

Title: Impacts of cultural values and practices in the Conservation of natural ecosystems

- Presentation to LLC16 DRAT COPY.

About Kikandwa Environmental Association (KEA)

- Kikandwa Environmental Association (KEA) based in Uganda is a Community Based development organization founded in 1999 with a purpose of addressing rural development issues and natural resources management.



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Location:

The lake is located in the districts of [Mubende](#), [Mityana](#) and [Mpigi](#) in central [Uganda](#). The coordinates of Lake Wamala are:0.328333N, 31.8406E: (Latitude:00 19 42N, Longitude:31 50 26E).

- Location: Lake Wamala is one of the freshwater bodies located in **Central Uganda**, covering a total area of 250 km². It is a relatively shallow with a depth ranging from 1.5 m to 4.5 m. It is surrounded by papyrus beds, reed (Phragmites), Raphia palms and wild date palms (*reclinata*). Lake Wamala covers an area of approximately 250 square kilometres (97 sq mi). It is dotted by many islands, including Lwanju Island, Mabo Island, and Bagwe Island, Kiraza, Kazinga, among others. Several rivers flow into the lake, including the River Nyanzi, the River Kitenga, the River Kaabasuma, the River Mpamujugu, and the River Bbimbye. The lake is drained by the Kibimba River into the [Katonga River](#), which in turn drains into [Lake Victoria](#). The Kibimba River, however, is highly seasonal and for much of the time its course remains essentially dry. Lake Wamala is of significant economic and cultural interest locally and is jointly administered by the districts of Mubende, Mityana, and Gomba, each of which share a part of the lake along common borders.

“What is special with Lake Wamala”

- ***“Are you possessed with the spirit of the Lake? Whenever we are in the meetings, you make a lot of noise on Lake Wamala” This remark did not stop Mr.Kaganga John and his colleagues in Kikandwa Environmental Association (KEA) to continue making noise in form of advocacy and lobbying so that some intervention measures are put in place to reverse the lakes current situation which was leading it to its extinction.***
- In 2005, Uganda hosted Ramsar COP9 where some of the KEA members actively participated and got inspired to concentrate on the neglected wetlands which included Lake Wamala on which poor men and women and children directly earn their living.
- That is how KEA became inspired and interested to promote wetland management and conservation by focusing on small wetlands in size such as wells, springs, rivers, and Lakes which are not cared for by government and non government institutions yet are serving high percentage of the local communities at the grass root level for their survival.

Briefly, Lake Wamala also known as Kabaka's Lake/Kings Lake is one of the living lake freshwater body in East Africa.

- It is argued that community cultural practices and beliefs had a lot of positive impacts in the conservation of its ecosystems.
- For more than 4,000 years ago; it was part of Lake Victoria. The Lake is shared by the district of Mubende, Gomba and Mityana in Central Uganda serving a population slightly above one million people.
- It used to cover a total area of 250 square kilometers, now its size is only about 180 square kilometers and is shrinking and getting to much degraded due to the negative impacts caused by climate change, over fishing, deforestation, bush burning, land clearance for farming, exposed pits left after sand and clay mining, solid waste disposal, construction of buildings in the buffer zone , rapid increase of population, over use of pesticide along the lake by farmers, use of poor fish gill nets less than 4inch for fishing and rapid eucalyptus tree planting within the buffer zone.
- Initially Kikandwa Environmental Association (KEA) in 2002 identified Lake Wamala as one of the Lake in East Africa threatened by degradation, over exploitation, drying up and bordering extinction.
- The information was confirmed in 2007 after a general survey conducted by KEA with assistance of National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE), after the survey KEA shared the information with development partners and key stakeholders.
- KEA staff approached different stakeholders at different levels to assist and take action. The information was profiled with support from East African Living Lakes Network and Global Nature Fund for Global visibility.

Impacts of cultural values and practices in the Conservation of natural ecosystems

- Uganda is graced with good cultural values that have in years past, supported the protection of natural environments and ecosystems such as Lake Wamala.
- Through traditional taboos and folklore, vital ecosystems were protected and sustainably managed for the present and future general benefits to the society.
- The Lake was protected traditionally by taboos and customs for sustainably for providing water, fish and other ecosystem services for the communities.
- There were Sacred places of worship and offerings to spirits; Mandatory not to cut trees at and around the lake ecosystems; Strictly no dumping of litter in the Lake; Entire community was responsible in the preservation of the hills and forests, sacred sites, and Islands in the Lake; Used various plants for medicinal purposes.
- Taboos were used to protect certain tree species from use for firewood and timber; Initiation rites and marriage were used to train young people to be responsible custodians of natural resources.

- Indigenous knowledge and cultural values, beliefs and practices were transmitted on to the young generation through various folklore including storytelling, myths, songs and dances.
- Currently, the lake's water volume varies from 100 to 180 square kilometers depending on the rainfall regime creating fear that the Lake may dry up. In 1950's, 1990, 1997 and early 1998, the Lake experienced serious shrinking, in some of the rain fall regime there has been recovery, but failed to come back to its original status despite of KEA and other stakeholders intervention.
- The Lake is associated with several cultural sites, rivers and wetlands which drain water into it including river Katonga that drains into Lake Victoria after draining in Lake Wamala, therefore saving its lake basin contribute a lot to saving Lake Victoria.
- The Lake has more than 10 cultural sites which still attract many people from walks of life from various parts of the country, who pay visits to fulfill certain rituals. Lake Wamala is one of a satellite lake in East Africa that must be conserved at all costs.

Challenges

- Population growth with influx of foreigners in the area; Abandonment and disregard of cultural practices due to western values and religion.
- Overgrazing and introduction of other economic activities such as charcoal burning, brick making, agriculture, trading, Eucalyptus plantations and others.
- Accumulation of litter and chemical pollution; Overfishing, bush burning, unplanned infrastructure development.
- Under resourced Government Departments such as Environment Department; Inadequate human and financial resources; Big number of unemployed youth who depend only on the Lake for survival.
- KEA and other key stakeholder's inadequate financial and technical capacity to fill the gaps; Greed and Selfish of some government officials who assist in grab and encroach on the Lakes land when it recede Limited awareness / knowledge and information about climate change and associated impacts.
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- Weak climate change adaptation capacity for communities, sub county and district authorities. For example, tangible interventions during extended dry seasons and increasing rainstorms that destroy crops.

- Weak policy implementation and governance. For example, planting eucalyptus trees close to the lake; use of improper fishing gear, boats in poor conditions, illegal sale of fish 'in the lake'
- Limited documentation on climate variability / change to inform planning and decision making at the local level.
- Lack of reliable information & data in water level change and weather forecasts
- Inadequate resources to meet the needs of all the 14 landing sites on Lake Wamala in Mityana, Mubende and Gomba districts.
- Political interference and conflict of interest in law enforcement. For example, in Mawanga islands, there is heavy forest clearance 'sanctioned' by local politicians
- Limited Projects to meet the challenges of particular groups like youths, women, and children.



What has KEA Done?

- Sensitization and training of local communities to be responsible on the Lakes ecosystem resource and Advocate for local and District leaders to enforce environmental laws and orders; Advocate for the protection of the catchment areas around the lake; Advocated for the planting of fruit and indigenous trees and keeping bees, and the growing of vegetables, and the Use of Improved fish smoking kilns.
- Enhanced linkage and networking with Local communities, National and International communities like the East African Living Lake Network and Global Nature Fund.
- Strengthened KEA Organization structure with adequate capacity, knowledge and skills in the organization and project management.
- Increased the ability of the rural poor to raise their income and have enough food through practicing sustainable agriculture.
- Established an education center and demonstration farms.

- Carried out lobby and advocate for wells, springs, streams, Small Rivers and Lakes to be the priority in rural water development.
- Promoted and supported Local Innovation participatory innovation Development (PID) and cultural briefs and practices.
- Enhanced the capacity of the rural communities to handle health and environment management through information dissemination, education, and communication and service delivery.
- Participated in decision making and implementation of climate change adaptation / programs at community level (sub county, district levels)
- Followed up engagements set out to develop the Lake Wamala conservation master plan.
- Advocated for Diversification for livelihood opportunities beyond fishing.
- Promoted regular reporting of climate change effects on community to the appropriate authority and leaders/ government departments.

Achievement:

- The initiative to protect and conserve Lake Wamala which started as making Noise became a community and a National concern and turned out to be a Global concern.
- The Lake ecosystems has started recovering its water volume and its biodiversity; The rivers which drains into the Lake but had dried up started coming back; Animals, fishes and birds which had disappeared started coming back; Local communities at the grass root realized the importance of the lake and its ecosystems in their own lives and livelihoods; The communities started owning the Lake unlike before KEA's interventions.
- Mityana, Mubende and Gomba distinct local governments which own the Lake started to intervene to save the Lake with their meager resources.
- National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), a government institution and the Ministry of Water and Environment and Local and International organization started interventions on the Lakes although still inadequate.
- In 2010 KEA implemented a pilot project at Lubajja A. known as MERZ-GNF Good Practice Project, Uganda Chapter to reverse the degradation of the Lake, the project had started to show positive impacts towards the Lake, unfortunately it was not completed, KEA was supposed to get funding from MERZ-GNF through OSIENALA in Kenya in three phases but got only money in the first phase which forced the project to stop on the way, but the goal was partially achieved.

Lessons Learnt:

- Local communities respect cultural values, beliefs and practices than policies and laws and orders; Some cultural practices have negative impacts in protecting and conserving natural ecosystems.
- It is easy and cheaper to enforce cultural practices and beliefs; Adoption indigenous knowledge and cultural practices with positive impacts is very important.
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- To empower and support local communities, Local CBOs and NGOs with cultural values and practices in the protection, conservation and restoration of ecosystems is a big tool to conserve the natural ecosystems.
- A lot of interventions in terms of Human and Financial resources are still needed to done.
- Persistence and determination is a powerful tool to conserve and protect the natural ecosystems.

Recommendation:

- To carry out advocacy campaign for development of Lake Wamala conservation master plan by the three districts, namely: Gomba, Mubende & Mityana.
- Start a Living Lakes network for the ten fresh water Living Lakes in Uganda; Intensify capacity building for young Living Lakes activists; Advocate for better access to international development funds and Climate & Carbon Certification Programmes.
- Strengthen the evidence based approach of our work by establishing more partnerships with scientific institutions; Intensify activities on the protection of biodiversity of lakes and their surrounding; Intensify the activities on increasing the resilience of lakes and their ecosystem services against negative impacts of climate change.
- Deploy wetland-focused nature-based solutions or ecosystem-based approaches to address climate change,” which would “simultaneously provide biodiversity and human wellbeing benefits.
- Formation of lake user groups in communities and schools; Sensitizing schools around the lake; Start and Updating the inventory of Founa and Flora around lake wamala; Start up fish ponds reduce on pressure of lake wamala; Strat up breeding sites around the lake in collaboration with Ministry of Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAIF) and Disrict; Start up community projects like fruit growing, vegetable growing and beekeeping to reduce pressure on the lake; Community come up with seasonal fishing to leave the lake rest and regenerate fish .

- Advocate for better coordination of initiatives to conserve Lake Wamala involving district authorities(Gomba, Mubende and Mityana), lake users, communities, researchers, central government, cultural institutions, NGOs, international community etc.
- Initiate and running group saving schemes.
- Carry out regular documentation, publishing and dissemination of information on the climate change related effects within the Lake Wamala basin.
- Active implementation of climate change adaptation initiatives at community level. For example, increase production of tree seedlings, sustainable agricultural practices, community training and sensitization, demonstration centres on adaptation options in agriculture, water supply, hygiene and sanitation, food security through promotion of indigenous crops like yams, buyindiyindi, bigaaga (domesticated Phaseolus spp), pumpkins etc.

Conclusion:

The aim of this paper is to understand the impact of cultural practices and beliefs in the conservation of Lake Wamala Ecosystem; it shows that cultural practices and beliefs have some positive and negative impacts in the conservation of an ecosystem. Firstly, some cultural practices such as keeping of large herds of livestock puts pressure on the pastures and water resources resulting to unsustainable management of resources. Secondly, religion has a central role in guiding community behavior in the management of an ecosystem. Thirdly, the indigenous knowledge and cultural values, beliefs and practices can be transmitted to the young generation through Folklore. A lot of interventions to save the lake are still needed to done.

Wishing you the best

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2023