

How govt wasted sh80b

BY JOHN MASABA

What is happening at Lake Victoria? The latest statistics from Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) indicate that the country has a deficit of 300,000 metric tonnes of fish. As a consequence, fish has become more expensive, knocking this wonder delicacy off the plates of many Ugandans.



The multi-billion government project at Kajjansi has become a hiding place for thieves. Photo by John Masaba



An ice-processing plant in Kalangala district

But an investigation by Saturday Vision shows that the enemy is within the Government. The solutions that were identified to save the industry, were muddled.

A study, Fisheries Master Plan Study of 1999, was carried out just two years after Uganda's fish had been banned in the European Union market over allegations that poison was being used on Lake Victoria to catch fish. This study showed there was need for quick reforms to save the industry.

as the best way forward, because lakes are not expanding," Mwanya says. "We were given a target to produce 15 million catfish fingerlings, 120 million tilapia fingerlings and 150,000 millarps seed (fingerlings) a year," he adds. This would support private fish farmers with quality fingerlings, which the Government projected would have a multiplier effect: more fish produced offshore would reduce the pressure on the lakes and help fish regenerate.

implemented under Poverty Eradication Action Plan and Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture. Dr Edward Mwanya, a fish specialist breeder at National Fisheries Resources Research Institute

(NaFIRI), said while the industry needed a cocktail of reforms, addressing dwindling numbers of fish was the biggest and most urgent of them all.

"Aquaculture was identified

they gave part of the money to the contractor to build the structure. Completion was due in 2005, after which the contractor handed over to the government. The delay has been attributed to the contractor's inability to supply the fish seed. Of the 150 million fish seed that the contractor was supposed to supply, he says, they were able to produce only 10 million fingerlings a year.

"Sometime, a farmer comes and he wants 25,000 fingerlings but he can only offer 5,000. It is a disaster," he says. The contractor, MHC, who undertook the project, has abandoned the project, refused to hand over the bush around the complex, growing taller every year.

"We can't clear it (bush) because it is still under the control of the contractor," he says. "We have tried to sue him (contractor) but he is not co-operating. We might have to think about using other means, including involving the Police."

Mwanya says he has eavesdropped that the contractor has been overpaying but they have been officially notified that it is going on.

"But that is not our problem (it's) back, even in that state because it has become a security threat," Mwanya says. In January, he says, they broke into their office, using the bush as cover, and stole their property valued at over sh50m.

Mwanya says earlier in 2001, the Government took a \$22m (sh80b) loan from African Development Bank (AfDB). However, all the infrastructure put in place to kick-start these multi-billion projects have been abandoned.

"Look," Mwanya exclaims in exasperation, pointing at an overgrown bush that has now swallowed the KADC complex. The complex is supposed to be an extension of NaFIRI in Kajjansi, built for them by the Chinese government in 2014. The centre undertakes fish hatching, breeding, and does routine mapping of fish genetics and markets. It cost \$5m (sh18b).

Mwanya says earlier in 2001,

travel to Tororo - more than 50km away. In fish farming, that is risky because the longer the distance taken to transport seed, the higher the risk of loss. Younger fish are very sensitive to temperature changes," she adds. She says farmers no longer have access to extension services since the Mbale centre closed.

Tumusiime says fish farming is lucrative, but with her current struggles, she cannot expand beyond the three ponds despite having a lot of land.

Efforts to get a comment from officials of GO Investments Limited, which undertook the works, were futile as our calls were not answered. Saturday Vision has, however, learnt that the company is one of those blacklisted by Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority for doing shoddy work.

There are some issues with the project since 1992. The contractor, MHC, who undertook the project, has abandoned the project, refused to hand over the bush around the complex, growing taller every year.

REPORT fish loan



A sinking excavator at Kajjansi. Photo by John Masaba

Since 2005, William Muhumuzi, a private security officer, has been guarding the abandoned project. A rickety Caterpillar grader lies rotting away in the yard. "Unknown people had started stealing its parts. My boss (contractor) asked me to come and help," Muhumuzi says.

He is not comfortable revealing how much he is paid for the job, but says: "They pay well, it helps me send something to my family."

Mwanya says the contractor was supposed to dig 100 ponds of 200 square metres each, but none has been dug yet. The contractor was also supposed to construct three blocks, one of which would produce fish feed at a commercial scale. However, only 50% of the work has been done.

the contractor, but we are working that out," he said. He, however, refused to delve into the details of how much government may have paid for the job, but says: "They pay well, it helps me send something to my family."

He added the government is committed to developing aquaculture as it is the answer to the current woes the country is facing.

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For more than 20 years now, he says Uganda's Nile Perch is part of the 20% fish species that make up 80% of chilled fillet market sales in the European Union.

While a kilogramme fetches him sh13,000 here in Uganda (which he says is decent money), he prefers shipping it to Europe, where it fetches him \$65 (about sh25,000). He also exports mawis (the insides of fish), which means nearly all of the fish fetches some money.

However, dwindling fish stocks in the country have hit him hard and figures from the UPEFA paint a grim picture. He says, fish was the most promising non-traditional commodity for the country.

"But we have lost it now. It is not only about the jobs, but also a lot of foreign exchange," he said.

UPEFA says Nile perch stocks on Lake Victoria alone reduced from 13 million tonnes in 1999 to 300,000 in 2008, representing a decline in value of \$1.9b (sh6.8 trillion) to the Ugandan economy.

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Borel said on average, fish processors are operating at 20%. Out of 60 fish processing companies in the country in 2005, there are now only seven in operation, one of which is Borel's Greenfields based in Entebbe.

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Amuru fish farmers cry out

Early this year, Tarad Okello, got a trip to the Netherlands after emerging among best candidates in the Vision Group Best Farmers competition. The competition is an annual project sponsored by the Dutch Embassy, KLM Airlines and dcb Bank, in conjunction with Vision Group.

He has quickly become an inspiration to farmers in Amuru. "Several people have been streaming to my farm every day for lessons on how they can also make it," Okello says.

He hopes to mobilise the farmers to start mass production of Red Tilapia, a rare species he got from the Netherlands. The fish type is in hot demand in Europe and could bring in millions of dollars for Amuru farmers. But the deal is slipping out of his hands. "I do not have the technical knowhow to multiply it (Red Tilapia) yet," he says. This service would have been readily acquired from the Fish Fry at Laliya sub-ward in Gulu, which is one of the projects financed with the \$22m loan from AfDB. But the project lies abandoned in a bush

despite the Government spending billions of shillings.

Sitting on 15 acres, the centre has a hatchery with capacity to produce 100,000 fingerlings a month, a standby generator, water heating system and regulatory tank. But these are rotting away with a thick bush growing over the area. All the 24 fish ponds are empty and dried up.

The Gulu district chairman, Martin Ojara Mpenduzi, says he made several pleas to have the centre completed, but that has fallen on deaf ears of agriculture ministry officials.

"I have written several letters to the permanent secretary but have never received any reply," he says. Due to lack of a fish hatchery in northern Uganda, farmers have to travel to Kampala, more than 200km away, to buy fingerlings and feed for their farms.

"There are several private farms here where one can buy. But it is a risk. There are a lot of lakes. I once bought 200 fingerlings of Nile perch, but it took a year for each to grow into a fish of 300 grammes," Okello says. Quality seeds can yield a fish weighing 800 grammes in six months in an aquarium, according to NaFIRI.

Golden global opportunity lost

Fish and fishery products are some of the most-traded segments of the world food sector, according to the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2015 report released by Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

It said fishery products have the ability to access and consolidate markets in the world, particularly in the European Union, the Middle East, South Korea, Singapore, Israel, Japan and Australia are

particularly singled out as lucrative destinations for fish.

"Fish now accounts for almost 17% of the global population's intake of protein," the report said. FAO estimates that fisheries and aquaculture support the livelihoods of 10-12% of the world's population. But the report also warns of an acute demand, urging countries to make faster inroads into alternatives to capture fisheries (lakes fishing), with aquaculture billed as the

best bet for countries' food security and job demands of their populations as well as foreign exchange.

According to the report, aquaculture contributes up to 44.1% of world fish production. The report said all continents have shown a general trend of an increasing share of aquaculture production in total fish production, due to increasing challenges in capture fisheries (fishing on lakes, rivers), including climate change.



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Mbale govt fish centre turned into grazing area

Like KADC, the Mbale aquaculture lies in ruins. It has now become a grazing area for cattle and goats. The wire mesh and metallic angle bars, which once secured the six-acre complex in Nkoma on the Mbale-Soroti highway from encroachers and trespassers, have been harvested by scrap dealers. The Mbale district fisheries officer, Francis Walyambooga, is an unhappy man. He says they were reluctant to hand it over but were overpowered by the agriculture ministry. "They said they would put up something more modern and help more farmers," he says. "We used to supply the

farmers in time. There was no problem with the fingerlings. We had about three species, including cyprinus carpio (common carp fish) from Israel," he adds. According to <http://www.fishbase.org>, the common carp is tolerant of a wide variety of conditions. It can grow to a weight of 40kg with the female able to lay up to one million eggs in one season.

Mbale was the only place in the whole country that reared that species, said Walyambooga. "All the hard work we had put in has gone to waste," he says, singling out the agriculture ministry for negligence and not



Mbale fish centre has been abandoned. Photo by J. Wazuli

supervising the contractor. "We would have done the supervision but they ignored us and preferred to deal directly with contractor from Kampala."

All the 60 ponds have since dried up and the area turned into a grazing area.

Ann Tumusiime, a fish farmer in Mbale, says: "I sold my house in Senior Quarters (a prime area in Mbale town)

to start fish farming, but I think I made a mistake. She has three fish ponds in Namatala near Namatala River where she rears catfish and Nile perch.

Tumusiime, who was introduced to fish farming by her late husband in 1993, says at first business was "very good but things have taken a nosedive."

"To get seed, I have to

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