

Concern. Maj James Nuwagaba, the marine commander in-charge of fighting illegal fishing, said some fishermen are using poison to catch fish.

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Fishermen using poison to catch fish - marine officer

BUIKWE/JINJA. Ugandans, especially those living in West Nile and Teso sub-regions are at the risk of suffering from gastric cancer due to consuming suspected poisoned fish from Victoria, Albert and Kyoga lakes, a new Uganda People's Defence Forces Fish Protection Unit report has stated.

Maj James Nuwagaba, the marine commander in-charge of fighting illegal fishing, said fishermen have resorted to using poison to catch fish, which is then smuggled to West Nile, Teso, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan among other destinations.

"Our intelligence reports indicate that people from West Nile, South Sudan and Teso region are consuming poisoned fish since fishermen are using dangerous methods to catch and sell it in the area," Maj Nuwagaba said during the launch of the illegal fishing operation at Ssenyi Landing Site in Buikwe District last week.

He said: "Chemicals are used to lure the fish to a particular area within the lake and in the process; they die and float on water before they are picked by the fishermen."

He said UPDF have so far destroyed more than 50 small boats used by fishermen for catching immature fish, non-recommended nets, hooks, fishing gears - all worth millions of Shillings.

URA, Trade Ministry blamed

Maj Nuwagaba accused Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) and the Ministry of Trade on what he called 'weak enforcement operations at the boarder-points of Uganda'.

This, he said, promotes illegal fishing in the waters by allowing the flooding of bad fishing gear, especially from China into the country.

"URA and the Ministry of Trade are responsible for the entry of these illegal and dangerous fishing gears into the country; they have not tightened or used their mandate to control unwanted items into the country," he said.

When contacted, the Trade ministry public relations officer, Ms Hadijah Nakakande, said URA is mandated



Impounded. Army officers display impounded fish during an operation to crack down on illegal fishermen at Ssenyi Landing Site in Buikwe District last week.

PHOTO BY DENIS EDEMA

EXPERTS' VIEWS

Dr Alfred Jatho, an oncologist from Uganda Cancer Institute, says: "There's no specific cancer linked to the size of fishing gear or confirmation that nets imported from China make one susceptible to cancer. Cancer begins at a cell level."

He added: "Unless the fish is fed on chemicals that the fish becomes 'cancerous'. And with the cordial working relationship between Uganda and China, it is beyond me to know whether China can export nets laced with cancerous chemicals to Uganda."

Dr Alfred Okuku, another oncologist from UCI, said: "If the fishermen are using poison to catch fish, the author of the report should have pointed out the poison or chemicals being used. However, if they (fishermen) are using agricultural inputs, chemicals, pesticides and generally hydrocarbons, these are known to cause cancer," he said.

He added: "It also comes down to the regulation. There's no regulation about the use of these chemicals and as a result, the risk can be so high."

manyika, said their (URA) mandate is on taxes while Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UBOS) is mandated to maintain standards.

"Some of them could spill over; however, no illegal fishing gear can cross a gazetted boarder unless through smuggling. Yes, some can come through, but through porous borders," he said on yesterday.

Illegal methods

The types of illegal fishing gears reportedly imported from China include monofilament nets, which cost about Shs75,000. These are chemically made nets with an electric spark, which once cast into the water, attracts all sorts of fish around any fish. Others are monofilament lines used for catching fish with hooks. Here, hundreds of them are placed with Tilapia that is alive such that the Nile Perch is lured to come and swallow it (the Tilapia) before getting caught.

to regulate the entry of the fishing gears into the country.

"We wrote to the Commissioner

General of URA to ban the illegal entry of fishing gears from China as the body that controls the entry of all

goods into the country. We did our job," Ms Nakakande said.

The URA spokesperson, Mr Ian Ru-