

Managing Lake Victoria's basin

By **DR TOM OKURUT**

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, LAKE VICTORIA BASIN COMMISSION



TOM OKURUT holds a PhD in Environment Science and Technology from IHE-Delft and the University of Wageningen in The Netherlands. Prior to his work with the LVBC he worked as head of the Lake Victoria Development Programme division of the EAC and prior to that as Coordinator and R&D Manager with the National Water and Sewerage Corporation in his native Uganda as well as a lecturer at Makerere University. During his tenure LVBC's staff has grown from three to over 40 and the organisation has established partnerships with all stakeholders.

The Lake Victoria Basin is at the centre of a new focus that could lead to a major turning point in the socio-economic development of the East African region. Covering more than 180,950 square kilometres and with a market potential of more than 38 million people, it has an estimated annual GDP of US\$40 billion, and is blessed with a wide range of resources of global economic importance.

As a shared resource, the lake and its basin present many advantages and prospects for regional co-operation, as well as opportunities for investment in several key sectors, all of which would play a major role in enhancing regional integration. At the same time, despite its potential to stimulate sustainable development in the region, the basin faces enormous challenges, ranging from widespread poverty, rapid depletion of its natural resources, pollution, and inadequate infrastructure and social services.

The EAC partner states, having recognised the potentials and threats to the Lake Victoria Basin (LVB) have designated the area as an "economic growth zone" to be exploited in a coordinated manner. Indeed, the need for a coordinated management of the natural resource base of LVB led to the establishment of the Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC). This was established in 2004 under the protocol for Sustainable Development of the Lake Victoria Basin (Article 33) as a permanent apex institution of the East African Community responsible for the Lake Victoria Basin. The LVBC has an overall goal of promoting the sustainable development in the Lake Victoria basin based on a vision of "a prosperous population living in a healthy and sustainably managed environment providing equitable opportunities and benefits". The permanent seat of the commission is in Kisumu, Kenya.

The LVBC operations are guided by the 'Protocol for Sustainable Development of the Lake Victoria Basin', the Shared Vision and Strategy Framework for Management and Development of the Lake Victoria basin and the EAC Development Strategy (2006-10). The Commission developed its first Operational Strategy (2007-10) to guide its operations including identification, preparation and implementation of its programmes and projects. The Commission is currently developing its 2nd Operational Strategy (2011-15) in line with the on-going process of developing the 4th

EAC Development Strategy.

To spearhead regional integration in the basin, the LVBC assumed structures and mechanisms developed and agreed upon by EAC Partner States. The structure consists of a Sectoral Council of Ministers for the Lake Victoria Basin, the Coordination Committee, the Sectoral Committees and National Focal Point Offices. The structures and mechanisms ensure strengthened involvement and participation of the partner states, as well as private sector and civil society organisations. These structures enhance adoption of common stands as well as increasing the ability to negotiate for fair deals on regional issues, thereby fast-tracking regional integration.

The LVBC recognises the role played by all stakeholders in the socio-economic development of the Lake Victoria basin and has entered into partnerships and signed agreements with key actors and stakeholders in the basin towards enhancing cooperation and collaboration. Similarly, the Commission has initiated programmes and projects such as the Lake Victoria Environmental Management Project II (LVEMP II), the Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation Programme (LVWATSAN), the Maritime Communication for Safety on Lake Victoria (MCSLV), the Mount Elgon Regional Ecosystem Conservation Project (MERECP), the EAC/AMREF Lake Victoria Partnership (EALP), and the Trans-boundary Water for Biodiversity and Human Health in the Mara River Basin Project (TWBH-MRB).

In addition, the LVBC, in partnership with bilateral and multi-lateral development partners (governments of Sweden, France, Norway and Finland, along with the World Bank and the East African Development Bank) has established a joint Partnership Agreement culminating to the Partnership Fund. The fund has played a pivotal role in institutional capacity building, research, and harmonisation of policies, laws, regulations and standards, as well as strengthening the regional coordination capacity of the Commission.

One of the key achievements of enhanced regional integration is the preparation and enactment of the Lake Victoria Transport Act (2007). The act has provisions on maritime regulations aimed at improving the safety of the maritime activities on the Lake. Preparation of regulations to implement the act is in the final stages.

Notable also is the preparation of a Water Release

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and Abstraction Policy for the Lake Victoria basin waters. The partner states recognise that uncoordinated water release and abstraction are a potential source of conflict. To address this challenge, the partner states have included in the process the establishment of an independent and transparent mechanism for monitoring water release and major abstractions within the basin. The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) of the UK has been contracted to prepare the New Water Release and Abstraction Policy, and the process is ongoing under the guidance of the EAC partner states taskforce.

To reduce accidents, save lives and improve the working conditions of fishermen and other people involved in activities on Lake Victoria, the LVBC, working with the private sector, has put in place strategies to improve maritime communication, emergency response infrastructure and weather data dissemination. A regional emergency number, 110, has been agreed upon and is operational within the LVB. The lake-wide GSM network coverage has greatly improved, currently covering the entire lakeshore and extending up to 20 kilometres into the lake. A Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) is being established in Mwanza, Tanzania. To fast track the establishment of the MRCC, Ericsson AB has offered an emergency control unit in the Ugandan capital of Kampala. The commission is currently sourcing for funds to further extend the network coverage, make the MRCC operative, and establish search and rescue centres in the partner states. The commission has also completed a hydrographic survey of three major ports on Lake Victoria: Kisumu, Port Bell, and Mwanza.

Environmental stresses adversely impact on the basin ecosystem, as well as the region's economy and livelihoods. Cumulatively, they cause degradation of the lake, reduce its resiliency, and contribute to some of the emerging conflicts over resource use. To deal with the main environmental stresses of the basin, the LVBC is implementing the Lake Victoria Environmental Management Project – Phase II (LVEMP II), an eight-year programme funded by the World Bank, Swedish International Development and Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and EAC partner states to the tune of US\$252.7 million. The programme has successfully established regional and national coordination offices and implementation of activities has started in earnest.

To address the challenges of lake pollution emanating from point sources, the LVBC is implementing the Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation Initiative phase II (LVWATSAN II) supported by the African Development Bank. The initiative targets water and sanitation systems in 15 secondary towns around Lake Victoria and the associated catchments in Rwanda and Burundi. The programme comprises an integrated

package of intervention such as water supply, sanitation improvements, solid waste management, storm water drainage in key areas, as well as capacity building of the local communities. An investment study has been concluded in the fifteen secondary focal towns (three from each partner state of the EAC). The total investment plan cost covering both short and long term interventions is estimated at US\$152 million.

With support from SIDA, the LVBC is implementing the EAC/AMREF Lake Victoria Partnership HIV and AIDS programme (EALP). The programme has established a framework for effective coordination of HIV&AIDS responses for mobile populations in the Lake Victoria basin. The programme has also spearheaded the standardisation of the methods and procedures for conducting HIV&AIDS seroprevalence studies in the EAC partner states. In addition, a framework to monitor the HIV&AIDS situation in the Basin has been developed. The framework is guiding the development of a regional HIV&AIDS Management Information System (HAMIS) that will facilitate the comparison of data across the EAC partner states.

The Mount Elgon Regional Ecosystem Conservation Programme (MERECP), implemented between Kenya and Uganda, is in the first year of implementation in its redesigned form. The programme is offering important lessons in trans-boundary natural resource management and more so in climate change adaptation by local communities. Consultations with the government of Norway, the main development partner supporting this programme, are in progress for the preparation of a full programme running for about five to six years. In addition, the possibilities of replicating best practices from this programme to other trans-boundary natural resources including wetlands in the other partner states is being explored.

The Commission has secured funds from USAID-East Africa to support a three-year programme in biodiversity conservation and to monitor the Mara river flows, which are essential for support of the Mara-Serengeti ecosystem. The programme recognises the ecosystem as a critical trans-boundary resource of global significance. The overall objective of the project is to promote a harmonised Mara River basin management practice for sustainability.

The contribution from the partner states and development partners towards the achievement of the commission's vision and mission cannot be underestimated. The LVBC particularly wishes to acknowledge the EAC Partner States, the Swedish and Norwegian governments, the government of Finland, the World Bank, The African Development Bank, and the United States Agency for International Development for their generous contributions. 