Sh3.5b needed for research on fish

By Agnes Nantambi

The National Agriculture Fisheries Research Institute (NaFIRRI) requires an annual budget of about sh3.5b to adequately research on fish in Ugandan waters.

Currently, the research body only receives an average of sh300m annually to carry out research and pay workers' salaries.

According to the director research, fish biology and fish stock assessment at NaFFRI, Dr Anthony Munyaho, the organisation has the challenge of buying big boats for use in deep water sampling.

"Procuring and running of big boats is expensive, it consumes 60 littres of fuel per hour," he said.

Munyaho explained that when the boats get mechanical problem, maintaining one injector nozzle costs sh46m yet research currently depends on donor-funded projects.

"When a project closes, the research gets paralysed until scientists request for funding," he said.

He made the remarks on Thursday during the hand over of an assortment of equipment to National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), NaFFIRI and Uganda Cleaner Production Centre (UCPC) at Lubigi sewerage treatment plant.

The items delivered included sewerage pond maintenance equipment, laboratory equipment

Fish recently caught from Lake Victoria in Ggaba, Kampala

motor boats, energy audit and leak detector equipment.

Pollution

Munyaho revealed that the NaFFRI is currently researching on farst-growing fish varieties, fish feed formulation, fish health, fish stock assessment, mapping and characterisation of fish breeding, water quality for fish and pollution.

He, however, noted that heavy metal pollutants are currently one of the major challenges incapacitating research on fish.

Munyaho urged the public to avoid polluting the lake but work towards ensuring the sustainable harvesting of fish.

The Minister of Water and Environment, Sam Cheptoris, while officiating at the ceremony applauded NAFIRRI for contributing to the strengthening of information pollutant input into Lake Victoria through the packaging and dissemination of information on pollution levels, mapping and monitoring the prevalence and abundance coverage of water hyacinth and other invasive aquatic weeds.

Others are studies on cage culture, preparation of geo-referenced maps for fish breeding and nursery grounds.

ON THE GROUND

Findings by NaFIRRI have revealed that there has been a decline in high value large- sized species such as Nile Perch from 40% to 25% and tilapia from 12% to 9%.

Impact of pollutants

"Recent findings by NaFIRRI have revealed that there has been a decline in the economic contribution of high-value large-sized species such as Nile perch from 40% to 25% and tilapia from 12% to 9% and an increase in *mukene* from 44% to 48%," Cheptoris said.

He added: "From the above findings we cannot over-emphasise the vital role of research institutions in the creation and dissemination of knowledge. The vision is for research to be at the forefront of our economic, social and environmental development."

The minister said that the three boats handed over to NaFIRRI will not only support the organisation in improving the information base on pollutant input into Lake Victoria, but also the knowledge of the impact of these and other human activities to the fisheries of Lake Victoria.

Cheptoris applauded the development partners, especially the World Bsank through the International Development Agency (IDA) and the Global Environment Fund (GEF) for their support towards the Lake Victoria Environmental Management Project Phase Two (LVEMP II).

"They have been instrumental in providing us with technical guidance on the implementation of the project," he said.

LVEMP II is a regional project implemented by the five East African community partner states of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi.

It is designed to address major environmental concerns that adversely impact on the water quality of Lake Victoria on top of alleviating poverty and improving livelihoods of communities around the Lake Victoria basin.