

Reporting period from 8th January 2016 to 8th January 2017

Project title: ***Promoting Population Recovery of Critically Endangered Cichlids Fish Species Endemic to Lake Victoria through Artisanal Fisherfolks Participation, Uganda***

Introduction,

In Uganda, Victoria tilapia (*Oreochromis variabilis*) and Singidia tilapia (*Oreochromis esculentus*) are endemic to lakes Victoria and Kyoga including the satellite lakes of Kyanja and Kayugi. These species have since disappeared from these main lakes and their survival in the two satellite lakes is threatened by various anthropogenic activities such as poor agricultural practices, wetland degradation, poor waste disposal, fishing pressure hence rendering them critically endangered (IUCN Red List, 2006).

The overall aim of this project was to contribute to the recovery of critically endangered Victoria tilapia (*Oreochromis variabilis*) and Singidia tilapia (*Oreochromis esculentus*) in lakes Kyanja and Kayugi, satellite lakes of Lake Victoria basin through engagement of local communities in conservation activities. During the above period, fishermen, pupils, teachers and researchers from National Fisheries Resources Research Institute (NaFIRRI) were engaged in various activities namely; a) establishment of Fish Conservation Committee (FFCC), b) Fish surveys and mapping of the breeding and nursery habitats, c) Establishment and zoning of safe havens, and d) awareness creation to achieve the aims of this project.

Main conservation outputs were ;a) All the sites identified as breeding and nursery habitats of critically endangered cichlid fish species were mapped by researchers and FCC team, b) A total of 8 safe havens for critically endangered cichlid fish species were established and mapped on both lakes c) Fish Conservation Committees (FCC) were established and empowered to conserve and protect native tilapia fishes and their habitat d) Fishermen, pupils and teachers were trained and highlighted on the need to conserve fish fauna and their habitats.

Main conservation achievements include a) Increased chances for the recovery of native tilapia populations in these lakes b) Enhanced conservation of other fish species, reptiles and birds such as the endangered crested crane with the help of the established safe havens on these lakes, c) increased liaison and commitment of fishermen and relevant agencies to conserve and protect critical habitats of these fish species on lakes Kyanja and Kayugi, and (d) Attitudes and behaviors of fishermen and wider

public living within and around these lakes were changed positively to conserve and protect these vital resources they rely on as their major sources of livelihoods and wellbeing.

Unforeseen challenges that arose during the project and how these were addressed

The following were some of the challenges/ difficulties that arose during the project;

a) It was a challenge at the beginning of the project to make fishermen, local leaders and government representatives understand the essence of the whole project particularly mapping and zoning off some areas on the lakes. However, after explaining to them the benefits that will accrue from the planned activities, they got involved actively in implementing project activities.

b) We were not able to start our field activities on Lake Kayugi immediately due to the fact that wooden boats are not allowed to be used on this lake, according to tradition and culture of the people living within and around this lake. However, with the help of local leaders and fishermen, we managed to overcome this challenge by making fishing rafts using bamboos, traditional fishing boat allowed to be used on this lake.

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Look- Ahead

- a) Monitor the recovery of native tilapia fishes in lakes Kayanja and Kayugi
- b) Continue with awareness creation among relevant stakeholders
- c) Continue working with fishermen to conserve and protect critical fish habitats and safe havens mapped on lakes Kayanja and Kayugi

Some of the photos taken during project implementation



ACT NOW TO CONSERVE NATIVE TILAPIAS OF Lakes Kayanja and Kayugi



Avoid cultivation up to lake shorelines



Stop watering animals directly in the lakes



Avoid cage fish farming in shallow lakes



Avoid sand mining and brick making in the buffer zones



Stop burning of wetlands

Impacts
Recovery of native tilapia and increased population of other aquatic wildlife

Benefits
-Food security
-Employment
-Income
-Tourism
-Recreation
-Cultural heritage
-Conservation of native tilapia



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THE DYING OUT NATIVE TILAPIA: The need to conserve

Why conserve?



Source of food



Employment and Income



Wildlife Protection

Human threats to fish on small lakes (Kayanja and Kayugi)



Cage fish farming in shallow Lakes



Burning of Wetlands



Cultivation upto Lake Shores



Brick making

Solutions:



Create Fish conservation committees



Raise awareness among the youth



Map, gazette and protect critical fish habitat



Stakeholder involvement

To succeed in these fish conservation efforts, all stakeholders including resource users, researchers, natural resource managers, academia, local leaders, policy makers and civil society organizations have a role to play



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