

JUNE 2016



HOPELVB BEACH MANAGEMENT UNITS

Bringing Fishing and Planning for Families Together in the Basin

After hours of fishing in Lake Victoria, Oket Stephen, a fisher from Kavenyanja, returned dejected. The look on his face revealed the agonizing reality—fish stocks are declining. “There are no longer fish in the lake,” he said. “For the past month, I have been going out to fish, but come back with nothing. I cannot make enough money to meet my family’s basic needs and take my children to school. I have two women and seven children to take care of.”

PROTECTING REMARKABLE NATURE

Lake Victoria is the second largest freshwater lake in the world, boasting the world’s largest freshwater fishery. It is the source-feed of the world’s longest river, the Nile, supporting an estimated 42 million people along its shores. For generations, men and women have fished in the waters of the Lake Victoria for subsistence and recently for commercial export. Over time, unsustainable fishing and farming

practices, as well as increased demand for resources from rapidly growing population, has overwhelmed fisheries that have traditionally supported the basin. In the last few decades, activities in the basin have increasingly created stress, resulting in the environmental instability of the lake.

Experts warn that more than ever before, the lake basin is facing numerous threats. So the question is—*How can such threats be addressed simultaneously, in a holistic and integrated fashion, in a way that respects communities’ needs and rights?*

RESPONDING HOLISTICALLY

A new approach to conservation in the basin—to save families as well as the fish and their habitats—is the Health of People and Environment in the Lake Victoria Basin (HoPE-LVB) project. HoPE-LVB seeks to reduce threats to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem degradation in the LVB while simultaneously increasing access to family planning and reproductive health services, in order to improve maternal and child health in

project communities in Uganda and Kenya. By integrating the delivery of reproductive health, livelihood, and conservation education and services in these communities, HoPE-LVB is improving reproductive health and natural resource management in the basin more successfully than programs focused exclusively on reproductive health or the environment.

SUPPORTING FISHERMEN TO BECOME CHANGE AGENTS

“Through HoPE, our Beach Management Unit is involved in a number of activities,” says Tadwa Laurenzio, Chairman of the Kyanjanzi BMU on Bussi Island. “We identified fish breeding areas and are working together to make sure no one fishes within these areas. Through the project, we learned how to work together to fight illegal fishing by reporting those involved in it and directly participating in patrol, using the boat engine the project donated.”

HoPE-LVB builds the capacity of BMUs to take collective responsibility to actively protect and restore fish stocks, their habitat, and the

entire ecosystem they depend on. This goes hand-in-hand with harvest management—establishing who, when, and where to fish, as well as tracking and documenting the fish catches.

Bussi fishing communities have learned that fish, like people, have a lifecycle that takes them through a series of stages—from birth to old age and death. At each stage in their growth, fish have needs and are vulnerable to threats, mainly natural mortality, predation, increased fishing pressures, and other environmental factors. For the continued health of the fish stock, it is important that fishers do not catch young fish, before they reach maturity and are able to breed. This will ensure there are always enough fish for fishing now and in the future. BMUs call these protected breeding sites “maternity wards.”

JUST ONE PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

Through HoPE-LVB, all sustainable fishing activities are done in tandem with the delivery of reproductive health and family planning services.

“Some of our BMU members serve as Village Health Teams,” says Laurenso. “They have been trained to give information to pregnant women and get them to go for antenatal care. They also talk to people about sanitation. Beyond health—our BMU has also been able to engage women’s and youth groups on activities like beekeeping, so they can earn money and fight poverty. We have also been able to raise over 600,000 tree seedlings and have planted over 578,100 trees on the lake banks and in the community so far. This lake is very important to our lives. We need to protect and guard it.”

The HoPE-LVB project has been made possible by the generosity of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and individual donors, and through partnerships between:

“The number of people on this island is increasing day by day. All of them rely on the lake to meet their needs for food and income. This means we need more fish for food and to sell to get money. Some of us who have been fishing since childhood. We know we have never seen the size of the lake increase...So we have a big role to play. It is our responsibility to protect this lake for now and the future.” —Mr. Kabuye, Chairman LC111, Bussi Island

