

Economy needs abundant water supply to thrive

By Gerald Tenywa

Dirisa Walusimbi, a resident of Ggaba landing site in Kampala, has been a fisherman on Lake Victoria all his life. He had never experienced drought like the kind that hit Uganda in 2005 and 2006. As the water levels in the lake dropped, so did the amount of fish he caught. In fact, his daily catch dropped by more than half and he was forced to quit fishing as his earnings could no longer sustain his family.

The 2005–2006 droughts coupled with the over release of water for hydro-electricity power generation at Kiira and Nalubaale reduced the water level of Lake Victoria by about two meters. And as the water level dropped, the fishing breeding grounds were destroyed.

“We have always had problems of over-fishing on the lake but this time the drop in the water level was forcing us out of business,” says Walusimbi, adding that the water levels always changed, but this change went beyond expectations.

This pushed fishermen and people working in different sectors that depend on the lake out of employment and reduced the productivity of thousands of employees. This is because factories need hydro-electric power to run. But as a result of frequent power blackouts, some factories closed and relocated to other parts of East Africa where they could secure regular power supply.

Drought

The agriculture sector also suffered as a result of the drought. Productivity declined and food insecurity as well as income among the farming communities reduced.

In the same period, the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) had to shift its water intake pipe network that supplies Kampala's two million people with water. The intake had to be moved deeper into the lake because the dropping water level had left it hanging and facing the risk of sucking air.

“Water should not be a constraint if the economy is to thrive,” Dr. Callist Tindimugaya, a commissioner of water resources planning and management in the Ministry of Water and Environment says, adding that water is important for sustainable development.

Tindimugaya was speaking ahead of the commemoration of the World Water Day commemorated annually on March 22. In Uganda, the day is being commemorated in Serere district under the theme *Water and Jobs*.

This year provides an important opportunity to consolidate and build upon the previous World Water Days to highlight the two-way relationship between water and the decent work agenda in the quest for sustainable development, according to a press statement from the UN. Serere shares water resources with Uganda's Lake Kyoga which is crossed by the River Nile on its way to South Sudan, Sudan and Egypt. The Nile is shared by 11 countries in its catchment and countries have been negotiating on how to share the water resources for prosperity.

Uganda is endowed with water resources, with at least 15 per cent of the surface area being open water. At least three per cent of the area is permanently occupied by wetlands and



The 2005-2006 droughts coupled with releasing too much water for hydro-power generation at Kiira and Nalubaale dams led to a reduction in Lake Victoria's water levels, which resulted in the destruction of fishing breeding grounds

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9.4 per cent by seasonal wetlands. The annual rainfall is high in much of the country, ranging from 600mm to 2500mm. The cattle corridor running from north-eastern Uganda across Central Uganda to southern Uganda gets little rain and is Uganda's dry land belt.

By 2025, Uganda will become a water stressed country. This refers to a situation where water exceeds the available amount during a certain period or when poor quality restricts its use. Water stress causes deterioration of fresh water resources in terms of quantity.

Access to safe water

According to the Water and Environment Sector Performance Report 2015, the population with access to safe water in urban areas was 73%, whereas that in rural areas was estimated at 65%. The national latrine coverage improved from 74.6% to 77%. “The funding to the water and environment sector has been declining in the last five years yet the population is increasing,” says Tindimugaya.



He pointed out that there is need for more work particularly in the rural areas since most people (68%) of the population lives in rural areas. In the last three decades, access to safe water increased drastically until 2010 when it started stagnating. Apart from the declining funding to the water and environment sector, Tindimugaya pointed out the inadequate capacity in the districts to deliver water and related services to the population. “The Local Government has new districts and there are some without staff and others have staffs that are not skilled,” he said.

Civil society speaks out

As much as access to water has been increasing over the years, civil society activists including

Jane Nabunya say the Government should provide access to safe water to 100% of the population. She says the exclusion of part of the population from accessing safe water undermines their productivity.

She also points out that Government does not give operation and maintenance as much attention as the construction or setting up of infrastructure. “We always get the money for setting up infrastructure but we do not provide for money to cover operations and maintenance,” says Nabunya, adding that communities lack the capacity and need monitoring from sub-county technical staff to sustain the water sources.

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