to earn
a salary. If they fight illegal fishing
practices, they will benefit from in-
creased fish catches, otherwise, they will be pen-
alised," he said.

He also asked the government to al-
low the landing site committees to ar-
rest perpetrators and strengthen en-
forcement against illegal fish trade
routes.

"They [government] should close all
routes used to transport illegal fish to
markets and stop the importation of il-
legal fishing gear. Then, the lake will re-
cover very quickly," he added.

Mr Aloysius Akiiza, a fisherman at Na-
katiba Landing Site, said many fisher-
men are optimistic about the new plan,
but expressed concern about possible
job losses.

"We see good times ahead and agree
to move in the new direction. Howev-
er, I am worried that many of our peo-
ple may lose jobs because reducing
the number of boats per landing site
means fewer opportunities," he said.

He noted that restoring fish stocks
could ultimately benefit households
economically, citing that a five-kilo-
gramme of Nile perch costs about
Shs80,000.

"That is enough to support a home. If
these measures can restore fish stocks,
we have no objection," he said.

Seasons

According to fisheries experts, Lake
Victoria has two major peak breeding
seasons: March to May and July to Au-
gust. Veteran fishermen agree that re-
viving old practices could help restore
the lake.

Traditionally, fishermen respected
natural cycles of wind and moonlight,
suspending fishing when the winds
were too strong or when the moon was
too bright.

However, that will only work if illegal
markets, both local and across the com-
mon borders are dismantled, and local
leaders are empowered.