

special report

STOCK

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Million tonnes. The current number of Nile Perch in Lake Victoria, which has risen from 0.85 million tonnes registered in 2016 (30 per cent)

L. Victoria swells with fish, factories set to re-open

Impressive. According to the National Fisheries Resources Research Institute, the fish stock in Lake Victoria have greatly improved. Besides putting a smile on fish traders faces, the increase in stock will see a recovery of some of the processing factories writes **Paul Tajuba**

Lake Victoria is once more teeming with fish having registered the biggest fish stock recovery in 12 years, pushing the authorities to consider reopening some of the fish processing factories soon.

At their peak in 2005, the country's fish factories were processing nearly 36,000 metric tonnes of fish worth \$143 million (Shs486 billion), but by 2014, the volumes had declined to a mere 14,000

metric tonnes and worth only \$88 million (Shs299 billion).

But the Status of Fish Stocks In Lake Victoria 2017 results released yesterday by the National Fisheries Resources Research Institute (NaFIRRI), indicate the most common commercial fish species in the lake — Nile perch, has increased by 30 per cent and so did the haplochromines stock or nkejje.

However, the NaFIRRI survey did not



10,000

Cost. The current cost of a kilogramme of tilapia fish according to Ms Betty Nyeko, a fish monger in Ggaba.

the capture tilapia population, another major fish stock in the lake, because they are restricted to inshore areas and the equipment used in scanning the lake being limited.

The increase in fish stock has been attributed to strict enforcement of stopping indiscriminate catching of fish in both Uganda and Tanzania by the countries' defence forces.

The Lake Victoria fish stock survey was done by NaFIRRI and two other national institutes, namely the Marine and Fisheries Research Institute KMFRI (Kenya), and Tanzania Fisheries Research Institute.

The Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization, which conducts independent stock monitoring surveys in the lake every year, coordinated the survey.

Dr. Anthony Taabu-Munyaho, the

Inspection. Fishermen inspect their catch before assembling it for sale at Ggaba Landing Site in Kampala last week. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

NaFIRRI executive director, said they eager to see a sustained recovery of the Nile perch and restrict 'nkejje' harvest so that they act as food for Nile perch.

However, *mukene*, another fish stock and prey to Nile perch, but harvested for both domestic and industrial consumption in the region, has continued to decline in the last four years.

The decline has been blamed on over fishing.

Dr Taabu said the majority of the Nile perch have remained small in size less than the minimum length of 50cm permitted by law to be harvested.

"This trend has persisted for the last four years covered by the surveys, and is not a pleasant trend since it means fishers are only left with a small portion of the stock to exploit. Fishes around 40 cm (1 year class) are not crossing into bigger size classes," he said.

Dr Edward Rukuunya, the director of fisheries resources in the ministry of Agriculture, animal industry and fisheries, said: "We should not use destructive methods to remove this fish that is increasing but wait until it has grown to the required size."



Display. Some of the Nile Perch caught at Ggaba Landing Site on Lake Victoria. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

Peak of processing factories 36,000 metric tonnes

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Re-opening. "We are now in discussions to see if a factory can be opened by May next year. We can open two [factories] but for now, we want one that we can feed 100 per cent."

Maj James Nuwagaba, UPRDF Fisheries Protection Unit Commander



He said the ministry has banned the use of imported nets and only locally manufactured nets are allowed on the lake.

The good news about increasing fish stock are also corroborated by fishers at the Ggaba

landing site in Kampala.

Ms Betty Nyeko, a fish monger in the nearby market, is mesmerised by the size and price of fish sold to her for the past two months.

"There is a lot of fish and of good sizes. The



Transactions. Fishermen prepare fish or sale at Ggaba Landing Site in Kampala last week. Lake Victoria has registered a biggest fish stock recovery of 30 per cent.
PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

FISH STOCK IN LAKE VICTORIA

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017
Uganda	513,133	448,146	393,353	457,248
Kenya	65,761	58,374	40,172	70,659
Tanzania	651,353	621,254	417,936	593,037

prices are good and the profits are good too," Ms Nyeko, who has traded in fish for 25 years, says.

At the beginning of this year, Ms Nyeko says the fish she used to buy at Shs20,000 is now costs only half of the price, with a kilo of tilapia which has been selling at Shs15,000 now going for Shs10,000.

"The lake is producing Nile Perch of 20 inches, tilapia of 11 inches, and we hope that in future, we will get better sizes," she adds.

Nile perch and tilapia are the most commercially profitable species introduced in the Lake in the 1950s and early 1960s by the British colonialists to boost Uganda's fish exports and took close to 20 years to multiply to commercially viable stock.

At Murchison Bay, near Luzira, a

Kampala suburb, where Joseph Mukasa was interviewed in May by *Daily Monitor*, and had complained of dwindling fish stock, now wears a smile on his face.

"Fish is slowly coming back. At least you can be sure of taking home something," Mr Mukasa says, although a green slime—a toxic algae bloom, continues to cover parts of the lake.

"Bad gears were killing the lake but because of the operations [against indiscriminate fishing], we now catch bigger fish," he adds.

President Museveni in response to dwindling fish stock in Lake Victoria that had led to closure of fish processing factories, assembled a team of soldiers to stop all illegal fishing activities on Ugandan lakes. Uganda shares her lakes, including Lakes Victoria, and Albert with other neighboring countries.

The army under Maj James Nuwagaba has been working jointly with the Fisheries Department, Uganda Revenue Authority, fish processors and police to stop illegal activities on the lakes.

Close to a year into the operation now, fishing nets and boats worth billions of shillings have been burnt by soldiers and the culprits arrested, thereby allowing enough time for fish to mate and grow before being fished.

"Lake Victoria is the biggest and feed most of the fish processing factories; so our operation had to first target Lake Victoria, but the operation is for all water bodies in Uganda," Maj Nuwagaba said.

"We are now in discussions to see if a factory can be opened by May next year. We can open two [factories] but for now, we want one that we can feed 100 per cent," Maj Nuwagaba said in an interview.

Last year, Mr Phillip Borel, the vice chairperson Uganda Fish Processors and Exporters Association, told *Daily Monitor* that some of their members had dropped out of business because of low fish catches, a trend that started in 2005.

Some of the industries that have closed in the last two years include Marine and Agro, Oakwood, Fresh Water, Igloo, Tampa Fisheries, Tropical Fish, Universal Foods and Ngege Ltd.

Statistics on fish stock availed last year by Uganda Fish Processors and Exporters Association (UFPEA) chief executive director, Ms Katiti Matovu, indicated a worrying decline in fish stocks that has led to closure of factories and rendered nearly 1.3 million people jobless.

"Our climax was in 2005 when the sector was doing very well," Ms Matovu said in an interview then.

The operation has, however, come with some high handedness with fishermen accusing the soldiers of brutalizing them.

But Maj Nuwagaba accuses politicians of inciting people to confront his soldiers who are on duty to protect fisheries jobs and revenue for the country.

Mr Dirisa Walusimbi, the chairman of fish protection unit at Ggaba, a landing site that receives more than 5,000 people, estimates compliance at about 70 per cent and appealed to those still carrying out illegal fishing to stop.

Although the operations against illegal fishing has started yielding results, Mr Frank Muramuzi, the executive director National Association of Professional Environmentalists, says more effects are needed to protect the lake from degradation and pollution.