

Management issues in Lake Victoria watershed

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Abstract:

Lake Victoria is the largest lake in Africa (68 800 km²) and is the eighth largest lake in the world by volume. The three East African countries of Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya share Lake Victoria and its resources. The total annual catch of fish from the lake ranges between 400 × 10⁶ kg and 500 × 10⁶ kg, bringing these riparian countries a combined annual income of approximately US\$250 000–500 000 from exports alone. Approximately 30 million people live in the riparian region and the catchment, with about 2 million of these depending directly or indirectly on fishing activities. Tragically, Lake Victoria's extremely diverse fauna was decimated in only 30 years following the introduction of non-native Nile perch in the early 1960s. An estimated 200 endemic cichlid species became extinct. Dramatic increases in overfishing, pollution from various sources, effects of noxious water weeds and other associated problems threaten the sustainability of the lake's resources and the economies of the riparian governments and peoples. Regulations governing Lake Victoria's resources are different in each country. The laws concerning treatment of effluents from point sources in the three countries are not harmonized, neither are implementation or enforcement provisions. The governments of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have begun to put in place regional mechanisms to address the lake's many problems including the creation of a permanent regional international institution through the establishment of the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO). A strategic vision document and action plans have been developed. Efforts are being made at local, national and regional levels to control the water hyacinth, including manual pulling, mechanical harvesting and introduction of weevils that weaken hyacinth root systems. To address the problem of overfishing, fishermen committees at landing beaches have been put in place. Each country has committed to take all necessary measures including legislation to implement the decisions of the LVFO governing bodies. All three countries have agreed to adopt and enforce legislation and regulations prohibiting the introduction of non-indigenous species to the lake and to enforce existing regulations regarding fisheries. A Global Environment Facility project which provides funding to the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization addresses land use management, catchment forestation, fisheries research and management, water hyacinth control, industrial effluent treatment and municipal waste treatment.