



## SPECIAL REPORT

Lake Victoria, the world's largest tropical freshwater lake and a lifeline for millions, is in peril. Pollution, illegal fishing and unchecked human activity are choking its waters, destroying breeding grounds and depleting fish stocks, while communities that depend on the lake face an uncertain future. For seven weeks, starting December 20, 2025, *New Vision* is running weekly stories examining this ecological crisis and what must be done to save Lake Victoria before it's too late. In this article, **Herbert Musoke** examines how the lake is fighting back.

**A** night when Lake Victoria's waters charged towards Kagera village in Kasensero town council in Kyotera district was catastrophic, according to Lawrence Mugaya, the LC1 chairperson of Kasensero Central village. According to Mugaya, it was a double tragedy as the lake struck at the very onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"On the fateful night, we witnessed a heavy downpour in the evening which subsided into drizzles as people went to sleep. Hell broke loose amidst the usual sweet sleep that dawns with the melodies of storm-free night rain," Mugaya said.

Mugaya noted that it was by God's grace that the charged water did not claim any human life, but properties worth millions of shillings were not spared as the lake redefined its boundaries, sparing not even an inch of the village.

"People lost property. Imagine waking up and finding the house filled with water. Many picked only

# WHY LAKE VICTORIA IS FIGHTING

PHOTO BY HERBERT MUSOKE



Part of Sangalo sand beach at Maduwa landing site in Busia destroyed by Lake Victoria overflow

## 'PROBLEM OF LAKE SHIFTING BOUNDARIES IS YET TO END'

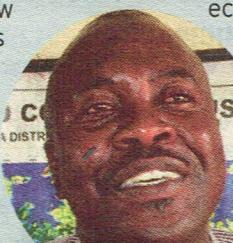
According to Joseph Byaruhanga, a senior environment officer for Kalangala district, those violating the lake should know that heavy rains cause all the rivers flowing upstream into the lake from all the countries it to more than double their inflows. This means the problem of the lake shifting boundaries is yet to end. "Rapid urbanisation, especially near the shores, created impermeable surfaces which have reduced the lake's buffers. Much of the building is done with concrete, paving and tarmac, which further reduces water infiltration into the ground, causing more surface runoff, increasing flooding, erosion and poor water quality as a result of pollutants washing into streams," Byaruhanga said.

He added that this also depletes underground

water, lowering the water table, drying wells, increasing pumping costs and harming stream ecosystems that rely on groundwater.

"Developments by the urban authorities such as the Nakivubo channel in Kampala, which is directed to flow directly to the lake. This is the same in towns like Busia, Masese in Jinja, Kiyindi in Buikwe and all other authorities. The green-looking water shows aquatic organisms are dying because of chemicals from industrial untreated waste, agro-chemicals from fertilisers and pesticides killing the lake," Byaruhanga said.

He added that poor land use around the lake and its feeders has accelerated surface runoff and siltation of the water bodies as the natural capacity of the wetlands and the soil to absorb excess water has drastically reduced, causing rapid flows into the lake.



Byaruhanga

a few items and ran for their lives," Mugaya said.

The village, which had over 100 homesteads, according to Mugaya, is now part of Lake Victoria.

"We had Kagera and Kasensero Central as the two villages that made up the landing site. However, the lake water overflowed its boundaries, submerging Kagera village and displacing everyone," Mugaya said.

According to Deo Nsamba, the Kasensero LC3 chairperson, the landing site being located between Lake Victoria and River Kagera puts it at a disadvantage because as Victoria discharged water, Kagera also discharged, leading to high water volumes and submerging everything around.

He purported that the lake overflow covered over 600 metres. "When you come here today, you may think that we were irresponsible with our settlement,

but we had left a buffer zone of 50 metres. Today the docking platforms are over 200 metres into the water," Nsamba said.

Many nature advocates and experts have warned that the moment for the lake to fight back against multi-dimensional violations it has suffered over decades is now, encouraging those still misbehaving with it to tighten their belts.

They have argued that the injustices against the lake were not limited to establishing human settlements in its buffers or invading it for agriculture; they extended to plastic pollution, industrialising buffer zones with reckless discharge of industrial residue into the lake, swamp reclamation and fishing-related illegalities, among others.

The experts insisted that from Kyotera to Busia, the message is clear: The boundaries of the lake

must be respected. They add that the rising waters should not be mistaken as mere natural disasters, but as a warning of what happens when climate change collides with human acts of negligence.

During the same period, desperate moments were not only a portion of Kagera residents, but panic gripped several communities that had reportedly invaded not only Victoria buffers, but also other water bodies across the country.

For Kampala, Mukono, Entebbe and Wakiso, even the flashy homes of the rich in the lake neighbourhoods were reportedly not spared and were highlighted with due prominence in the media to magnify a campaign against injustices on Lake Victoria.

At Waneko in Buliisa district, several residents had to evacuate their homes after Lake Albert waters shifted boundaries during the same period. The very lake

did the same in districts, such as Ntoroko and others. Displacements were also reported around Lake Kyoga, Lake Edward, River Nile, among others.

### EFFECTS OF RISING WATERS

During a press conference at the time, the then Police spokesperson, Fred Enanga, was quoted telling reporters that over 778 homesteads had been displaced across Uganda as a result of the rising water levels from Lake Victoria adversely affecting schools, transport and health services, among others.

"The rising water levels led to back-flows of the rivers that feed Lake Victoria, thereby causing adverse effects to areas where they originate and flow through. Districts such as Apac, Nakasongola, Kwanza, Oyam, Kole, Otuke, Dokolo and Lira, among others, were affected as roads like Akokoro Road connecting the ferry from Apac to Nakasongola were flooded," Enanga said.

Over the same period, the Kenyan media reported that over 300 lives had been lost and over 20,000 people displaced around Kisumu, Busia, Saiya and Homa Bay counties.

While in Tanzania, about 5,000 homesteads were reportedly affected in Kagera and Musoma regions. Official state reporters indicated that overall, about 481,000 people had been displaced in East Africa.

Vincent Lukyamuzi, the Masaka district planner, indicated that during the period, about 5,000 affected persons had been enumerated at 337 places in the district alone.

Some weather experts argued that the water overflow had been triggered by unusually heavy rains between October 2019 and mid-2020 and a positive Indian Ocean dipole.

The Indian Ocean dipole is a pattern characterised by year-to-year temperature shifts causing opposite effects (warmer/cooler) in the areas, influencing weather like monsoons, droughts and floods across Africa, Asia and Australia.

Lake Victoria is a huge trans-boundary water body shared by the three East African countries of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania with about 23 rivers draining into it. These rivers originate from as far as Rwanda and Burundi; thus, when it rains in Burundi, water will find its way to Lake Victoria.

"When it rains, all the water