

The Lake Victoria mission Report

Uganda and Tanzania, 22 March – 2 April 2006

Project leaders: René. M. SEGBENOU and Gilles GAEBEL

ABSTRACT

1. Context

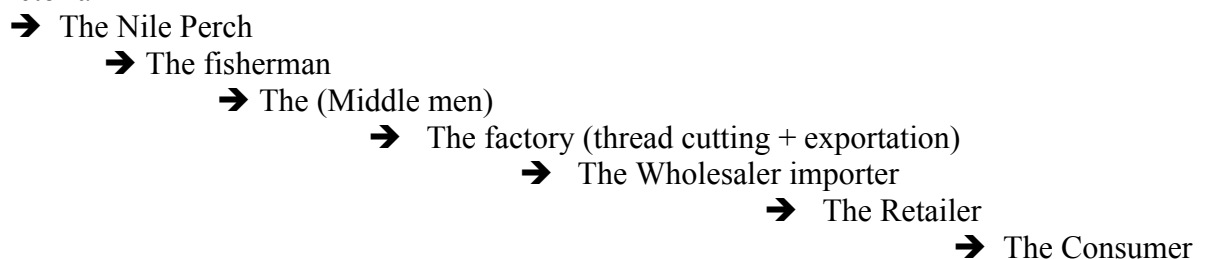
The release of Sauper's film "Darwin Nightmare" has raised a vivid emotion and lot of interrogations on the situation of the populations living around Lake Viktoria. Wishing to know the reality on the ground, CARREFOUR and Charles Leopold MAYER Foundation for the Progress of Human being (FPH) have jointly sent a mission for exchange and information in Ouganda and Tanzania. The mission leaders, Gilles GAEBEL for CARREFOUR and René M. SEGBENOU for the FPH/ADEPA, have been backed up on the spot by Margaret NAKATO (Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association and Fishermen World Forum), Editrude LUKANGA (Mwanza Women Development Association), Erik VAN DIJK (ANOVA East Africa) and Maarten BUITNDIJK (FIORITAL).

This "mission/intrusion" had to face, in the beginning, the mistrust of persons they met because they were not confident on their hosts' intentions. Did they have a camera.....? But the introductions to the companies with the backing up of CARREFOUR and the presentation of the Objectives of our mission have allowed reducing this suspicion...

2. The weak links

For the exported products coming from the Nile Perch (?), the chain of production, from the fish to the final consumer, includes roughly 8 direct actors (and many indirect actors):

Lake Victoria



Except the fishermen communities and the resource, i.e. the Nile Perch itself, who seem to be, on the short and middle terms, the fragile links, the situation of the whole chain is rather flourishing.

2.1. The fishermen communities

The data collected lead to think there are at least two categories of fishermen: i) the wage earners employed by the boat owners, ii) and fishermen under contract with the "middle men". As already said, they represent both the fragile links of this chain, considering their economic and social situation.

The factories pay the Kg of fish between 1500 and 2000 Tanzanian Shillings (TSh), which is between 1,02 and 1,36 euro or between 2 000 and 2 700 Ugandan Shillings (UGSh) which is 0,91 and 1,23 euro (exchange rate : 1€ = 1 470 TSh, and 1€ = 2 190 UGSh). In Uganda for instance, the fishermen cash nowadays, between 20-30 Kg per boat and daily (three fishermen on a boat). In return, the boat owners pay back to the fishermen 30% of the sale price of the fish at the factory. Besides, a minimum wage would be paid on days without fishing.

In Tanzania another compensation system is practised: a day per week, the whole cash belongs to the fishermen; in addition, they receive on each of the other days 25 000 TSh, which is a lot in appearance. But the daily capture are rather lowering (35 to 40 kg/day since 2 years) while the individual income decreases. Besides, the prices paid by the factories benefit mainly to the middlemen and to a few really independent fishermen. Among the 250 000 fishermen operating on the Lake, many are from “second hand”, which means in a position of service providers or employees of the middle men. The money transferred by these collectors to the fishermen is much lower than they should be.

22. A rather decreasing resource

Of course, there was plenty of fish, mainly after the EU boycott in 2000 (demanding better practices and health conditions for the exportation). The biomass resource available in the lake was then estimated at 1.6 million tons, and then it decreased strongly to roughly 400 000 tons in 2003. In 2005, it is said to be stabilized between 500 000 and 580 000 tons.

The present captures are around 220 000 and 228 000 tons a year for a total resource estimated at 540 000 tons (concurrent drawing for the 3 countries). The yearly extraction would reach more than 40% of the resources for a sexual maturity cycle of two years and a half. This is at the limit of over fishing. The situation could be worse, as others people believe that the sexual maturity cycle could be more than 3 years.

The only constraint enforced at present on fishing is the size of the fish: 50 cm minimum and 85 cm maximum, and the checking seems to be weak on the field. A 50 cm perch weights from 1,5 to 2 Kg. With a yielding of 40% in threading, no fish weighing less than 300 g should be found in selling. It is also frequent to find fish weighing more than 50 kg in factory, size corresponding to the breeders.

Part of the fishing is done with the line (up to 25 %). This technique is practised during certain seasons and in certain zones. It is more selective than the net (gillnet) as to the size and the types. This technique does not expand because of an inferior yield in captures.

There is no national quota for fishing, by landing site, by boat or by fisherman. We are therefore in a very closed ecological system which is allowing an open fishing as for the management of the resource. The present conditions of exploitation lead as a whole to the risk of exhaustion of this resource. More over, with the persisting draught since two years, the level of water in the lake has diminished of more than a meter, leading the perch off, and depriving certain zones from access to the resource.

The biodiversity of the lake has drastically diminished with the introduction of the Nile perch. However, there remains a population of Tilapia (vegetarian fish consuming only vegetable proteins) which represent 12% of the biomass available and mainly the “silverfish”, a small fish very abundant which is consumed locally and regionally. When the fish is not fresh because of the

fishing and logistic conditions, it is used to feed chicken and pork.

3. Fishing and trade organisation

Fishermen, estimated at 250 000 on the Lake, are: either owner of their boats, either embarked as daily employees. Certain persons (non fishermen) possess many boats and play a role of ship owners/collectors/fishmongers, called “middle men”. The owners of boats are generally men. But today widows, mainly because of HIV/AIDS are among boat managers. The Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association (Uganda) and its homologue in Tanzania, Mwanza Women Development Association supports these women.

The fishermen who are employees and the “patron fishermen” are paid “cash” daily, by the “middle men”. These last collect the fish from the fishing zones and carry it in ice and by boat to the factories. These are the intermediary offering and supplying fishermen in ice, fuel, new nets, and food supplies. The “middle men” and the threading factories are in a rather ruling position.

Certain landing sites are under the responsibility of “Beach Management Unit” (BMU). The fishermen have a major role in the management of these “small landing sites”. This system, launched very early in Tanzania (545 BMU today) is very little developed in Uganda. On the 1350 landing sites registered around the lake, only fifty are equipped with a modern management system.

At the level of the factories, the employees would have a condition envied by the other habitants. They would be better paid and better protected than the other sectors of activity. These companies have benefited from collaboration and help from EU to apply the norms. They have a very good technical and sanitary level.

There is no local market for the Nile perch, for the price is based on the demand for exportation. The price of the raw materials is therefore locally regulated by the external demand. The Nile perch is not affordable for the majority of the local consumers, because of the level of the household. One must however precise that the Nile perch consumption is not part of the diet habits of the place. The consumers prefer largely species traditionally consumed: silverfish, tilapia and catfish. Most of the Nile perch is therefore drained towards exportation. It is clear that the diet habits could have changed, if the Nile perch filet were not sale at a prohibitive price on the local market.

The quantity of fish exported from the whole lake goes up to 90 000 tons of thread (yearly catch in 2005 of 224 000 tons with a threading yield of 40%). The selling of Carrefour in Europe (four countries among which France) represents an important part of this volume. Many other super marked sell it also (Leclerc, SuperU, Monoprix, Auchan...). More and more important quantities are found in group restoration (school canteens, hospitals, company restaurants...)

4. Local fish consumption.

Local populations have seen their consumption of fish diminish because of the diminution of their resources in Tilapia (12 % of the biomass today). The Nile perch (31 % of the biomass in 2005) dried, smoked in the years 1990 and partly consumed by local people is presently sent abroad, almost in totality, as threads. Only the sub-products (heads essentially and residual meat on the bones) are exploited locally. The best left parts are essentially (either dried and/or smoked) for human consumption and for that of the neighbouring countries (Rwanda, Congo, RDC...). The residual wastes are turned into animal food. These transformations are done unfortunately in very bad sanitary conditions.

The whole of the processing, of the trade of the other species (Tilapia, Silverfish) is done also in similar healthiness status. Between the procedures for export and those (or their absence) for consumption on the local market, “it is day and night”.

The fish heads are highly appreciated by the Asians, the Chinese in particular. They are very interested and might start in a short period, to trade this product. There is a real risk that these products disappear, in their turn, from the local or regional market...

As said above, there is a flow of exportation of tilapia towards Germany and the USA. By effect on the prices of the raw materials, one might fear that this type of fish becomes limited too, for local consumption. Because of this, Tanzania has forbidden the export of the product of this species, which is the case neither in Uganda, nor in Kenya.

5. The local situation

The fishing activity is a very dynamic economical sector in the area. The Nile perch was at a certain time the first export of Uganda (120 millions USD in 2005). This wealth draws the poor people from the farms. Many wish to come and fish in the lake or work in the processing plants. The perch is known as “the gold from the lake”. The number of fishermen increases regularly. In 2002, the LVFO (Lake Victoria Fisheries Organisation) had estimated this increase to 30 % in two years. Even if these statistics might be questioned, every body agrees that the increase of the populations around the lake is high. In the opposite, as already indicated, their revenue has a tendency to diminish due to the associated effect of the decrease of the accessible resource, daily catches and the increasing number of fishermen.

There are numerous islands in Lake Victoria. These “migrant” populations have settled there in camps, as one can see it in “Darwin nightmare”. The living conditions are dreadful there. The HIV infection rate which is already of 30% around the Lake raises up to a 60 and 70 % of prevalence for the population living on these islands (source: Forum Syd-Swedish NGO operating in Mwanza). Globally health and education problems are very important.

6. Propositions to change this situation

The two “weak links” in the chain, as we said, are on the one hand the fishermen and the communities living around, and on the other hand the resource. It is clear that in front of this situation, action must come in to assure a sustainable exploitation of the resource. Based on our observations and the analyses we have done, we think those actions should be at three levels: the management of the resource, alternative activities to fishing, activities targeting social objectives. But none of these actions will be efficient, neither sustainable, if it does not come from the actors themselves’ will. Therefore the following proposals will not be appropriate until they meet local initiatives.

6.1. Resource management

- ◆ .Fight against illegal fishing and install national quotas, quotas by BMU and by registered boat.
- ◆ Develop the practice of line fishing, which is more selective (incentive and rules to be thought of).
- ◆ Prompt Uganda, Kenya to forbid the export of Tilapia.
- ◆ Negotiate and practise biological rest in the three countries around the lake.
- ◆ Control the size of the fish (at the boat level, from BMU, factories) and the size of the

exported threads

- ◆ Train fishermen and reinforce their organisations on local, national and regional levels in relation with the LVFO (Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization). Strengthen local and regional NGOs capable of contributing to a better education and a better management of the resource

62. Develop alternative activities

- ◆ Develop aquaculture for a production of living baits for line fishing. Positive experiments are known (see GREENFIELDS in Uganda and FAPOEL (NGO) in Tanzania). Presently, the only resource for fishermen is the harvesting of young catfishes in spawns and feeding zones, which contributes to destroy the ecosystem,
- ◆ Promote the breeding of Tilapia in cages or basins for local consumption. As this fish is only vegetarian, the breeding system is therefore interesting for the protein balance and for sustainable development
- ◆ Help the micro credit system favour other local alternative activities, such as agriculture, arboriculture, and land raising: bovine, pig raising and poultry farming (cf. the micro-credit system organised by KWDA in Uganda and MWDA in Tanzania).

63. activities focusing on social objectives

- ◆ Actions to improve the health level of the lakeside residents
- ◆ Actions for the education by schooling of children
- ◆ Actions for the professional training of the fishermen, fishermen's wives about fishing technology, the management of the resource, the management of the boats, the valorisation of the fish industry.

- ◆ Actions for training and capacity building of fishermen's organisations, community organisations.
- ◆ Achieve facilities with local actors to transport, process, stock, sell the fishing products at local level in a minimal acceptable health conditions
- ◆ In parallel to the sponsoring for the modernization of factories and export of the Nile perch, encourage EU to give its support to help fishing industry/distribution on local market comply with acceptable norms.

7. ACTIONS TO BE CONDUCTED OR SUPPORTED

71. The conditions of success

For the above proposals to help improve the present situation, it is necessary at first, that the fishermen communities themselves make a critical analysis of their present situation, identifying the actions to be undertaken for improvement and get organised for this. Therefore, any immediate support should allow to:

- ◆ Identify by country, 2 or 3 grass root NGOs able of helping fishermen communities conduct a context analysis ~~running into~~[leading to](#) the necessary changes to do and the actions to be undertaken to succeed;
- ◆ Organise, at the level of each country around the lake, a round table to obtain a consensus around the actions and correctives measures to be taken, a commitment of the different

categories of actors to act in the precise area and a concerted plan of action to face the situation, taking into account the experiments conducted elsewhere (Europe, West Africa, Asia, Latin America);

- ◆ Organise, at the level of the three countries, a round table to create a community dynamics of exchange of experiences around Lake Victoria, each working differently according to its context. It is absolutely enriching not to have the same solutions everywhere even if the problems are similar or identical.

It is important to establish a permanent consultation around the lake, for any safeguard measure which is not operated on the whole lake has no chance to be efficient. Besides, this process of thinking based on context analysis and the search of solutions, would put local communities in a better position to integrate proposals and help coming from elsewhere.

72. Constitution of a liable fund for development

A fund could be set up and fed by a number of actors of the production chain: small part of the money flowing to the fish processing plants, export companies and retailers. Carrefour is presently thinking of solutions of this type with its partners. This could contribute to the launching and the backing up of certain actions suggested here.