



The dam has brought life back to Kyamahingi Village in Kajwaka Parish, Kanara Sub-county, Ntoroko District. PHOTO/TREVOR LUTALO

How dam is saving Ntoroko's herds

Constructed by the government and later improved with support from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the dam is designed to withstand dry conditions. A solar-powered pump pushes water into reserve tanks, ensuring availability even when levels are low.

BY TREVOR LUTALO

By the time you arrive in Kanara Sub-county, the land tells its own story. The grass is short, grazed almost to the roots. In the distance, scattered herds of cattle move slowly across wide, open rangelands. Goats and sheep trail behind, their keepers walking patiently in the heat. It is a landscape shaped by livestock, not crops.

Located westwards, Ntoroko District sits at the edge of Lake Albert in the Rwenzori Sub-region, farming follows the rhythm of water, either too much of it, or none at all.

For a district that sits on the shores of one of Uganda's largest lakes, water remains one of the most difficult resources to access. Ntoroko is one of the country's flood-prone districts. When the rains come, Lake Albert often bursts its banks, submerging homes and grazing land. But when the rains retreat, a different crisis sets in.

Months of dry weather leave the upland areas parched, turning water into a scarce and contested resource. It is this contradiction, floods on one hand and drought on the other, that defines life and farming in Ntoroko.

For most households, access to clean and safe water has long been a daily struggle. Communities depend on River Semuli-

ki and Lake Albert, drawing water that is often unsafe for human consumption. In many cases, people share these sources with livestock, exposing both to health risks.

How livelihoods are built

Livelihoods here are built around pastoralism. Crop farming is limited, largely because unpredictable weather makes it difficult to sustain. Instead, families rely on cattle, goats and sheep for income, food and security. But without reliable water, even livestock farming becomes a gamble.

"In the past, we used to move long distances looking for water, sometimes spending an entire day just trying to get water for our animals," says Charles Isingoma, a resident of Kyamahingi Village in Kajwaka Parish, Kanara Sub-county, and chairperson of the water user committee. "By the time you return home, both the animals and the people are exhausted, and this affects productivity."

Mr Isingoma recalls that during prolonged dry spells, the situation would quickly become desperate.

"We have lost animals in the past because of water scarcity. Others would become weak and fetch very low prices in the market," he says. "Some farmers were forced to sell off their cattle cheaply just to avoid losing everything. It was not by

choice, but because there was no alternative."

Before the establishment of the valley dam, Lake Albert was the main fallback option. But even that came at a cost.

"We used to take animals to the lake, but it is very far for some of us," Isingoma explains. "And the water is not clean. Animals drink there, people fetch the same water, and sometimes it is contaminated. It was risky, especially for children."

It is against this backdrop that the Kanara valley dam has emerged as a lifeline. About an hour into the interior of Ntoroko, the dam comes into view, its presence marked by constant activity. Herds of cattle stream in from different directions, while herdsmen guide them steadily toward the water. Nearby, children push bicycles carrying jerry cans, others waiting patiently in line.

For Isingoma, this daily scene is a sign of transformation. "This dam has brought life back to this community," he says. "It is not only serving Kyamahingi village, but also neighbouring villages. When the drought is severe, you will find people coming from far distances because they know they will find water here."

Constructed by the government and later improved with support from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the dam is designed to withstand dry conditions. A solar-powered pump pushes water into reserve tanks, ensuring availability even when levels are low.

"The improvement by FAO made a big difference," Isin-

goma notes. "Before, the water would reduce quickly during drought, but now with the pumping system and storage, we are able to manage it better and serve more people."

For the community, the benefits go beyond livestock. Water from the dam is also used at home, he says. "We use it for cooking, washing and other domestic work. It has reduced the burden, especially for women and children who used to walk long distances to fetch water."

Unlike the lake and river sources, access to water at the dam is organised. Users pay a maintenance fee of Shs100 per jerry can, an arrangement that helps sustain the facility.

"As a committee, we agreed on the small fee to help with maintenance," Isingoma explains. "This money is used to repair the system when there is a problem and to ensure that the dam continues to serve the community."

He emphasises that the system has encouraged a sense of ownership among residents.

"People value what they contribute to," he says. "Because they pay for something, even if it is small, they are more responsible. They follow the guidelines, and they help us protect the dam."

Still, the demand for water often exceeds supply, especially during peak dry seasons. "Sometimes the pressure is too much," Isingoma admits.

Dam impact

"You find many animals and people waiting. That is why we are saying one dam is not enough for this area."

For livestock farmers, however, even this single facility has made a significant difference.

"Now we are able to keep our animals even in the longest droughts," he says. "We no longer panic when the dry season comes because we know there is at least one reliable source of water."

This reliability translates directly into economic stability.

"When animals have enough water, they remain healthy," Isingoma explains. "They produce more milk, they grow well, and when you take them to the market, you get better prices. That is how this dam is helping us improve our livelihoods."

Shs100
MAINTENANCE
FEE PER JERRY CAN