

**Africa / Uganda****The first of its kind...**

*A report of a fisheries stakeholders' dialogue meeting held in Uganda in June 2005*

**By Caroline E. Nabalema, Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association (KWFDA)**

A fisheries dialogue meeting organized by Action Aid–Uganda in June 2005 brought together fisherfolk from landing sites as well as beach management unit representatives. The meeting also involved district fisheries officials around Lake Victoria, the Uganda Fisheries and Fish Conservation Association (UFFCA) and the Ministry of Fisheries.

Women were also included in the dialogue, through women's community-based organizations. The Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association (KWFDA) is one such organization that promotes women's participation in the fishing sector so as to improve the general quality of rural women's lives.

As the first of its kind for the grassroots fisher communities, the meeting sought to enable all fisherfolk directly engaged in fishing activities—even those at the lowest rung of the production process—to voice their problems and participate in finding solutions.

The main problem was the restriction on fishing in some areas of the lake. The fisherfolk claimed the government had “sold off” parts of the lake to foreign investors who restricted fishing in those parts of the lake. The fishing communities also complained about the introduction of the Nile Perch, a predator that has wiped out the other species of fish such as tilapia and *mukene*. The communities now cannot depend on the lake to add nutritional value to their diets.

Participants also complained about ignorance of national fisheries policies, which were framed without consulting them. This was unfair as they were supposed to actually implement the rules and policies.

There were also complaints about price fluctuations, unfair terms of trade with the industrial processing companies and government failure to protect the

fishermen. The industrial sector was said to directly exploit the fishermen by fixing prices without involving them in price meetings. The dwindling fish stocks in the lake encouraged the capture of immature fish as well as destructive fishing techniques.

The law enforcement strategy has been very harsh and corrupt, the fishermen allege. The officials supposed to patrol the lake are always bribed and, consequently, no lawbreakers are arrested. The communities demanded participatory planning with other stakeholders to frame policy and rules, fix fish prices and disseminate policies in the fishing sector, including restocking the lake, curbing corruption, identifying alternative marketing opportunities for the fishermen, educating local fishermen on global fish trade, and affording government protection against exploitation by middlemen.

It is not, however, clear who will carry out the struggles to change the lives of the fisherfolk. While the participants from Katosi looked up to KWFDA, their sole intermediary in the dialogue, KWFDA, is, in turn, looking up to Action Aid—Uganda for follow-up. Thus, there is likely to be a delay before positive action occurs to improve the status of the fisherfolk. In the worst-case scenario, change may never be realized.

*Caroline can be contacted at  
katosi@utlonline.co.ug*