

Friday Exclusive



Photo taken during African Great Lakes Stakeholder Network Workshop (5-7 November 2019): Strengthening Capacity in Research, Policy, and Management through Development of a Network of African Great Lakes Basin Stakeholders, in Entebbe, Uganda

Vital step for addressing Lake Turkana defies

BY ADDISALEM MULAT

Of late, The Ethiopian Herald had a short stay with Dr. Ted Lawrence, African Center for Aquatic Research and Education (ACARE) Executive Director; Stephanie Smith, ACARE Strategic Advisor; Zephaniah Migeni, ACARE Advisory Groups Communications Facilitator; Dr. Kevin Obiero, Lake Turkana Advisory Group Lead and Chair and ACARE Board of Directors and Prof. Abebe Getahun, Lake Turkana Advisory Group member concerning the research center that is intended to be established at Omorate, positioned close to Lake Turkana, major causes of conflicts around the lake and other related issues.

They as well have touched upon quandaries surfacing in the length and breadth of Lake Turkana, the sole reason why the International Institute for Sustainable Development and the African Center for Aquatic Research and Education joined forces and the benefits emanating from the program to the Lake Turkana community. Excerpts:

What is the intended target of establishing a research center at Omorate, close to Lake Turkana? Does it help you reap the fruit of success within the shortest time possible?

The Ethiopian side of Lake Turkana is probably one of the least studied of all the African Great Lakes (AGL). One of the reasons for this is its location being remote and absence of necessary infrastructures and academic institutions close by. So far, the studies conducted were by academics from far away Universities (e.g. Addis Ababa and Jimma Universities).

It is, thus, found imperative to establish a research station close to the lake at

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Omorate, the capital of Daasanach Woreda (District), located at the Shore of Omo River and some 65 km far from the lake under the auspices of Jinka University, which is located some 250 km from the lake.

The research station, furnished with necessary field and laboratory equipment, will assist in monitoring the Omo River

and Lake Turkana frequently and collect essential scientific data. It will also serve as a place where researchers and students from domestic and foreign institutions stay for some time and study the different scientific and socio-economic aspects of the lake and the river.

What are the major causes of conflicts around Lake Turkana?

Conflicts between the Ethiopian Daasanach and the Kenyan Turkana tribesmen often occur at the border on the northwest end of Lake Turkana near Omo Delta and this date back as early as the 19th century. The region is highly vulnerable to frequent and prolonged droughts which increase the pressure to raids mostly executed during rainy seasons.

The main causes of conflicts include cross-border land disputes, scrambling for grazing areas/pastures, water resources and fertile fishing grounds, stealing of livestock and theft of fishing gears and equipment. The main driver of the escalating cycles of violent conflicts is the gradual erosion of elders' authority, failure of government agencies to provide adequate security in remote areas, the proliferation of small arms and lack of integration of local communities into the national political and economic spheres.

What should be done to address predicaments taking place around the lake?

Promote adaptation measures aimed at building structures for dialogue, strengthening information and communication for peace, and provide training in nonviolent conflict transformation, and foster the prevention of violence and violent conflict. This would be achieved through developing economic incentives for livelihood diversification

and environmental conservation initiatives targeting the riparian communities.

The conflicts among the tribesmen from the two neighboring countries (Daasanach and Turkana) should be solved amicably through negotiations and fair share of the resources. The two Governments, Regional Organizations, Academic Institutions, NGOs, and community elders should work towards this goal.

Approaches such as co-management agreements and development of by-laws should be adopted to enhance lake wide cooperation amongst dependent communities.

Collaborative scientific studies should be conducted on all aspects of the problems of Lake Turkana and Omo River that ultimately would benefit the two countries and especially the communities bordering the lake, without severely affecting the environment. Being that this is the least studied of all the African Great Lakes, an ideal model case is required to develop climate change adaptation strategies.

We, as the scientific community, are aligning this model for collaborating and building trust, working together to understand the resources and how to protect them for the benefit of those who rely on them most. Through such efforts, we are demonstrating that working together; we can solve some of the issues that normally cause conflict.

Why did the International Institute for Sustainable Development and the African Center for Aquatic Research and Education join forces? What are the benefits emanating from the program to the Lake Turkana community?

IISD-ACARE combines the legal and policy expertise of IISD's vast expert staff, and the resources and training ability of

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IISD's Experimental Lake Area [<https://www.iisd.org/ela/>] with ACARE's newly created African network of large-lakes experts and scientists. These combined resources are designed to allow the experts in Ethiopia and Kenya the ability to work more effectively on addressing Lake Turkana issues, prioritizing the work that needs to be done, accumulate the knowledge and training to do good research, and harness necessary partners and resources to conduct important research.

The community around Lake Turkana relies on the Transboundary resources from the lake for their livelihoods. Currently, there are a variety of threats facing the Turkana Basin, which forms a great concern for the future persistence and long-term viability of the important ecosystem services that have been provided over generations.

Therefore, to ensure sustainability of ecosystem services that are currently enjoyed by the local communities and the region as a whole, there is need for scientists, resource managers and riparian communities to understand how the lake functions, what is threatening the lake, and what actions need to be taken around the lake. The IISD-ACARE program and the members of the Lake Turkana Advisory Group are working together to ensure the lake is healthy for all users.

How are you going to address some of the challenges surfacing on the African Great Lakes?

Environmental problems on the African Great Lakes are often addressed by international agencies and local organizations targeting short-term objectives, resulting in piecemeal results. Strengthening research capacity on these lakes can bolster long-term, strategic commitments, stable funding, and address ecosystem approaches to resource development and management.

By adopting a bottom up approach, IISD-ACARE is assisting six advisory groups on each of the African Great Lakes, led by African leaders in research, science, and management and policy, to prioritize and direct critical research needs on these valuable resources.

Do you think partnering with the International Institute for Sustainable Development will enhance our ability to strengthen science and positively affect policy and management on these critical resources and provide the global scientific community with worthwhile work experience? Would you elaborate on this?

Partnering with the IISD will strengthen scientific efforts on the African Great Lakes. IISD has, for over 30 years, been building relationships with organizations and individuals globally to address some of the most important threats to our freshwater, large-lakes, resources. Their networks, expertise, and knowledge will strengthen the efforts in the African Great Lakes region.

What are the benefits we secure out of the six Advisory Groups that were



This is the Lake Turkana Advisory Group members led by Dr. Kevin Obiero-Advisory Group Lead (3rd left back row) and Jeppe Kolding-the AG Expert Adviser (3rd right back row)

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created to address issues on each of the African Great Lakes? How are they going to carry out their activities?

The IISD-ACARE program is facilitating lake advisory groups to enhance scientific inquiry in a systematic and consistent manner; foster a community of shared knowledge and practice, across sectors and geography; and Positively influence policymaking using science, communication, education, community engagement and other strategies. Specifically, advisory group members will meet, in-person (when COVID conditions allow) at least annually, and virtually at least monthly to:

- Prioritize research needs on each lake;
- Determine and undertake specific projects to address prioritized research;
- Exchange knowledge regarding relevant research, monitoring trends, and practices;
- Foster partnerships to inform and accelerate positive change for the lakes;
- Develop policy briefs and communication tools, based on science and community needs;
- Activate collaborative, cross-basin projects between lakes and across sectors; and
- Direct resources towards priority collaborative needs and projects. Membership of each lake-specific advisory group will consist of researchers, managers, and policymakers from each riparian country and all will be represented in a larger regional body called the Council of Advisory Groups.

How is the Lake Turkana Advisory

Group organized? Who are involved?

The Lake Turkana Advisory Group (LTuAG) was created in November 2019 under the auspices of the African Center for Aquatic Research and Education in Entebbe, Uganda. The group consists of freshwater experts drawn from research (Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute) and higher learning academic institutions (Addis Ababa University, Jimma University, Jinka University, Turkana University College), governance experts from the riparian countries of Kenya and Ethiopia and global advisers.

The group provides a platform to enhance communication and partnership among its members to foster collaborative research for better understanding of the health of the lake and surrounding communities. The group anticipates having around 10 members to attend biannual meetings in Kenya and Ethiopia.

The specific goals of the meeting are to (1) facilitate open communication among researchers active in the basin; (2) coordinate multi-disciplinary research; (3) assist in disseminating scientific research to key stakeholders. The anticipated outcome is increased research projects for sustainable livelihoods in the Omo-Turkana basin.

As a Statement of Purpose, the advisory group has committed to jointly conduct long and short-term research on different aspects of Lake Turkana and the Omo Delta which include, but not limited to, fish stock assessment, limnology, climate change impacts, food security and socio-economic studies.