

## Fisheries management

# Coming together with confidence

This article looks at co-management of lake resources in Uganda through 'beach management units'

Fisheries resources throughout the world are under increasing pressure, and effective approaches to improve management are being sought. Many countries are looking for ways to involve fisheries users in management and the term 'fisheries co-management' has been adopted to refer to a broad range of user-government partnerships. This shift is in recognition of the failure of centralized management of fisheries to maintain stock levels and secure dependent livelihoods within fisheries communities.

Co-management has been defined as "a sharing of responsibility and authority for resource management between the government and local resource users/community" ("Community-based and co-management institutions for sustainable coastal fisheries management in Southeast Asia", by R. S Pomeroy, *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 27 (3), 1995). There are, however, different interpretations of co-management, with different types of responsibilities and levels of authority shared between communities and government. The different approaches to co-management have implications for how fisheries stakeholders, particularly the boat crew and women, benefit from co-management.

Recent experience from Uganda in the implementation of a co-management approach to fisheries management demonstrates how the more marginalized stakeholders in fisheries—the boat crew and women—can be empowered through legislation, capacity building and participation in decision making.

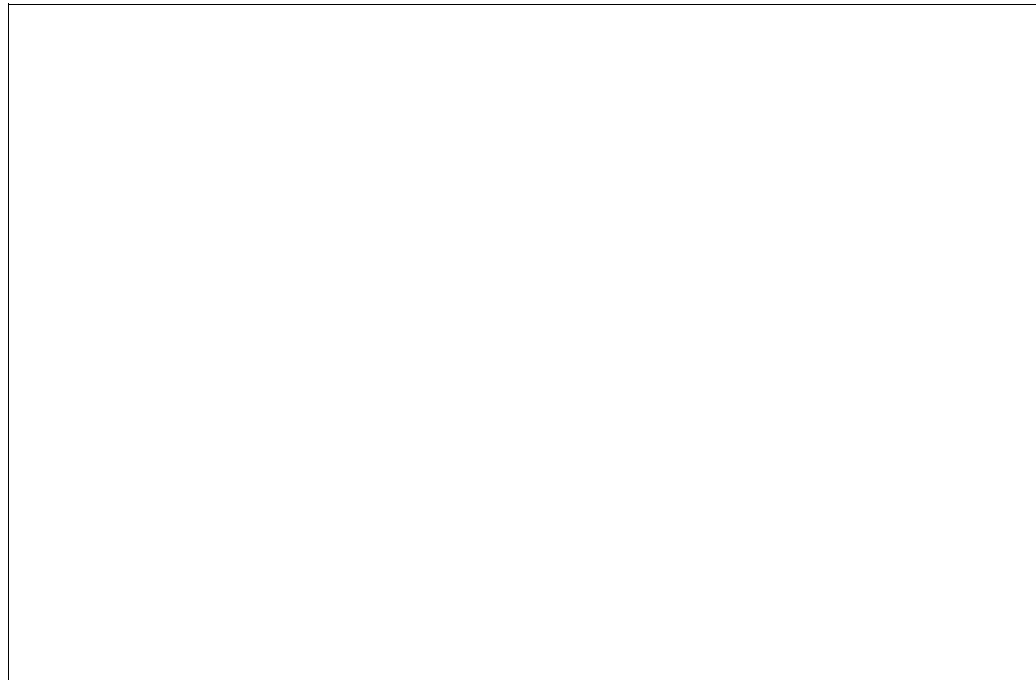
The contribution of fisheries to the national economy of Uganda is

considerable, with an annual economic value of US\$301 mn (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development figures for 2004). Over 300,000 people are directly employed in the capture fisheries sector, many of whom are the poorest in rural society, with a further 1.2 mn people in rural households dependent on the sector. The government recognized that this significant contribution to poverty reduction can only be maintained and increased if the management of fisheries resources involves all relevant stakeholders, including the poor and women.

To implement the new fisheries co-management approach, the government, through its Department of Fisheries Resources (DFR), developed and approved the first-ever National Fisheries Policy (NFP) in March 2004, developed a provisional Fisheries Sector Strategic Plan (FSSP) and passed legislation to empower new fisheries community groups called 'beach management units' (BMUs). The BMUs are designed to ensure that the poor and women participate in key decision-making processes. A draft Fisheries Bill (2004) has been developed that will strengthen the new approach considerably, strengthening new institutions and reforming fisheries taxation.

### Significant move

This article explains how BMUs represent a significant move from the past, centralized approach to fisheries management, how they operate and how those involved in capture fisheries, particularly the boat crew and women, benefit from the roles and responsibilities of BMUs and from the legislation that supports their active involvement. In Uganda, as in most other countries, fisheries management in the past was



vested with central government using out-posted fisheries staff. The administration and management was based on a command-and-control approach. There was very little or no participation by fisheries communities in resource planning, management and development.

**A**t various stages in past management history, informal institutions were established, including local fisheries leaders, known as *gabungas*, landing site committees and fisheries taskforces. Representatives in all these informal institutions were not democratically elected, and had no legal status; their functions were not clearly defined and their operations lacked sufficient transparency and accountability.

Consequently, fisheries management using these institutions within a centralized approach was not very effective and did not reflect the needs of all fisheries stakeholders. Many fisherfolk were excluded from decision making and management, particularly boat crew (the fishermen) and women fishmongers and processors.

In light of the failure of the centralized approach to tackle harmful fishing practices and sustainably manage resources, and in line with the Government of Uganda's

decentralization policy, Uganda adopted a new, more participatory approach to fisheries management.

This approach is founded upon principles underpinning wider government policies that promote poverty-focused and gender-sensitive development strategies. It aims to build good governance, transparency and accountability in fisheries management. It deepens decentralization through participatory fisheries planning and management. This includes marginalized stakeholders, especially poor fishing crew members and women in decision-making structures and processes governing the management of resources upon which their livelihoods depend. This co-management approach brings fishing communities and government together for more effective management and implementation of policies and regulations.

In developing the new NFP and the provisional FSSP, the government held several consultative workshops with local government officials and representatives of all fisheries stakeholder groups. This consultation resulted in consensus and raised awareness about the new approach and ensured that policy was informed by experience and practice.

#### **Sustainable exploitation**

The primary objective of the NFP is to ensure "sustainable exploitation and

culture of the fishery resources at the highest possible levels, thereby maintaining fish availability for both present and future generations, without degrading the environment”.

**T**here is no explicit mention of access rights and livelihoods, but the key policy strategies clearly demonstrate a strong commitment to a new co-management approach. Policy commitments on devolution of some decision-making responsibilities to communities and local government, the formation of sustainable institutions at all levels for fisheries management, and co-operation between local government and communities, guide the implementation of the co-management approach in Uganda.

In order for BMUs to become fully effective, the DFR recognized that they must associate with one another and with local governments to manage lake resources using an ecosystem approach. This is being achieved by the formation of Lake Management Organizations (LMOs), bringing together the local governments and communities bordering a lake, and addressing catchment issues that affect lake resources. The NFP also includes plans to create a Uganda Fisheries Authority (UFA) to take over from the DFR.

The UFA will be an autonomous institution under the parent Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries (MAAIF), which will be more flexible than a government department, more responsive and client-oriented, while costing less money for the government, through raising money within the sector.

The provisional FSSP was developed to implement the policy and includes detailed activities and spending plans. This document is used by the DFR to lobby for funds within MAAIF. The plan was instrumental in ensuring that DFR could lobby effectively during the revision of Uganda’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), the overarching policy framework, for poverty reduction required by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund for debt relief for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). Uganda’s PRSP is known as the

Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) and it is essential that fisheries and key action areas within fisheries that will lead to poverty reduction are included in the PEAP to secure resources for implementation.

DFR was successful in ensuring that fisheries is included in the revised PEAP, and the need for financial support for the formation and capacity building of fisheries co-management was noted as a priority area. This strengthens the ability of fisheries stakeholders in lobbying for resources to improve livelihoods, while also increasing productivity.

Fisheries co-management is being implemented through the formation of BMUs at designated landing sites, as required by the Fish (Beach Management) Rules, Statutory Instrument No. 35, July 2003. They are the institutional structures within which fisheries stakeholders work in partnership with local and central governments, to improve planning and to sustainably manage fisheries resources. Over 200 BMUs have been formed, mainly on Lakes Kyoga, George and Edward, with hundreds more expected on Lakes Victoria and Albert.

The statutory instrument is accompanied by detailed guidelines that set out how BMUs should be formed (such as raising awareness, registering members and holding elections for the committee) and who should be on the BMU committee. The legislation requires that boat crew have 30 per cent of the places on the BMU committee, and that women, wherever possible, also have 30 per cent of places. The percentage allocations are one way of ensuring that all fisheries stakeholders participate in decision making, safeguarding against domination by stakeholder groups that have traditionally managed landing sites, that is, fishing boatowners who invariably do not fish themselves. The legal allocations are supported by capacity building, monitoring and, in the future, by development initiatives to build the capacity of boat crew and women in decision making and leadership.

#### **UK aid**

With assistance from the UK’s Department for International Development

**Table 1: BMU Composition on Lakes Kyoga and George**

Number of...	Kyoga	George
BMUs	192	8
Boats	Approx 10,000	326
BMU members	42,281	2,478
Men	37,630	2,017
Women	4,651	461
Boat owners	8,572	444
Boat crew	24,740	1,158
Fish mongers	3,823	288
Fish processors	2,121	44
Other fisheries stakeholders	3,025	544

(DFID)-funded project, Integrated Lake Management (ILM, [www.ilm.mrag.co.uk](http://www.ilm.mrag.co.uk)), BMUs have been formed on Lakes George and Kyoga. Lake Kyoga is in the centre of Uganda, covering around 2,800 sq km, with 10 districts bordering the lake. George is a much smaller lake, in the southwest of Uganda, within the Queen Elizabeth Protected Area. It covers 260 sq km, with three districts bordering the lake.

Table 1 shows the composition of these BMUs in terms of men and women, and stakeholder groups.

Table 1 shows that 11 per cent of BMU members on Kyoga are women, whereas the much smaller Lake George has 18.6 per cent women. On Kyoga, there are, on average, 2.5 boat crew per boat, and on George, 3.5 per boat. The higher figure on Lake George is due to sharing of boats and licences and the fact that Lake Kyoga includes dugout canoes where owners also go fishing.

Not all the BMUs on Lakes Kyoga and George have complied with government regulations on the composition of the committees. Forty-five per cent of the BMUs on Lake Kyoga had 30 per cent or more women on the committee, and 73 per cent had 30 per cent or more boat crew. In some fisheries, such as male-dominated dugout canoes, there is justification for fewer women and boat crew on the committee (as the boat owners also crew

the boats, so there are fewer registered boat crew), but in other cases, more effort is required to improve poverty focus and gender sensitivity. On Lake George, two of the eight BMUs have fewer women than required by law on the committees, and one has fewer boat crew.

Resistance to the allocation of committee member places to boat crew and women was particularly strong at two landing sites on Lake George, where the dominance of a small group of boatowners had prevailed for decades. The boatowners were able to lobby at ministerial level for a change in the guidelines, but were unsuccessful, largely due to the counter efforts of the DFR and district political leadership. The same groups did, however, succeed in slowing down the election process, but eventually accepted the prescribed procedures and committee composition.

This does not mean that opposition to the new approach has disappeared. It is expected that, in some places, dominant groups may still try to use the new arrangements to continue their dominance.

#### **Effective participation**

Boat crew and women, in particular, need support and capacity building to ensure they can effectively participate in decision making within BMUs and are able to resist attempts by certain boatowners to

dominate the management of, and the share of benefits (legal and illegal) from, fisheries resources.

**I**n terms of planning for, and managing, fisheries resources, what are BMUs doing? The statutory instrument clearly sets out their roles and responsibilities, but the main areas of activity can be summarized as:

- collecting information that can be used in planning and making management decisions, for the fisheries, but also for development of the landing sites;
- using this information for taking local and lake-wide management decisions and making management plans, by BMUs, lake management organizations and government;
- monitoring fishing activities and working with local and central governments to enforce management rules and regulations; and
- participating in control of access to the lake for fishing. Participatory processes for the licensing of boats promotes greater transparency and accountability within local communities.

From these roles, many benefits are expected from BMUs, both in terms of better management and, therefore, higher productivity, but also in terms of empowerment and poverty reduction. BMUs provide an entry point to fisheries communities and have enabled local government and non-governmental organizations to work more effectively with these communities, now they are organized and the structures are inclusive. BMUs are mandated to contribute to local government development planning and the new government-led, community-based planning approach to local government development planning provides an ideal route through which BMUs can participate in planning and lobby for resources.

In 2002, prior to the formation of BMUs, the government decentralized licensing powers to the administrative heads of local government. On Lake George, a lake with a fixed number of boat licences, this coincided with an evaluation of the number of licences and the procedures of issuing licences. It was agreed between all stakeholders that a participatory process would be developed that would increase access by boat crew and women to boat licences, while also ensuring continuity of licensing for livelihood security. New procedures are now in place, with benefits for resource management and local livelihoods.

Table 2: Performance of BMUs

Lake	No. of BMUs sampled	Percentage of BMUs				
		Holding meetings	Recording views of women & crew	Book-keeping	Collecting fisheries information	Reducing illegal gear use
Edward	5	100	100	40	100	80
George	8	100	88	25	100	50
Kyoga	186	69	53	14	52	48
Total	203					

Although BMUs were only formed on Lakes Edward, George and Kyoga in late 2003, their performance was assessed in June 2004 to provide baseline data and to identify areas where capacity building and support are particularly needed. The ILM project spent five years working on Lake George, compared to three supporting Edward to some extent, and three on Kyoga. The scale of Kyoga meant that capacity-building efforts required considerable resources and, so the Kyoga BMUs have not performed as well as the fewer BMUs on Lakes Edward and George. Further capacity building and support is needed to build on the capacity building already provided.

Performance was assessed using a monitoring framework provided in the Guidelines for BMUs, issued by DFR in 2003. A selection of the results from this monitoring programme is shown in Table 2.

The results show that many of the BMUs have already held meetings and that over half (55 per cent) are recording the views of women and crew in minutes of meetings. All the BMUs on Lakes Edward and George and over half on Kyoga are collecting fisheries information. This is very encouraging, as ILM had only recently rolled out training on fisheries information collection on Kyoga. Almost half the BMUs are addressing the challenge of the use of illegal fishing gear. The performance of BMUs, in terms of bookkeeping, is disappointing, and highlights the need for more support on financial management for BMUs.

Fisheries provide a significant livelihood from lake resources. However, for effective lake and fisheries management, BMUs must come together for co-ordination and coherence between management plans.

BMUs can associate with one another, both between BMUs at different landing sites and to form different levels of association. They may wish to associate at different levels of local government. On both Lakes George and Kyoga, LMOs have been formed to develop and implement lake management plans.

The Lake George Basin Integrated Management Organization (LAGBIMO) and the Lake Kyoga Integrated Management Organization (LAKIMO) are founded upon the BMUs, with representatives attending the lake-wide assembly and represented on the executive committee to ensure that their concerns are addressed across the lake. The organizations are associations of local government, formed under the Local Government Act, 1997, though the BMU statutory instrument also allows for BMUs to associate.

#### Improved management

The LMOs bring communities and local governments together for improved lake management. Such organizations are essential for developing a harmonized approach to managing a lake and for development interventions in the area. The LMOs are doing much to support the role of women and boat crew in fisheries management and beach development, through supporting their participation in

decision making, capacity building and through targeted interventions, as set out in the management plans.

**T**he fisheries sector generates significant revenue. Not only is fish one of the biggest agricultural export earners for Uganda, it also generates revenue for local communities and local government. Some of these resources are being ploughed back into the management of lake resources through both BMUs and local government.

Money from fish movement permits, profits from fish-landing site tenders and collection of fish or money per boat landing (as determined through bylaws) is generating revenue to enable BMUs to hold meetings, collect valuable information, plan and implement decisions and monitor fisheries activities.

The collection of landing fees is tendered by local government to an external contractor. The tenderer is contracted to remit a certain amount to local government but can collect far in excess of that amount, removing vast sums from fisheries resources.

To address this removal of funds that could be used for reinvestment, the new draft Fisheries Bill 2004 includes provisions for BMUs to collect a Landing Site User Fee (LSUF). Financial analyses

reveal that this system, if adopted, will decrease the charges to resource users, particularly the poor, but, at the same time, increase the amount going to local governments for wider development, and leave a substantial amount for fisheries management and development by BMUs.

BMUs are set firmly alongside the government system. Although they are not formally part of the government system, many of the functions set out in the statutory instrument require close collaboration with local and central governments.

In fact, the parish or village executive committee is charged with monitoring and supervising the operations of BMUs. The Chief Administrative Officer of the district local council has overall responsibility and reports directly to the Commissioner of the Department of Fisheries Resources.

#### **Local plans**

In order to be effective in management, BMUs are required to develop local fisheries management and beach development plans and advocate for their integration in other local development plans. Integration of their plans into local government development planning, through Parish Development Plans, will increase the opportunity for funding and implementation. This strong integration into the local government system ensures

that a BMU works closely with government and that its plans and activities are integrated into local government development and work plans.

**T**he policies and legislation are in place and over 200 BMUs have already been formed. It is, however, very early days for fisheries co-management in Uganda, and it is critical that the government, at national and local levels, provides the support that BMUs will continue to need to operate effectively and to ensure that all fisheries stakeholders benefit.

The need for support to, and capacity building of, BMUs and LMOs is clearly set out in the draft revised PEAP of March 2004, the PRSP of Uganda. This recognition is critical for DFR and others to lobby for resources to support fisheries co-management institutions.

Women and boat crew are already actively involved in BMUs and are speaking out on issues of concern to them. They recognize the opportunities brought by fisheries co-management. A woman member of a BMU committee on Lake George remarked, "I have gained confidence and exposure. Now I can contribute to discussions at the BMUs and in workshops when called, even if men are present".

Uganda has embarked upon an innovative co-management approach to fisheries management that, if effectively implemented, will result in increased productivity and improved livelihoods. This will, however, require greater financial support to the sector to ensure the new institutions have the capacity to operate effectively and deliver these critical outcomes.

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# Fighting HIV and AIDS

**African fisherfolk suffering from HIV are subject to stigma, denigration and disempowerment, all of which weaken their voice in civil society**

**T**itled ‘*Deadly Catch: Uganda’s fishermen seeking sex workers prompt HIV surge*’, an April 2014 article in *The Guardian* reports 43 per cent of adults have been infected in Kasensero, a Ugandan fishing community bordering Lake Victoria. According to the article, “Once their catch is sold...most head for Kasensero’s bars and the sex workers who hang out there”. This, and many other similar reports in the media, echo multiple studies in the medical literature linking HIV to stigmatized sexual behaviour.

For example, a recent review of 44 articles about HIV among

for most HIV infections as well as the numbers infected, differ between Africa and the rest of the world. Outside Africa, the percentage of adults with HIV is much less than in Africa, and the two risks that drive HIV epidemics are anal intercourse among men and sharing unsterilized syringes and needles to inject recreational drugs. Since only a minority of adults have these risks, the percentage of adults with HIV outside Africa—as well as the percentage of fisherfolk—is almost always low.

However, the situation is different in Africa, where 5 per cent—25 per cent of adults are infected in more than a dozen countries, and where injecting illegal drugs and male—male sex account for only a minority of HIV infections. But how are so many adults—and fisherfolk—getting HIV in Africa? The common view that almost all HIV infections among all adults in Africa come from sex is not based on evidence. No studies among fishermen in Africa have looked at all risks, including blood exposures through unsterilized syringes, needles, razors, and other skin-piercing equipment used for healthcare and cosmetic services.

## **Conflicting evidence**

Similarly, researchers have only rarely traced infections in African adults to sexual partners—instead, researchers have routinely assumed that an HIV infection in an African adult came from sex, without showing that is so. At the same time, researchers routinely ignore abundant conflicting evidence—such as people with HIV who deny sexual risks, and HIV in children with HIV-negative mothers.

**The common view that almost all HIV infections among all adults in Africa come from sex is not based on evidence.**

fishermen considers heterosexual sex to be responsible for most infections. According to the review, as many as 30 per cent of fishermen are HIV-positive, while 42 per cent engage in transactional sex (that is, they hire prostitutes). The review, by Smolak in *AIDS Care*, 2014, included studies on fishermen—internationally as well as in specific Asian, Africa and European countries. Similarly, a recent publication by the WorldFishCenter, titled ‘*HIV/AIDS in the Fisheries Sector in Africa*’, generalizes “a number of lifestyle factors suggest that heterosexual sex is the prevalent channel [for HIV infection] in fishing communities”.

For fisherfolk, as well as for all adults, the specific risks that account

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The characterization of Africans, in general, and fisherfolk, in particular, as—on average—more willfully and thoughtlessly promiscuous than other adults is denigrating, stigmatizing and disempowering, weakening their voice in civil society. Even worse, the emphasis on sexual risks distracts from what has to be done—and can be done—to help prevent HIV infections in fishing communities.

Avoidance of sexual risks is not enough to protect someone from HIV. In African countries with a lot of HIV infections, fisherfolk, like all other residents, are at risk to get HIV from minor blood contacts. The Joint United Nations' Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) warns UN employees in much of Africa that “unsafe blood collection and transfusion practices and the use of contaminated syringes account for a notable share of new infections”. To address this risk, UNAIDS assures UN employees: “Because we are UN employees, we and our families are able to receive medical services in safe healthcare settings, where only sterile syringes and medical equipment are used, eliminating any risk to you of HIV transmission as a result of healthcare”. UNAIDS—and other public health organizations and initiatives—do not similarly warn local populations or assure safe care.

In countries with a lot of HIV infections, fisherfolk have many of the same risks as other residents. They go to barbers who may reuse razors and electric shavers without sterilization. They go to doctors who may reuse needles and syringes for injections or needles, tubes or bags of saline for infusions. Because of their profession, fisherfolk have some special blood-borne risks. On board a fishing boat, tools in a first aid kit may be reused without sterilization from one person to another. Reliably killing HIV requires boiling instruments, not just rinsing in chlorine or alcohol; boiling may be difficult on a boat.

While staff of UNAIDS and other public health organizations are aware of the risks of getting HIV from blood exposures in Africa, public health agencies have not alerted the public

to these risks. It is understandable that people delivering healthcare do not want to warn people about risks of getting HIV during healthcare. But this is an ethical failure—in not telling people about all risks, public health staff are not respecting their responsibility according to the World Medical Association's Declaration of Lisbon on the Rights of the Patient, including: “Every person has the right to health education that will assist him/her in making informed choices about personal health and about the available health services”.

With healthcare professionals not wanting to talk about blood exposures, HIV prevention programmes and messages designed by public health professionals are incomplete. This failure to warn leaves all adults—including fisherfolk—unaware of what they need to know to avoid HIV. As long as health professionals are not willing to craft a complete message about risks, it is up to others to do so. For example, civil society organizations that are not controlled by public health professionals, such as churches and unions, could revise their HIV prevention programmes to warn people about blood exposures as well as sex.

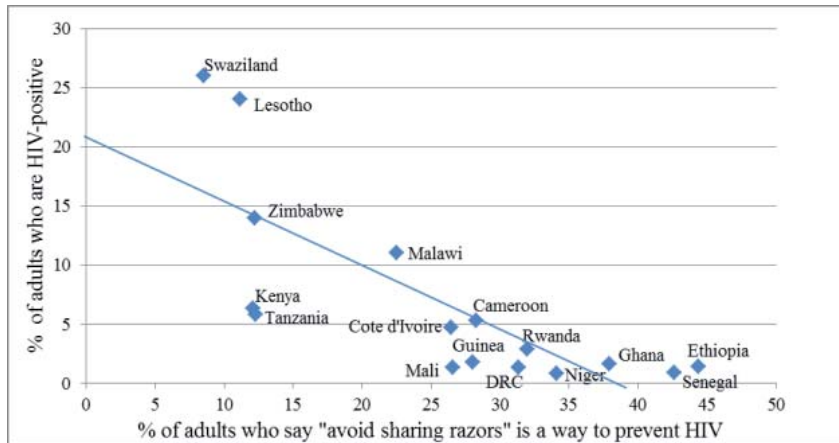
Formal organizations representing fisherfolk could revise HIV prevention programmes to warn fisherfolk not

ROBERTO FAIDUTTI



Fish auctioned at the Ugandan fish market. Fishing communities could spread the message about HIV prevention programmes through crews and fish markets

Figure: Percentages of adults with HIV vs. percentages aware of blood-borne risks



Source: <http://dontgetstuck.org/2012/10/15/3-in-african-countries-where-more-people-are-aware-of-blood-borne-risks-fewer-people-have-hiv-part-2-of-3/>

tested what happens when some adults (in the intervention arm of the trial) get special education and warnings to avoid sexual risks while other adults (in the control arm) do not get such education or warnings. What was the result? Educating and warning people about sexual risks had virtually no impact on the rate at which they acquired HIV infections (see [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1940999](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1940999)).

Changing the message—warning about blood as well as sex—not only gives fisherfolk the information they need to avoid HIV and to protect their loved ones, it also reduces the blame and stigma that have been linked to HIV. If a husband or wife has HIV, the other spouse should not assume it came from sex outside marriage. But on a larger scale, recognizing blood-borne risks arms African fisherfolk to fight back against the demeaning and weakening stereotype that they are unusually and thoughtlessly promiscuous.

only about sex but also about blood exposures. Fishing communities could spread the message through crews and fish markets. Despite decades of failure on the part of health experts to warn Africans about HIV from blood exposures, one can always hope that experts will wake up to their ethical responsibility to deliver this. But since lives are at stake, multiple strategies may be considered to ensure change.

Good evidence shows that Africans aware of risks to get HIV from blood exposures have less HIV. During 2003–07, national surveys in 16 African countries asked people how to prevent HIV. In these surveys, the percent of adults who mentioned “avoid sharing razors/blades” as a way to prevent HIV ranged from 10 per cent in Swaziland to almost 50 per cent in Niger and Ethiopia. In five countries where less than 15 per cent of adults recognized contaminated razors or blades as risks for HIV (Kenya, Lesotho, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe), the percentages of adults with HIV ranged from 5.6 to 26. On the other hand, in six countries where at least 30 per cent mentioned razors or blades (Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC], Ethiopia, Ghana, Niger, Rwanda and Senegal), only 0.8 per cent to 2.9 per cent of adults were HIV-positive.

On the other hand, good evidence shows that warnings about sexual risks alone have almost no impact on the rate at which people get HIV. Ten trials of HIV prevention in Africa

**For more**

[data.unaids.org/Publications/IRC-pub06/jc975-livinginworldaids\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/Publications/IRC-pub06/jc975-livinginworldaids_en.pdf)

**Living in a World with HIV and AIDS, UNAIDS**

[papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1940999](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1940999)

**Randomized Controlled Trials for HIV/AIDS Prevention among Men and Women in Africa: Untraced Infections, Unasked Questions, and Unreported Data**

# Power to the People

Five members of the Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT) talk about various policies and initiatives to empower small-scale fishing communities in Uganda

**D**oes the Government of Uganda pay due attention to social and economic development to empower small-scale fishing communities? How?

The Government of Uganda has made strides to put in place policies and initiatives to bolster the social and economic development of small-scale fisheries (SSF) communities through the National Fisheries & Aquaculture Policy, and the newly completed National Plan of Action (2023) for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, as well as via infrastructure development

development (HRD) in the areas of health, education, literacy, digital inclusion and other technical skills?

The Health Sector Development Plan (HSDP) includes strengthening health infrastructure, training healthcare workers and healthcare financing, as with the national health insurance scheme. However, fisher communities highlight the inadequate access to healthcare due to distantly located facilities, which are poorly equipped with medicines. “You only find Panadol, a painkiller. We don’t have quality health services except for the medicines for bilharzia brought once in five months,”.

HRD through education includes allocating resources towards education development to enhance access, quality and equity in education through infrastructure improvements, teacher training and curriculum reforms, the introduction of free Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to equip youth and adults with skills relevant for employment through training and programmes targeting out-of-school youth and adults, which offer basic literacy, numeral skill and vocational training, all of which have been enhanced.

Although distance was the challenge for fishers to access education, disruption of the SSF economic activities by regulations and policies prevented children from being placed in good schools. More so, TVET does not reach fishing villages and due to poor UPE and USE many in the community do not benefit from financial support for higher education through bursaries and scholarship programmes provided by the government. There is not much information on how digital inclusion and information and communications

**The existence of the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) provides retirement benefits to formal sector employees in fisheries-related industries. But the majority of fishers and fishworkers are in the informal sector; they lack coverage**

and programmes to alleviate poverty. However, these initiatives are characterized by weak implementation, low budget allocation and inadequate monitoring.

The Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme, the Youth Livelihood Programme and the Parish Development Model (PDM), which aim to increase access to financing to meet the needs of the fisher people have all been characterized by shortcomings. According to the 2023 SSF People-Centred Assessment of the SSF Guidelines Implementation in Uganda, fisherfolk reported that the funds allocated to fishers through the government development programmes are insufficient to support them to engage in fisheries and the process of accessing these funds is cumbersome.

**How does the government promote investment in human resource**

*This interview with Margaret Nakato (nakato@katosi.org), Vaal Namugga, Joan Kayisinga, Catherine Nalugga and Jackline Kasoga, members of the Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT), Uganda, was conducted by N. Venugopalan (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Manager, ICSF*



technology (ICT) development efforts are expanding internet access and promoting ICT literacy through the National Information Technology Authority (NITA-U) that supports entrepreneurship to bridge the digital divide in fisher communities.

**How do you ensure that fishing communities have affordable access to services such as health, education, literacy, digital inclusion, housing, basic sanitation, safe drinking water and energy sources?**

The Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT), through women working in groups, has played a key role in increasing access to social services. KWDT has provided communities with income-generating opportunities, enabling them to access healthcare, particularly in areas where health centres are inadequate and poorly equipped.

Fishers and fishworkers organized in groups have been trained on financial literacy to ensure they run viable and profitable businesses. With support from GIZ RFBCP, the trust has trained and graduated 600 participants in business development services and functional knowledge and skills for women in fisheries. Complemented with training on the SSF Guidelines, this has enhanced their capacity to make informed decisions.

To bridge the digital divide, women in fishing communities were trained by KWDT on using digital apps like Abavubi for marketing and record-keeping. In all 9,764 people were trained on mobile monetary transactions to enhance their capacity to navigate digital financial systems, and understand cybersecurity, especially in rural communities where cyberfraud is rampant.

Most fisher communities are informal settlements where land is the key factor for housing. Land conflicts and irregularities in collection of rental fees by landlords deter efforts to access housing. Since 2017, when forests have been cut, houses are being de-roofed more often and people are increasingly seeking refuge in other people's houses. Training by KWDT on human rights, including land regulations and establishing of village disaster management committees (VDMCs) in 13 fishing villages have helped fishing

communities make informed decisions on building houses 200 m from the lake as a community initiative to reduce vulnerability to flooding and destruction.

For over seven years KWDT has been implementing a comprehensive water and sanitation programme, in partnership with the Germany-based non-profit arche noVa, in 13 fishing villages, including two islands. Construction of water sources, latrines and bathing facilities is complemented with the promotion of standard good hygiene practices not constrained by the diverse culture beliefs prevalent. Menstrual hygiene education, training to maintain the functionality of water and sanitation facilities, and the use of ecosanitation latrines have also been promoted. Waste management committees, primarily comprising women, convert organic waste into briquettes, as an alternative to firewood and charcoal. Women are trained as borehole technicians to maintain water sources, and communities are trained on safe water practices to prevent contamination and outbreak of diseases. Women's groups also use music and dance to effect change through the Women Advocacy Committees (WACs).

Interventions on energy conservation and the use of renewable energy have included marketing solar lights, energy-saving fish-processing technologies (like solar driers) and climate-adaptation technologies have been introduced to women in groups.

**How are the rights of children to education protected in fishing communities?**

UPE and USE are government initiatives to provide free education at the primary and secondary levels. The government also enacted the Education Act (2008), mandating compulsory primary education and delineating responsibilities to ensure compliance. KWDT has contributed to the rights of children to education through the construction of classrooms, and water and sanitation facilities in fisher communities. Women have been trained on human rights with support from Fokus Frauen and they are playing a key role in protecting the rights of children to education.

By invoking laws against child labour, women in groups have been ensuring that all children in their communities go to school. Poverty in fishing communities, poor school infrastructure, the long distances that need to be surmounted to reach school, and the lack of meals, water and sanitation have all contributed to the violation of children's rights to education.

With increasing poverty, children are working with parents in fishing and in stone quarries. Poverty is the major driver of child labour in fishing communities. KWDT is supporting economic empowerment, particularly of women, to address these challenges. "In our community, we ensure that all children of school-going age attend school", according to the Bugoye women's group. "We rescued girl brides who were taken from the east and brought to our landing site and made sure the men responsible were arrested," according to the Bisobooka women's group.

**What social security measures are available to protect workers and their families along the small-scale fisheries value chain?**

The existence of the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) provides retirement benefits to formal sector employees in fisheries-related industries. But the majority of fishers and fishworkers are in the informal sector; they lack coverage.

**What social protection measures are available to fishing communities (marine and inland)?**

Financial services and credit access through the Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) are available in fishing communities through governmental and non-government organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. Efforts to diversify livelihoods among fishing communities include training and support in alternative activities like agriculture, aquaculture and craft.

**Are there services such as savings, credit and insurance schemes accessible to small-scale fishing communities, especially women?**

Access to services such as savings and credit are at present scarcely provided by organizations and insurance

schemes are notably absent. Savings mechanisms are primarily informal, including physical savings boxes, group savings, and mobile money services provided by telecommunication companies. According to KWDT's assessment report, savings boxes are vulnerable to theft; the loss may go unnoticed for an extended period.

Mobile money transactions, while common, are susceptible to scams, and the process of replacing a lost phone is cumbersome, with telecom offices being physically located mainly in cities and major trading centres, posing accessibility difficulties for the fisherfolk. Despite progress on access to credit, high interest rates, short-term loans and inadequate capital are among the other prevailing challenges.

**Are there complementary and alternative income-generating opportunities for small-scale fishing communities? Examples?**

Small-scale fishing communities in Uganda have access to complementary and alternative income-generating opportunities to diversify livelihoods and enhance their economic resilience, including, but not limited to, agriculture, livestock rearing, trade, tourism, hospitality, handicrafts, brick making and sand mining, among other sectors.

**Is decent work, minimum age requirements, and acceptable working and living conditions protected for all small-scale fishworkers, even those in the informal sector?**

The legal frameworks, including the Employment Act (2006), protect the rights of all workers, including small-scale fishworkers. However, fishers and workers engaged in the assessment of the implementation of SSF Guidelines highlight minimal or zero access to decent employment as a result of the lack of social services.

**Do you have measures to eradicate forced labour and debt bondage of women, men and children, both resident and migrant, in small-scale fisheries?**

Uganda has implemented a comprehensive framework to combat forced labour and debt bondage. Within SSF, measures include awareness on legislative frameworks that prohibit such practices, mechanisms for monitoring implementation, capacity

building for officials, and collaboration with legal NGOs. KWDT has contributed to awareness through training 2,016 persons from 15 districts on the SSF Guidelines, with support from GIZ RFBCP, and 3,500 persons on human rights and gender, with support from Fokus Frauen and arche noVa.

**Are conditions conducive for men and women of small-scale fishing communities along the value chain? Free from crime, violence, piracy, theft, sexual abuse and corruption?**

Fishing communities are characterized by high rates of crime, violence, piracy, theft, sexual abuse and corruption, all of which affect the conditions for men and women engaged in fisheries-related activities. Criminals often find refuge in fisher communities due to their remote locations. Violence, particularly towards women, is exacerbated by the use of illicit drugs, alcoholism and poverty. The participatory disaster risk assessment done in 13 fishing communities, with support from arche noVa, identified eight cases of domestic violence and four of theft as threats to the lives of the women. They are also more prone to losing their fishing equipment—nets and boat engines—to theft, as compared to fellow fishermen.

The competition for fisheries resources has fuelled sexual abuse, as well as the use of sex to gain access to fisheries resources. “We bear the children of fishermen in order to secure access to fish,” reported a fisherwoman in Lutoboka. The use of derogatory names to describe women who directly engage in fishing creates an even more unpalatable environment.

In Uganda the fishing environment is marked by payment of bribes to rescue confiscated engines and boats. “We pay UGX 70,000 per month to access and fish from the LPA,” reported a fisher. “We usually collect money as a community to recover our fishing equipment,” reported another.

**How are migrant fishers treated? Are they integrated into fair and equitable sustainable fisheries? Is there regional co-ordination for regular migration of fishworkers across national borders?**

Uganda’s fishery is characterized by migrant fishers, given the number of shared water bodies. Nonetheless, a

harmonious relationship exists among the fishers, although conflicts arise occasionally.

**Is there effective and timely access to justice for victims of violence and abuse?**

Timely access to justice for victims of violence and abuse along the fish value chain in Uganda is limited to legal centres in fisher communities. Ignorance, low rates of reporting, and poverty further constrain the ability to get justice. KWDT, along with other development actors, has put in place measures to enhance legal access, including through training on human rights, to enable communities to recognize and report violations, and create platforms where communities, individuals and victims can engage in dialogue with the authorities to link them to the various reporting mechanisms. Continued efforts are needed to address the existing challenges and ensure that victims receive timely and effective support and redressal.

**Do you think better social development institutions, processes and mechanisms contribute to effective fisheries management?**

They can significantly enhance fisheries management. Integrating the social development of fisher communities with government plans, coupled with investing in the implementation of the plans, can have a huge impact on effective fisheries management.

Empowering fishing communities, promoting livelihood diversification, improving social protection and community well-being, building capacity, sharing knowledge, facilitating conflict resolution and social cohesion, and advocating for policy reform and governance improvements can contribute to sustainable fisheries outcomes. They do so by fostering local stewardship, reducing dependency on fisheries, addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities, enhancing governance effectiveness and promoting inclusive and equitable decision making.

At the global level, such initiatives facilitate international co-operation, knowledge exchange and policy harmonization, leading to more responsive and sustainable fisheries management practices. 3

**For more**



**Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP)**

<https://mglsd.go.ug/uwep/>

**The Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP)**

<https://mglsd.go.ug/yyp/>

**Parish Development Model**

<https://ict.go.ug/programmes/parish-development-model/>

**Govt directive on silverfish sparks hike on prices in Busoga**

<https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/govt-directive-on-silverfish-sparks-hike-on-prices-in-busoga-4563132>

**Fishermen in Namayingo, Uganda, want Fisheries Protection Unit disbanded over human rights violations**

<https://www.icsf.net/newss/fishermen-in-namayingo-uganda-want-fisheries-protection-unit-disbanded-over-human-rights-violations/>

**Ministry Of Health Strategic Plan 2020/21 – 2024/25**

<https://www.health.go.ug/cause/ministry-of-health-strategic-plan-2020-21-2024-25/>