



The fish catch has dropped

For a long time, fishermen on Lake Kyoga, which occupies 10 districts in eastern, northern and central Uganda, have used carcasses of domestic animals,

disappearing, in the process being discovered later are being linked to their being used by unscrupulous fishermen as baits in catching fish.

According to ... usually go on the lake with ...

Fishermen resort to killing to make BAIT FOR FISH

By Pascal Kwesiga

When Samuel Amandra arrived in Kayago fishing village, Amolatar district about a year ago, he expected his life to improve.

For a few months, he fetched water from Lake Kyoga and vendied it in the villages of Amolatar.

However, towards the end of last year, he started accompanying fishermen on fishing expeditions in canoes so he could learn the trade. His family recalls that on the evening of January 19, Amandra together with a fisherman, who was reportedly teaching him how to fish, got into a canoe to go fishing.

Residents at Kayago fishing village only identified the fisherman Amandra went fishing with as Meddie. They claim that whereas Meddie returned the following day, Amandra did not.

The fishermen also claim that Meddie fled the village and on January 20, an abandoned canoe was discovered on the lake. In the canoe were the clothes Amandra wore when he and Meddie went to fish.

Fishermen also claim that a raincoat belonging to Meddie was also found in the canoe. Three days later, (January 23) Amandra's body was found floating on water by a team comprising the marine Police and fishermen.

The body was tied with ropes around the legs and arms. It also bore bruises and cuts, an indication that Amandra was hit with blunt objects before he died.

The fishermen alleged that Amandra, who is a father of four, is the latest victim of a new crime among fishermen who have allegedly resorted to killing people and using their bodies as bait to catch fish.

Amandra's body was buried in the cemetery belonging to the Muslim community in Kayago. Around the grave, there are gloves and papyrus mats used by the Police and fishermen to carry the remains



Bodies are reportedly tied on sudds to attract fish. Photo by Abou Kisige

from the water to the burial site. The Police have since arrested three people in connection with similar murders on Lake Kyoga, but Meddie remains at large.

According to Osman Angaa, 31, a fisherman at Kayago, some fishermen started the practice of killing people and using their bodies as bait for catching fish in 2015.

"They have been doing it for about two years now to catch more fish. Amandra was my friend and tribesmate (Lugbara from Arua district) and he was just learning how to fish," Angaa added.

Rashida Vita, 35, another fisherman at Kayago fishing village, said it is impossible that Amandra was killed by other fishermen for straying into their (fishermen) fishing grounds because he was only learning how to fish.

"The one (Meddie) he went with into the lake knew how to fish and he came back. Amandra was killed and his killers tied him in one place to attract fish," Vita added.

Strange activities on lake
There are many floating islands on Lake Kyoga. Some fishermen, who claim to 'own'

some of the floating islands (sudds), fight their colleagues who 'stray into their territories'. They tie sacks of sand and stones under the sudd to prevent them from drifting.

Dennis Otema, another fisherman, confirmed reports that apart from killing fishermen who stray into other people's 'territories', some fishermen have resorted to murdering people (fishermen) and using their bodies as bait to attract fish towards the sudd.

"Nowadays, people who stray into the controlled territory of the floating islands do not only get killed, but their bodies are tied under sudd to attract fish," he added.

The fishermen claim over 10 people have so far been killed and their bodies used as bait to catch fish on the lake since 2015.

Machetes, spears in lakes
The lake covers over 10 districts in eastern and central Uganda. But most of the incidents regarding killing people around sudd have reportedly occurred in Amolatar district.

"Since last year, we have retrieved from the lake three bodies of people reportedly killed by fishermen around the sudd," says the district Police commander, Gerald Isabirye, said.

However, the Police have not established allegations by fishermen that three victims (whose bodies the Police retrieved) were killed for purposes of being used as bait for catching fish.

However, Isabirye confirmed that fishermen go out in the waters with traditional weapons such as machetes and spears to fight off or attack those they find 'straying in their fishing' waters'.

Use of dog carcasses
Isabirye also confirmed that fishermen have for a long time been killing domestic animals, including dogs, and tying the carcasses under the floating islands to attract fish.

"Some (fishermen) have even been buying beef and using it to catch fish. It is common knowledge that they have also killed dogs and goats for the same purpose. The use of human bodies has not been confirmed," he added.

He explained that the three

bodies the Police retrieved from the lake did not bear signs that they had been partly eaten by fish, but one of them had decomposed.

Florence Akello, 59, said the body which had disintegrated was that of her son, Anthony Aman. Akello, a resident of Namasale fishing village in Amolatar, said his 38-year-old son was dragged from a bar last June and thrown into the lake to drown.

"If his body had not been held up somewhere in the lake, it would have floated immediately. It took about three weeks to see the body floating on water," Akello added.

A marine Police officer said fishing communities around the lake believe human flesh is good bait for fish, and that the belief could be the reason why bodies of some people who drown in the lake are never recovered.

The officer in charge of marine Police on Lake Kyoga, Samuel Onyango, said incidents involving murder of fishermen in the lake have been reported in Amolatar and Nakasongola districts, but preliminary investigations show deaths resulted from fighting over sudd.

"We are investigating the reports," he added.

Fishermen insist
Tommy Ogwang, the leader of fishermen in the district, insists that for two years, they have received reports that some fishermen have been killed and their bodies used as bait to catch fish.

In figures

10 FISHERMEN

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2015
According to Osman Angaa, 31, a fisherman at Kayago, some fishermen started the practice of killing people and using their bodies as bait for catching fish in 2015.

600 SQ MILES

Lake Kyoga spreads across 600 square miles in 10 districts in northern, central and eastern Uganda.

"The district Police commander is new in this area and the Police do not understand some of the issues regarding fishing. I have been fishing for about 20 years now. I interact with fishermen every day and I know what is happening," he adds.
Paul Okecho, the LC1 chairman of Kayago villages, said some fishermen believe a foul smell from a decomposing body attracts fish into the nets. "We have not had law enforcement operations on the lake since the President suspended them in 2015. The fish catch has reduced and fishermen are employing all methods to catch fish," he added.

Kambu Ssenyonza, the chairperson of the Association of Fishermen and Lake Users of Uganda, who is a fisherman on Lake Victoria, said if proven, using human flesh to catch fish would be the most unfortunate development among the fishing fraternity.

Moses Kiseombo, a fisherman in Ntoroko district on Lake Albert, said the use of human flesh to catch fish is unheard of on the water body. "Not even beef has ever been used on this lake before," he added.

A fisheries scientist at the National Fisheries Resources Research institute said although fish is attracted to beef, there is no previous record of lakes where it has been used in fishing activity.

"If it is true, then it highlights the fact that fishermen are now trying out all sorts of things to get fish as the catch dwindles continuously," he added.