WATER DAY

Unchecked pollution

By Betty Amamukiiref

In August 2017, the Commission of Inquiry into land matters was shocked to find dead aquatic life floating on the shores of Lake Victoria, at Luzira, Kampala.

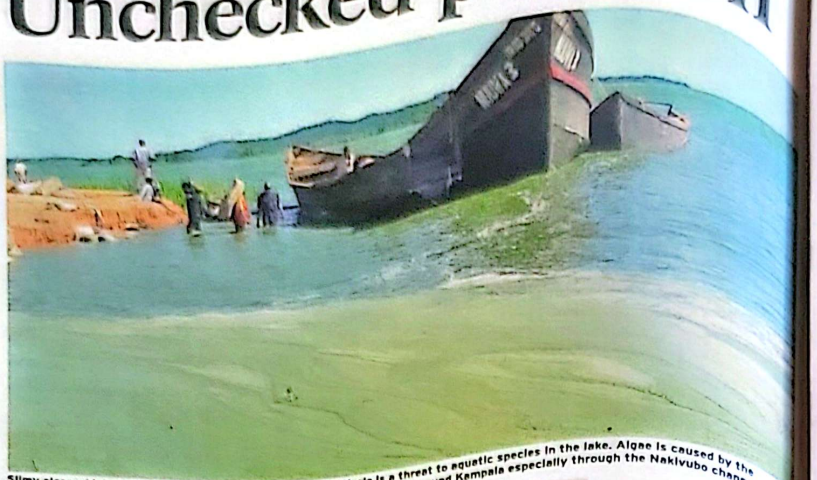
The commissioners saw huge flies hovering over frosty green water and dead water snails. The place had a revolting stench.

On touring the area, they found the once lively beach hosting hundreds of fun loving Ugandans abandoned. The permanent structures had grown algae and looked haunted.

According to residents, the prime land was abandoned due to the stench from the city waste which is being poured in the lake through the Nakivubo channel.

Residents said the waste made the lake inhabitable for aquatic life and micro-organisms started dying.

Far from the abandoned beach, children in the area were found swimming in oblivion of the contaminated water, an activity officials from the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) described as dangerous to human health.



Slimy algae which looks like green porridge form on Lake Victoria is a threat to aquatic species in the lake. Algae is caused by the decomposing chunks of garbage and sewage entering the lake from in and round Kampala especially through the Nakivubo channel

Degradation of wetlands

Tom Okurut, the NEMA executive director, told the commission that because of the degradation of the wetlands and population increase in the urban area, dangerous wastes are emptied into the lake and over time it has caused a sludge build up which has in turn killed all the aquatic life.

He said fish breeding places have been compromised by the sludge build up and the only living things in that part of the lake are maggots.

Okurut said, the Rubanda County West MP, Henry Banyenzaki, who had bought the land to develop it into a beach had to abandon it due to the sludge.

"Due to population increase in the city, the wetlands can no longer filter the waste. So it all pours into the lake," he said.

Okurut explained that the sludge has reduced the depth profile of Port Bell from eight metres to six metres.

Uganda currently uses the lake water for drinking, irrigation, fisheries, navigation and generation of hydro-electricity power.

The 26,560 square miles' lake is shared by the East African states of Kenya (6%), Uganda (45%) and Tanzania (49%). It has a 3450 kilometre-long shoreline, lies at an altitude of 1135 meters above sea level, has a mean depth of 40 meters and maximum depth of 80 meters.

According to Dr Callist Tindimugaya, the commissioner, water resources planning and regulation at the Ministry of Water and Environment, the pollution in the lake is composed of faecal matter and all the rubbish from the cities and towns which are washed into the lake.

Water ministry is the Government agency responsible for managing the water resources on behalf of the Government.

"In 2005/6 the water level went down by 1.6 meters and it impacted power generation, navigation and fisheries," Tindimugaya said during an interview with the *New Vision*. He said at that time more water was being released for power generation. "They decided to regulate the water count and eventually the lost level was regained.

Pollution still a huge challenge

Tindimugaya noted that pollution is still the country's biggest challenge in the country since all the waste from towns and cities get washed directly into the lake during the rainy season.

He said the Navikubo channel which was being used as a filter is now degraded leaving the waste to freely flow into the lake.

Tindimugaya said the pit latrines and septic tanks, mostly used in Kampala, fill up and when it rains, all is discharged into the lake, while industries that do not want to spend on waste treatment, take advantage of the night to discharge the effluent.

"Industries discharge untreated waste water at night because they want to save money that would otherwise have been used for treatment. Some have treatment plants but do not use them. So they open the waste at night and pour it in Nakivubo channel at night," he said.

Tindimugaya, noted that even the cesspool emptier also empty septic tanks at night to avoid paying the charges at the treatment plant in Bugolobi.

Frank Muramuzi, the executive director National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) said the unplanned settlements and beaches on the shores of lake Victoria and the surrounding wetlands, all pour their waste into the lake, affecting the biodiversity of the area.

"They degraded the wetlands and built hotels, factories and industries. They all now pour their waste in the lake killing biodiversity," he said.

Muramuzi said the palm oil plantation farmers in Buvuma and Kalangala islands have degraded the environment around the water body by cutting down the trees that would help filter the dirt thereby disregarding the 200m buffer zone put to protect the water resource.

"They ignored the law and are now silting the lake," he noted.

Muramuzi stated the Government leased out land around the lake area to cage farming without taking into consideration the repercussion of blocking the over 30 million people depending on the resource."

Tindimugaya noted that though sand mining isn't bad, people should mind about the impact of the activity where you can mine sand and you have to do it in an environmentally sustainable manner but people have even entered into the lake to get it," he said.

Giving an example of a sand mining Chinese firm, Tindimugaya said that there orders have always been flouted by the mining companies who go ahead to carry out dredging in the lake.

He said they carried out an impact assessment on the lake and found that sand mining poses grave danger to countries that depend on the lake.

"Our argument is that when the waste goes into the lake it settles at the base. These pollutants at the bottom form sediments. So if you mine that sand, you are going to end up destroying the bottom of the lake," he said.

Tindimugaya adds that once the lake base is destroyed, pollutants will rise up, go into the water and will cause an epidemic; fish will die or people consuming it will die.

He also noted that sand mining should be allowed in the lake only if the three countries; Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania agree to it.



A sample from Lake Victoria

Effects

Tindimugaya said the pollution has made the Government to spend a lot of money treating the water and this has in turn made National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) to hike water rates.

He noted that it is about to reach a point where NWSC won't be able to properly treat the water and it is the public that will suffer.

Tindimugaya said the pollution build up has killed fish in the lake and even those that have tried to survive will die soon.

"When water is polluted a lot of oxygen is needed because there are micro-organisms that fight for it with the fish. It reaches appoint where the water does not have oxygen and so microorganisms die," he explained.

Tindimugaya noted that heavy metals that are washed into the lake are sometimes swallowed by the fish and when humans eat the fish and drink the water, they are likely to get ill with diseases such as cancer.

Sand mining

Muramuzi dredging of sand from the lake removes the natural filters from the lake and destroys the breeding ground of aquatic life.

He said sand mining pits that are left in the lake affect the free movement of the fish and water and will cause the lake to silt.

"The problem is they let a few people to mine the sand while the activity on water bodies and aquatic life.

"The fish is fed with artificial foods which pose a danger to the lives in the lake by distorting their natural growth. They should have done an environmental impact assessment on the impact of the activity on the other fish in the water and people depending on the lake," he said.

What should be done?

Tindimugaya said whoever is discharging waste water is required to treat it to the required standard, saying they have issued factories with waste water discharge permit which gives the standards.

He noted that people need to be educated on the importance of conservation and that the production process of industries need to be improved so that they don't discharge waste water in the lake.

"Only about 10% of Kampala is covered by the sewer network. This means that most of the people do not have where to discharge waste. We now have a programme being spearheaded by NWSC to undertake the building of sewerage networks but it costs a lot of money," Tindimugaya said.

He said solid waste management in Kampala is the responsibility of the citizens, but the ministry is currently working in partnership with KCCA and have formed a pollution task force (Kampala pollution task force) to collect solid wastes.

The water ministry also has Lake Victoria Environment Management project which supports the city authority in collecting solid waste.

Above all the most important thing is mindset change. We have talked to people to change their mindset so that they dump rubbish responsibly. The problem is that Ugandans don't care and take these issues for granted," he said.

Okurut noted before the commission that they are in talks with KCCA to see that the Nakivubo channel is terminated to let the waste flow on the strip of the wetland before it finally goes to the lake.

He said that by doing this, the wetlands will filter the waste and retain the water for long before pouring into the lake, adding that they are also planning to remove the sludge from the lake but do not have the finances.

Muramuzi said the authorities mandated to protect the lake need to become serious in carrying out their mandate and ensure that the policies are respected by all member countries.

He called for the periodic audit of the fish cage businesses on the lake to ensure that the other lives in the lake are not affected by the activity.

Muramuzi said tax payers also need to be involved in the protection of the endangered lake since money has proved incapable of solving the problem.

choking Lake Victoria

ONCE THE LAKE BASE IS DESTROYED, POLLUTANTS WILL RISE UP, GO INTO THE WATER AND CAUSE AN EPIDEMIC. FISH OR PEOPLE CONSUMING IT WILL DIE



A close up of trash, water hyacinth, bottles and algae in Lake Victoria dumped by industries and people living around the lake

WaterAid

PRESS RELEASE

Access to Water Reduces Inequalities and Promotes Progressive Realisation of Uganda's Development Aspirations

The quest for a middle income status for Uganda by 2020 and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 remain a far cry from reality if access to clean water for everyone is not made a priority, WaterAid has said. The SDGs implore governments, including Uganda, to improve service standards to reach everyone everywhere.

This world water day 22 March 2018, WaterAid releases its State of the World's Water 2018: the Water Gap revealing that more than 23million Ugandans are still unable to get clean water within a half hour round trip.

According to the report, Uganda ranks third lowest in access to water on premises or close to home, within a 30 – minute round trip, with Papua New Guinea and Eritrea trailing. The poor are even comparatively worse off with only 35% having access to clean water close to home, while 72% of the wealthy do.

"While the 38% water coverage so far achieved is commendable progress, it is urgent that our government takes action beyond the statistics to ensure that every person in this country, even the poor and most marginalised especially the women and girls enjoy the right to clean water at all times, leaving no one behind," says Francis Musinguzi, Country Director WaterAid Uganda.

Today 844 million people globally do not have clean water. In many developing countries including Uganda, Niger, Mozambique and India, limited access has been compounded by pressures from urbanisation, population growth, shock weather events and poor financing and prioritisation of water services.

"Due to climate change, water, our most precious resource, is increasingly under threat. Those marginalised by age, gender, class, caste or disability, or living in a slum or remote rural community continue to suffer poverty, disease and food insecurity due to limited funding and low prioritisation of water service delivery," adds Musinguzi.



A woman uses a pre-paid meter in front of her rented home in a slum at Kiteve – Makindye in Kampala; she can buy water credit for as low as Ugx.500 and spends only Ugx.25 for every 20L jerrycan of water. In slum areas where the system has not yet been installed, it is not uncommon to find landlords inflating the price per unit to unsuspecting tenants. WaterAid promotes customer segmentation and cross subsidisation of water tariff as pro-poor policy measures to close accessibility and affordability gaps.

Globally, the number of people living in water stress is expected to increase beyond the current 60%, with extreme weather brought by climate change, urbanisation, industrialisation and the simple ever-increasing demand for water.

The Water Gap report comes as nations prepare a 2018 review of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 6, to deliver water and sanitation to everyone, everywhere by 2030. The findings of the report and analyses from WaterAid's work around the world compels the call to action by governments for without adequate financing and political priority, national, regional and international commitments remain a dream.

WaterAid's Chief Executive, Tim Wainwright, said:

"It's deplorable that every year nearly 300,000 children die before their fifth birthday from diarrhoeal illnesses caused by dirty water, lack of decent toilets and poor hygiene. This year ahead of the July 2018 review of progress towards UN Sustainable Development Goal 6 in New York, we urge world leaders to take real action to deliver access to water and sanitation for all by 2030, because without these, none of the other Global Goals - alleviating poverty, improving health and creating a fairer and more sustainable world - will be achievable."

This World Water Day, WaterAid is calling for:

- Recognition that the UN Global Goals are everyone's responsibility to deliver, to ensure no one is left behind.
- Responsible environmental management, including regulating the use of water in agriculture and industry, to protect and preserve enough clean water for communities' basic needs.
- Including access to water, sanitation and hygiene as central to health, education, nutrition and gender equality. Without water, none of the other UN Global Goals can be met.
- Urgent action on the ground, at regional, national and global scale. Access to safe drinking water is a UN-recognised human right: politicians need to prioritise it and fund it, civil society must empower people to speak out for their rights, and business entrepreneurs in water, sanitation and hygiene must work together to support service providers and government to respond.
- Mobilising resources from taxes, tariffs and transfers, and increasing the amount and proportion of aid for water, sanitation and hygiene, to close the gaps in financing. This also means supporting institutions to ensure they are accountable and well-governed, so that money is well-spent, and promoting pro-poor policies that ensure access to water for everyone.

#ENDS

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