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# Joint Operations in Lake Victoria to reduce IUU fishing

## Background

Lake Victoria, Africa's largest lake, is arguably the most important single source of freshwater fish on the African continent, contributing significantly to national and regional economies and the livelihoods of an estimated three million inhabitants of the three countries bordering its shores, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Nile perch was introduced to the lake in the 1950s and increased in biomass to such an extent that it decimated the lake's endemic fish community and became the most important fish species in the lake, forming the basis of a lucrative commercial fishery. The Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO) was formed in 1994 to jointly manage the Lake's fisheries resources on behalf of the three partner States, but nevertheless Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing have had a continued impact on Nile perch. Its Biomass peaked at around 2.3 million tonnes in 1999 and accounted for 92% of total fish biomass but fell to less than 300,000 tonnes in 2008. Moreover, the average length of Nile perch has declined from 51.7 cm to 26.6 cm, as recorded in 2008, significantly below the required minimum size of 50 cm for export<sup>1</sup>.

MCS within Lake Victoria is coordinated by the MCS Regional Working Group (RWG-MCS), which consists of senior fisheries inspectors and a senior police officer from each of

the partner States. Between 2004 and 2008, the RWG-MCS received funding as part of the EU sponsored project on the Implementation of a Fisheries Management Plan (IMFP). In 2006, the RWG-MCS agreed to Standard Operating Procedures, which harmonized the MCS activities in the three partner States. Since the project ended, the work of the RWG-MCS has been more limited. Data inconsistencies and inaccuracies make it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of this project, especially as it is believed that the frame surveys underestimated the use of illegal fishing gear by as much as 30%.

As a result of overfishing the LVFO identifies the main threats to sustainability from illegal activity as :

- Use of illegal gears including:
  - long lines using hooks of No.10 size or smaller
  - gill nets with less than 5 inches mesh size
  - all sizes of monofilament nets
  - seine nets
  - cast nets
  - the use of poisons
  - the use of dynamite
- Capture, transport and processing of immature fish
- Fishing in restricted areas
- Fishing without the necessary permits
- Unregulated trade of Nile perch for Chinese market in dried swim bladders has removes spawners from the stock.

<sup>1</sup> Kariuki, J., Assessment of IUU Activities on Lake Victoria, June 2012, Indian Ocean Commission Report SF/2012/12, 2012.

Community-based Beach Management Units (BMUs) were established to legally represent each fishing community and undertake MCS activities. It is a requirement that all non-industrial fishers have to be registered with a BMU in order to obtain a fishing license from the fisheries authorities. The BMU inspects fishing boats and gear and makes recommendations to the fisheries authorities with respect to registration and licensing. Lake Victoria has 1087 registered BMUs, but for several reasons they largely have failed to control illegal fishing. The BMUs come together to form district and national level committees. The national committees form the Regional BMU Network, which is a component of the LVFO structure and thus is represented at the Council of Ministers. Despite the potential of this Network, a lack of financing creates another challenge.

## The SmartFish Intervention

Faced with a continuing decline in the Nile perch stock the LVFO requested the SmartFish programme to work with all three member states. This took the form of capacity building in the first year to develop professional MCS teams followed by practical operations for the remaining three years, initially as joint operations with all three member states taking part and in 2014 -2015 nationally with Tanzania and Uganda only.

During the first phase of the SmartFish Programme organized and implemented a series of MCS training workshops in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, the three LVFO partner States. The first part of the training consisted of an initial workshop that took place in Jinja, Uganda during March to April 2012 and focused on operational planning for multilateral MCS operations. One exercise in the workshop involved planning a multilateral joint operation, which then was practiced to assess what had been learned.

This was followed by three operational exercises during the period of May to August 2012: SmartFish II, III and IV in Bondo, Kenya, Entebbe, Uganda and Bukoba, Tanzania respectively. Each exercise contained the following components:

- The issuance of an 'Exercise Warning Order' two weeks prior to the start date in order to encourage a pre-training operational mind set in accordance with the prior theoretical training.
- One day of refresher training to reinforce the lessons learned in the prior training.
- An operational planning session with a Principal Fisheries Officer (Operation Commander), two Fisheries Officials (Section Commanders) and BMU representatives.
- The presentation of the operational plan to the participants, including representatives from all three LVFO partner States.
- The implementation of the Joint Operation: Typically a 9-day exercise which used a local vessel as a 'mothership' to transport the personnel to target locations around Lake Victoria where support vessels then transported the teams to shore<sup>2</sup>.

These three operational exercises resulted in measurable successes such as the confiscation and destruction of illegal fishing gear and boats. For example, during the first two days of SmartFish Exercise IV, 48 beach seines, 252 undersize gill nets, 193 monofilament nets and 3 dagaa nets were confiscated and burned, along with large quantities of undersized fish. Additionally the presence of large team of MCS officials performing surveillance mission demonstrated that IUU fishing was no longer being tolerated.

Overall, the operational exercises were a large success, not only because of the amount of confiscated gear, but also because of the media attention the issue received and the extent of education and training received by the participants. The success would not have been possible without the enthusiasm, discipline, teamwork and dedication of the participants, particularly the leadership and planning skills of the Commanders.

However some of the missions were met with extreme hostility by the local fishermen who would resort to physical violence. The MCS participants had to ensure they demonstrated an authoritative presence to control angry villagers<sup>3</sup>. This level of protest serves as just one indicator of how serious the local people take fishing as it is a source of food and livelihood for many. As the resources become scarce, they have taken to illegal methods of fishing to ensure that they still can maintain a living and provide for their families. This demonstrated that continued operations and interventions would need to be made to eliminate IUU fishing.

In 2014 SmartFish continued to be involved in regional MCS operations through which more illegal fishing gear was confiscated, during seven joint operations, approximately.

In 2015 six national operations took place in Uganda and Tanzania. National inter agency team planned, coordinate and executed the operation using formal procedures and supported by SmartFish experts. The operation resulted in the confiscation of so much illegal gears that it was impossible to patrol all the beaches.

## Drivers

The main drivers are the continuing decline in Lake Victoria's Nile perch stock, the extend of illegal fishing taking place in the lake, the failure of previous initiatives and the lack of effective control and monitoring measures in place to address the IUU problem.

## Results

- **Exposing the scale of IUU and illegal trade** was important to increase awareness of the urgent need to improve management measure and MCS.
- **Training and capacity building by experts in MCS planning and execution** has resulted in fully trained, professional MCS leaders and interagency teams with the ability to plan and carry out national and joint operations where and when required.
- **Tanzania and Uganda have been effective in using the SmartFish MCS patrol model** to their advantage and has copied it, albeit with its very low operational funding to conduct their own self-funded operation.
- **36 operational MCS** mission conducted between 2011-2015
- **720 personal** trained in operations
- **300 personal** trained in basic enforcement
- **3600m<sup>3</sup>** of illegal net confiscated

## Lessons learned

- The success of the joint operation demonstrate that when working together states can organise and implement effective MCS operation.
- All partner states must be involve to curb IUU fishing in the Lake
- Planning of operation and logistical control is essential for improved operational efficiency and effectiveness



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- Refresher training should be occasionally carried out
- Night operation are effective as they incorporate an element of surprise
- Involvement of senior officers and politician boost the operational team moral and increase exposure to MCS effort and IUU fishing.
- Fishers and communities must be made aware of importance of fisheries regulation and should be involve in the management process.

technical assistance, coordination and leadership in the future.

- **Support Lake Victoria riparian countries on risk analysis for enforcement operations.** This will establishing clear parameters of where and when to focus efforts. Funding will be used more effectively, results will be tailored to the largest problem areas and planning will be more manageable.
- **Implement effective mechanism to generate revenue from fishers** so that funds are available for implementation of management measures and MCS
- **Encourage improved internal inter agency coordination** between various ministries that govern over fisheries and fishing communities.
- **Engage with local communities** to sensitize them to the consequence of IUU fishing and increase likelihood of long term success in eliminating IUU fishing. Economic development and livelihood diversification is essential so that fishers do not have to rely on IUU fishing practices in order to support their families.
- **Support BMUs** to eradicate corrupt and illegal activities within their ranks, and to foster commitment to fisheries management measures by providing training, regular MCS support and benefits or incentives, financial or otherwise, to ensure their commitment.
- **Ensure** that all three riparian countries benefit from all form of support

## Conclusions/Recommendations

In order to combat IUU fishing, various initiatives have been undertaken in the past by the three riparian countries of Lake Victoria, the LVFO as well as by donor organizations. These initiatives faced many challenges largely due to financial limitations and the lack of political will and consequently IUU fishing continued to be an increasing problem.

Seeing the need for action in the face of this problem, SmartFish supported a joint MCS intervention. The SmartFish intervention consisted of an operational training workshop followed by the implementation of joint and national operations, whereby illegal gear and boats were confiscated and destroyed. The successes of the operations were shared with the media for increased publicity with the aim that fishers would realize that IUU fishing is no longer being tolerated. Though the operations faced challenges, they were successful in increasing the enforcement presence on the lake. Not only do continued SmartFish interventions such as this one have merit, but in addition, the following further activities are recommended:

- **Support Lake Victoria riparian countries in brainstorming** and developing a longer term strategy for sustainable and consistent funding to strengthen the LVFO and the MCS Regional Working Group.
- **Provide technical and financial assistance to bolster the MCS Regional Working Group** so that it can provide

<sup>2</sup> du Preez, A. P. J., Consolidated Report on Joint Operational Training Undertaken in Lake Victoria: March 2012 to August 2012 (East Africa, LVFO), 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Markovina, M. and Bennett, R., Perched on a knife-edge: Lake Victoria's ailing fisheries, Pambazuka News, 2013-10-30, <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/89460>



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