

Saving Lake Victoria calls for integrated approach

EDITOR: In the wake of the recent reports of the allegations of Lake Victoria fishing communities towards the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF) over human rights abuses, one is left wondering about how Uganda can save the world's second largest fresh water lake that plays a critical role in the ecosystem and source of livelihood for millions of Ugandans.

The UPDF efforts in curbing bad fishing practices in the lake communities through creation of awareness, regular patrolling, arresting illegal fishermen, capturing and destroying illegal fishing gears as well as ensuring that the fish supply chain is clean to the extent of arresting immature fish dealers in markets should be applauded.

Their efforts in the past one year has seen increase in fish catch at some landing sites.

The question that now remains is how we can ensure sustainable fishing in Lake Victoria, a critical ecosystem that sustains millions of lives across East Africa, a habitat for several bird species, a tourist hotspot and a source of millions of foreign revenue for Uganda without jeopardising the livelihood of fishing communities?

According to UNEP, over 30 million people reside in the Lake Victoria watershed with an estimated increase of 3% per annum.

In the Lake Victoria watershed, population density is one of the highest in the world, averaging more than 500 persons/km² and exceeding 1000

persons/ km² in parts of Kenya. It is upon this that our government needs to appreciate that overtime the population of lake dependent communities has been increasing hence over fishing tendencies to meet consumer demand, destruction of critical fish breeding sites, habitats for birds and other key species.

The sustainable and holistic way to sustainable fisheries and a sustainable Lake Victoria ecosystem could be in the population health and environment (PHE) approach.

The PHE approach addresses head-on the challenges of food security, nutrition, unmet need for family planning health, environment degradation, maternal and infant mortality, climate change, energy, gender equality, lack of economic/

livelihood opportunities as well as water sanitation and hygiene.

The PHE approach could be adopted by the Government through UPDF under the Operational Wealth Creation programme activities amongst lake communities as a sustainable and holistic way of addressing some of the challenges in the Lake Victoria basin by appreciating that population growth and health are closely interlinked with increased pressure on fisheries, forests and the ecosystem at large and as such some holistic approaches like PHE could promote sustainable fisheries.

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PICTURE BY SAMUEL BALAGADE

Lift retirement age