

# **The Status of Lake Basin Management in Kenya and the Prospect for East African Collaboration on ILBM**

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Africa has quite a number of lakes but the concentration of many of the natural lakes is in the eastern part of Africa. In West Africa, we have some small natural lakes and fairly large reservoirs. While we have a huge number of lakes at 677, many of them are really quite small. One of the characteristics of the lakes in Africa is a lot of inter-decadal variabilities. We see very big fluctuations in the lake levels. For example, in the present day, we are seeing unprecedented rises in the levels of the Kenyan rift valley lakes. These lake level rises have had serious socio-economic and also ecological impacts. The rise in lake levels is partly related to heavy rainfall. However, other factors such as increased surface runoff as well as increased sedimentation also need to be considered.

We come across many different threats for the lakes in our region. They basically can be divided into environmental factors that affect the ecosystem goods and services, economic factors, social aspects as well as governance. For example, in Lake Victoria, there is a lot of sand harvesting on the lakeshore and influent rivers, which introduces a lot of sediments into the lake. We see algal blooms, because of the number of nutrients that are conveyed into the lake by rivers, surface runoff, industries, sewage effluent releases, and atmospheric deposition, among others. Some of the problems that we are experiencing include the proliferation of water hyacinth, which is blocking navigation in the lake itself and also has some other socio-economic impacts as well as impacts on the aquatic ecology of the lake.

In terms of implementing ILBM in Kenya, we have periodically been producing Lake Briefs to help to guide interventions that can have positive impacts on the improvement of the status of the lakes and their catchments. We have prepared a draft national ILBM strategy. The draft national ILBM strategy has actually been incorporated into the National Water Policy, which is the overarching legal framework for the management of water resources within the country. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry is also launching programs to improve the environments within lake basins, and also the wetlands associated with some of the lakes.

In terms of reaching out to the larger East Africa region and the continental scale, we have a governance framework in place to be able to accelerate ILBM into these other regions. We have various regional bodies, the main one being the African Union, and also sub-regional bodies covering

different parts of Africa. We also have the Africa Development Bank. All of these institutions have been instrumental in providing a guiding framework for properly managing national as well as transboundary resources.

The recognition of the cross-cutting nature of water is extremely important. There is a need to improve inter-sectoral coordination to ensure that what is done in one sector, and what is done in another sector do not work against each other. Therefore, national water and national environment ministries have been incorporated into policy reforms, which have been ongoing across the Africa region ever since 2000.

In conclusion, we note that our lakes within Eastern Africa in particular and Africa, in general, are highly sensitive to natural changes and human activities. We also note that the problems in each of these basins are multifaceted. It is essential to identify the most important drivers that are driving these lakes towards pollution and unsustainable management. These need to be filtered out and focused upon in order to reverse the direction that the lakes are currently taking. We also note that lakes are largely ignored in Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) frameworks. So ILBM offers us opportunities for cross-sectoral and also transboundary cooperation. Citizen participation and long term transgenerational views are extremely important.