

# A well-deserved award

**During a virtual ceremony in 2021, the FAO Director-General, presented the Margarita Lizarraga Medal, to Margaret Nakato**

By **Margaret Nakato**,  
(mnakato@worldfisher-  
forum.org) Executive  
Director, Katosi Women  
Development Trust,  
Uganda and Member  
of World Forum of Fish  
Harvesters and Fish  
Workers (WFF)

MARGARET NAKATO



*During a virtual ceremony on the 19th of November 2021, the FAO Director-General, QU Dongyu presented the Margarita Lizarraga Medal, to Margaret Nakato of the Katosi Women Development Trust in Uganda, whom he praised for her work in organising women in fishing communities to work together, empowering them with knowledge and skills, access to training, technology and markets.*

*The award is bestowed to a person or organisation that has served with distinction in the application of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. Thanking the Director-General and FAO, Nakato said the award would inspire the women she works with, to continue to support food security and the eradication of poverty.*

*The text of the acceptance speech is reproduced below:*

Dear Director-General and Distinguished Guests,

I stand here in honour and appreciation of the 166 FAO Council for awarding me the Margarita Lizarraga Medal in recognition of my humble contribution to women in fisheries through Katosi Women Development Trust. It is, indeed, a great privilege to be added to the list of previous winners of this prestigious award.

Since 1996, my passion has been to place women in positions where they can contribute to decisions that directly affect their lives including decisions that shape the food systems. This amazing progress has been fuelled and accelerated by our willing partners who undertook the risk to invest in rural poor fisherfolks particularly the women.

Therefore, I cannot go without recognising the trust of our first partners: Ilse Schummer, through Friends of Uganda whose support put us on the global path to contribute to sustainable food systems. Another huge thank goes to the GIZ Responsible Fisheries Business Chains Projects under the Global Program Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture. They saw the need to scale up KWDT interventions in order to reach out to over 1,000 women

in fishing communities in Uganda. I am extraordinarily grateful and I appreciate all our partners whose cooperation has enabled us to deliver comprehensive development interventions including improvement of access to water, sanitation and hygiene, particularly in rural fisher communities who need these services the most.

I haven't found the right words to honour the rural and fisher women organised under Katosi Women Development Trust who have trusted me and my entire team at KWDT to follow them on their journeys of self-development. I appreciate them!

I would like to immensely thank my colleagues organised under the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers, (WFF) and the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty. Being part of a network of experts enabled me to endlessly pursue inclusive development anchored on a human rights based approach with specific human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, empowerment, participation and attention to vulnerable groups as enshrined in the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication.

I also thank FAO for the boundless collaboration with Civil Society Organization.

I use this opportunity to call for sustained cooperation in support of small-scale fisheries, particularly women who occupy more than 50 per cent of the post-harvest section of the fish value chain. The cooperation should offer options to small-scale fishing communities to reframe their strategies for attaining development, offer inclusive and diversified development approaches while promoting access to basic social services and advancing the protection of human rights; all key tenets of the SSF Guidelines. The long-term objective of the SSF Guidelines is to eradicate hunger and poverty. This award will inspire the women I work with, to continue to support food security and eradicate poverty in a sustainable environment. 🙏

# Making change possible

**A comprehensive development approach has multiplied the livelihood options for women in Uganda's Lake Victoria region, leading to a sense of empowerment and hope**

By **Margaret Nakato** (mnakato@worldfisherforum.org) and **Vaal B. Namugga** (vaalbn@katosi.org), Katosi Women Development Trust, Uganda

**K**atosi, a fisher community north of Lake Victoria in Uganda, has undergone transformation that has changed the lifestyle of its members. Earlier, fishers from Katosi went out to fish every day; but now many go fishing to islands far away from Katosi, where they spend months before returning to their community. There are, therefore, only a few women left in the fish-smoking business in a community where once the majority of the women used to be employed in smoking and drying fish.

For the fishing communities, the growth in export-oriented fishing is part of the problem. Further, these communities continue to attract people seeking self-employment. This has increased the population depending on fisheries resources, thus exacerbating the pollution of the lake ecosystem and leading to overutilization of the wetlands and forests.

There is a decline in the quality of life in many fisher families, with the household population comprising mainly women and children. In a community where infrastructure, health and access to basic services are limited, this leads to hardship in day-to-day existence.

The Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT) was started in 1996, organizing

women to enter the male-dominated fishing sector. It adopted a comprehensive development approach to be able to address the challenges women faced in fisher communities. This approach was premised on the belief that "You can't tell a poor person to conserve the environment; your approach must meet the basic needs of the people in the fisher community". Diversification of fisherfolk livelihoods to reduce dependency on fisheries resource is the key objective for KWDT, coupled with ensuring that all activities contribute to the conservation of Lake Victoria's fisheries resources and ecosystem, and the empowerment of women.

Supporting women to enter diversified economic activities helped create alternatives to employment lost in smoking and drying fish due to export of fish fillets. Most women could not afford to purchase fish, whose price had increased because of exports that made processed fish unaffordable for many rural families. The Lake Victoria basin is a rich but very fragile ecosystem, susceptible to overexploitation of resources. Animal rearing, fish farming, beekeeping, mushroom farming and fruit-tree planting are complementary activities established to create employment for women in fishing communities, and help sustain the ecosystem.

With declining fish stocks, there is less fish available for the fisher communities who cannot afford the investment in improved fishing gear. Many desperately resort to use of undersized nets that catch immature fish, thus exacerbating the problem. The trade in juvenile fish, though illegal, is flourishing in many rural fisher communities. However, if they are caught, women lose all their investment as the fish is confiscated and destroyed. Despite the risks, the activity still lures many who want to make quick money, especially when they face economic needs like paying tuition fees for children. KWDT supports women to shift from the trade in illegal juveniles and enter legal economic activities through access to credit and awareness campaigns.

KWDT has been instrumental in changing the economic situation of many women in Katosi. Working with 405 women organized in 16 groups, KWDT has been able to divert their dependence on the lake, and move to other livelihood options. KWDT members undertook removal of water hyacinth from the lake, an activity that was later taken on regularly and systematically by the Beach Management Units (BMUs). According to

KATOSI WOMEN DEVELOPMENT TRUST / UGANDA



Community dialogues enable KWDT to engage communities in decisionmaking on the access and use of their fisheries resources

Nalongo Joyce, a member of the Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association, “They used to call us whenever hyacinth spread across the lake, to please come and remove it, but now they have a schedule to manage manual removal of the invasive weeds”.

Access to water and sanitation was a challenge in Katosi, particularly with the increase in population. The situation was more acute because of the high HIV/AIDS prevalence in the community: 20-30 per cent as compared to the national prevalence rate of seven per cent. KWDT supported women to increase their access to clean safe water and adequate sanitation, and has made steady strides with over 250 households benefiting from the support.

With economic empowerment and access to basic facilities like water tanks and toilets, many women feel capable to participate in decisionmaking in their communities and at the local government; to take up leadership and political positions; to participate in economic development activities; and to exercise the right of access to property. KWDT provides the training needed for the women to effectively play these new roles.

Community dialogues, where KWDT groups mobilize their communities and engage them to discuss important issues that affect their livelihoods, have been key in bridging the gap between the leaders and the community. Having been successful in water and sanitation management, KWDT is also exploring the platform to engage communities in decisionmaking on the access and use of

their fishery resources. Women who have been trained in advocacy formed Women Advocacy Clubs (WACs) that are now ably utilizing their skills in lobbying and advocating for improved service delivery across the sectors that are relevant to their livelihoods. This has created transparency, accountability and inclusion of the rural women in decisionmaking. Women are engaged in community budget-making exercises, and this has bridged the gap of communication and information between the leaders and local people. However, illiteracy is high in fishing communities, and female illiteracy hampers progress towards empowerment of women.

Isolation of fisher communities is an impediment to the women being part of debates around their problems and development alternatives. KWDT sought to join an international network of small-scale fisher organizations, the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers, to engage in the formulation of policies that are vital to fisherfolk livelihoods. In 2011, KWDT led the civil society consultation towards the development of international guidelines for securing rights of small-scale fisheries and fishermen. Today KWDT is recognized by fisherfolk as an important resource for advice on issues of fishing communities and their livelihoods. With land near the water attracting real-estate development and many other development projects that threaten livelihoods of fishers, the focus for KWDT is to ensure that the women not only know, but can also defend, their rights to access and use of land and fishery resources. ❏

**“You can’t tell a poor person to conserve the environment; your approach must meet the basic needs of the people in the fisher community”.**

# Bringing in the catch

**For Uganda's Katosi Women Development Trust, fish farming offers a way out of various social, environmental and economic challenges**

By **Deborah Payne Mirembe** (katosi@utlonline.co.ug),  
Public Health Officer,  
Katosi Women  
Development Trust

**K**atosi is a fishing village located in the northern shores of Lake Victoria in Mukono District in southern Uganda. It is known for landing huge catches of Nile perch and tilapia. Its exports reach as far as Belgium and Italy. The thriving village has developed only within the last 20 years, drawing individuals from over ten ethnic groups across Uganda. Yet with so much production, where is the fish in the local market?

Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT), currently an organization of 11 women's groups

onshore became a challenge. As Lake Victoria opened up to international market players, the price of fish at the local market increased and local consumption went down. Overfishing of the lake's resources led to a rapid decline in fish populations, forcing marginalized fishers to harvest juvenile fish, resulting in further depletion.

As a response to this complex mix of environmental and economic issues, the KWDT decided to turn to land-based fish farming. "When you tell an individual to conserve resources and not overfish the lake, but you don't give them an alternative to their current activities, you haven't solved the problem," says Margaret Nakato director of KWDT. "Individuals need an income and they need to feed their families."

Fish farming allows community members to address both the health and economic needs of the community. Fish is harvested without harming the lake's fragile ecosystem. Also, better quality fish is available at a fair price.

The construction of KWDT's first fish pond began July 2007. KWDT members dug out the pond on low-lying property belonging to one of them, chosen for its natural access to surface water. The pond was then ceremoniously stocked with tilapia and catfish that had survived a tremendously bumpy three-hour ride from Kampala to Bunakijja, just outside Katosi.

As the fish grew, so did the challenges. These included stabilizing oxygen levels in the pond and warding off local reptiles, grateful for the new addition to their diet. Yet with dedication to the project, the women are looking forward to their first harvest. Tilapias grown in the pond are expected to weigh about one kilo and bring in UGX1,000 (US\$0.60), per fish. Catfish, not common to the region, are expected to fetch approximately UGX2,500 (US\$1.50) per kilo. This is a dramatic increase over the small fish sold in the local market for UGX500 (US\$0.30) per piece. After the harvest, the pond will be restocked and harvested again after eight months. There are also plans for the construction of additional ponds.

Addressing the issues of Katosi's rural fisher women has required flexibility and determination. Competing in a market dominated by men, the women have had to

**NOTHING LIKE A DIP  
AFTER A BUMPY RIDE !**



across Ntenjeru and Nakisunga sub-counties, was formed in 1996 with the objective of improving women's income from the fishing industry. In the initial years, the organization acquired a motorized boat and nets and set out to fish in Lake Victoria. But the competition was high and the market unfair. The women were unable to compete with their male counterparts, frequently being cheated out of a fair price at the market.

As processing companies began dominating the trade, the fishing industry became more and more hostile, marked by stiff competition. In order to fish, women had to set up residence on one of the islands. Looking after their family

think outside the box, turning from lake to land for an income from the fishing industry. The issues facing fishing communities around Lake Victoria are complex, encompassing social, environmental, economic and health factors. Decreasing the demand on

the lake will help sustain the fishing industry. Land-based fishing will give women the opportunity to create their own sustainable market, improve the nutrition levels of their communities, and further their own economic development. ❖

**Africa / Uganda****Hopes amidst the nightmare**

*During a recent tour of France, Margaret Nakato, leader of the Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association (KWFDA) in Uganda, met consumers, Breton fishermen and NGOs as well as Herbert Sauper, who wrote and directed Darwin's Nightmare, the vivid and controversial documentary film on the Nile Perch fisheries in Kenya. In this interview, conducted on 18 October 2005, Margaret discusses the film and the importance of networking among the fishworkers' organizations of the South.*

**By Alain le Sann of the *Collectif Pêche et Développement*, and a member of ICSF**

**You have viewed *Darwin's Nightmare* with the members of your co-operative. Would you say it's a true picture of current conditions over there?**

Generally, yes. It shows clearly that the wealth generated by the Nile Perch fisheries has not percolated to the local communities. It remains largely in the hands of Europeans, plant owners and the government. In Uganda, the fishing sector is a major contributor to the gross domestic product—accounting for nearly 20 per cent. In Katosi, we catch Nile Perch too, but there is a difference between Katosi and Mwanza in Kenya: here you will not find abandoned children roaming the streets. The incidence of AIDS among fishermen is double the national average. It seems the anti-HIV campaigns have been less successful here.

**The film shows that women are particularly marginalized in the development of Nile Perch exports. What do you think?**

That's quite true. Before the Nile Perch boom and exports to Europe, women processors would smoke the fish and sell it on the local market and in neighbouring countries like the Congo. That provided food and livelihoods. Today many smoking ovens are idle and more find it difficult to include fish in their



diets. Fishermen prefer to sell to exporters. The spread of the Nile Perch has also reduced the number of species traditionally consumed locally. Women processors have to resort to juvenile species for their trade, and consequently, face penalties from the authorities. That is why we pressed the women to refrain from using undersized fish and turn instead to alternatives activities.

**Some European countries are suggesting a boycott of the Nile Perch. What is your view?**

That's an important demand, which needs thorough debate. Personally, I'm rather guarded about the move. The Nile Perch remains a major resource for the countries that border Lake Victoria. It would be difficult to suddenly do without it. One should instead aim at a more fair trade that would bring decent returns to the fishermen and allow them to have a bigger say in management matters. If, after proper consideration and debate, the fishermen and their communities decide to call for a boycott, why not?! As long as they ponder over all aspects and options... It's for them to decide their course of action.

As for us, we try to make families less dependent on fishing by encouraging the women to venture into new areas such as handicrafts, agriculture and trading. The level of pollution in the lake is already high and its

resources may well decline further. To diversify occupations, we need adequate funding and support. The European Union is providing some help to upgrade the processing plants to EU standards. Why not also help the fishermen and their families to improve their lot?

**Tell us about the actions undertaken by your organization.**

We have established credit schemes to start revenue-generating activities. We currently have a membership of 198 women. We were operating several boats, but because of low returns from fishing, we now have only two. We now promote cattle rearing and vanilla cultivation. We would like to expand aquaculture and we have constructed tanks to distribute clean water, for which people pay a small fee.

**You are the vice-president of the World Forum of Fishworkers. Does that serve you in the field?**

Yes, of course. To organize our people to compete with processors, we have to be informed about fish prices and distribution networks, about WTO and EU regulations. We have to exchange notes with fisherfolk from other countries. We have to be active stakeholders in resource management, and in the programmes set up by the government, for example, the beach management units.

Today the threat of privatization of the resource is looming. Fisherfolk all over the world face such problems. Thanks to our international network, we were able to view *Darwin's Nightmare* and show it to members of our group. There are questions asked about the Nile Perch chain, here in Europe and at home in Africa. It is important that fishworkers around Lake Victoria can react and express their views. They have done that in the video we made after together viewing *Darwin's Nightmare*.

*Alain le Sann can be contacted at  
ad.lesann@wanadoo.fr*

**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*



## News/ Uganda

### Stricken by AIDS

*A study finds that in Uganda, as a result of HIV-AIDS, men's involvement in fishing declined by 14 per cent and that of women in fishing processing by 24 per cent*

**By Esther Nakkazi of *The East African***

The high prevalence of HIV-AIDS among Uganda's fishing communities has adversely affected the sector, leading to a sharp drop in production. Quoting a study released recently by the National Agricultural Advisory Services of Uganda (NAADS), the Minister of State for Agriculture, Kibirige Ssebunya, said that 26 per cent of the 3,879 people in the study's population were infected with HIV-AIDS and related illnesses, with 486 having died over the past five years. The study was carried out by the NAADS with support from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Integrated Support to Sustainable Development and Food Security Programme. The aim was to assess the non-health effects of HIV-AIDS on individuals, households and communities.

The study was based on a survey of smallholder agricultural rural households at six sites in the Lake Victoria Crescent agro-ecological zone, representing the fisheries and pastoral agriculture subsectors. Households were asked to provide comparative data for the five-year period between 1997 and 2002. Forty-three per cent of affected households reported a reduction in the annual catch, a figure higher than that for unaffected ones by 20 per cent.

The survey found that men's involvement in fishing declined by 14 per cent, while that of women in fish processing went down by 24 per cent. Households were spending six per cent less time on fishing and making up the shortfall with male hired labour.

As a result of HIV-AIDS, men had resorted to shallow-water fishing with reduced night-time fishing. Women fisherfolk, on the other hand, were producing a lower quality of smoked and salted fish or altogether abandoning these processes because they are labour-intensive and detrimental to health. Instead, they were shifting to sun drying. Sun-dried fish has a lower market price than the salted or smoked variety, leading to an overall lowering of income. Due to poor smoking, a significant proportion of the catch was rotting and being turned into animal feed, which fetched lower prices.

The study also revealed that, because of limited resources, HIV-AIDS-affected households could not invest in modern technology, fishing boats and gear.

*This piece is based on Esther Nakkazi's article in *The East African (Nairobi)*, 1 December 2003*

## From Africa/ Uganda

### Fishing pioneers

*A dynamic group of women take to fishing in Lake Victoria*

by Margaret Nakato, a member of the Katosi Women's Fishing Group

We, the Katosi Women's Fishing Group, are a pioneering group of women in the region, engaged in fishing. We are 25 women who came together with the aim of improving our general socioeconomic situation. We use a locally built boat, with a 25 HP engine, and fishing nets of a mesh size recommended in Uganda to avoid catching young fish. We do fishing as a group activity, and, from the profits, we have created a Revolving Loan Fund that is a source of loans for the women members of the group.

It has not been easy for us to fish, as the men here tend to regard fishing as a profitable activity only for men. The group was met with resistance and a lack of cooperation from the community in the beginning, and we had to work with those men who were willing to help us reduce the resistance. Despite this, there are areas that continue to be 'out of bounds' for us. There is an island on Lake Victoria, which, according to custom, should not be visited by women, even though this island is a great strategic place to go fishing in some seasons. Our group has not ventured there, as this has been a tradition for a long time.

The men who support us work as our employees, or as suppliers of petrol and fishing nets, on credit. The man who is the chief buyer of our catch has also been very supportive of our cause, and this has given us more independence, rather than having to depend on our husbands and other men for support.

We fish in the lake Victoria. The Nile perch is the main catch, though tilapia, lung fish and a few other species are also caught. The Nile perch is mainly for export, while the other species are usually consumed locally. The fishing period is not continuous, as we catch more fish during the dark days of the month and almost none when the moon is bright.

Earlier, the fishing activity was almost eliminated due to a ban on fishing, imposed because of the illegal use of poison by some people in the community, eager to

reap easy profits. The spread of water hyacinth had led to a rapid decline in the fish population in the lake. It was at that time of fish scarcity that some fishermen began to use poison to catch fish. The members of our group were more oriented towards eradicating the weed, since it was affecting the whole landing site and thus the whole community. Fortunately, the government intervened to introduce a weevil that fed on the weed and, consequently, there has been a decline in the coverage of the weed, especially at Katosi Landing Site.

Since, with the exception of fishing, this area has no employment or income opportunities, the whole community suffered intensively as a result of the ban. Though the ban has since been lifted, the industry has not completely revived and is still limping.

Since our daily catch is still small due to limited equipment, it is sold to our chief buyer, who has a big boat with a freezer installed. The chief buyer patrols the lake, looking for fish from small boats like ours, and has the capacity to stay on the lake till the maximum tonnage is reached. This fish is then supplied to the fish-processing industries that are located at a distance of some 45 kms, in the capital city of Kampala.

We are thinking of going into fish processing since it is more profitable. Fish smoking and other forms of fish processing were activities local women engaged in earlier. However, due to the rise in the demand of fresh fish by fish-processing factories, women processors were forced out of business and are no longer in this activity. They took to activities, such as food vending, selling of secondhand clothes, selling fresh vegetables, local brewing, tailoring, running drug shops, poultry farming, etc. As we have been giving loans to women, we have found that women often do the same type of business, leading to duplication and low sales.

We think a processing factory will be a major achievement for the women in the area and a source of employment. Our plans include building a freezer boat and then building a fish-processing factory so that we can process the fish for export, instead of selling it raw. If our dream is realized, our project is going to be a pioneering one in the whole country. The factory will be owned jointly by the women of the group. It will enable the women in the area to enter international trade, create employment and will answer our campaign for industrialization. The fish-processing factories presently in Uganda are mostly owned by foreign investors.