

Domestication of Fishing Baits on Lake George to Save Papyrus Vegetation.



Project progress report submitted to the rotary IHE-Delft Alumni Support Fund

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Summary

Lake George, one of the key fisheries resource base is faced with overfishing. This is due to fishing and related activities which is a major economic livelihood and source of fish for the majority of Bakonzo people of the district, whose staple food is fish and cassava flour. And over the last four decades, human population in the district has also greatly increased fueling the rise in the number of consumers and active fishermen who join the fishing industry and continue to quietly use illegal and unauthorized fishing gears. This active recruitment has over time resulted to the increase in the fishing pressure, and consequently created an increase in search for baits from the lake shores covered by papyrus, leading to its destruction and methane exposure to the atmosphere as they cut the papyrus, and dig into the root mat and mud to search for earth worms that work as baits for line fishing.

Continuous search for baits will lead to depletion of the papyrus vegetation cover in the shorelines. The vegetation protects the lake from pollution, siltation, performs biological purification functions, offers breeding grounds for the fishes in the water body and provides habitat to many other aquatic biotas there in. Thus, any destruction of this ecosystem, directly affects the lake productivity in terms of fish catches per fishing expedition and any reduction in catches in turn renders fish folks to food insecurity and low incomes since Lake George is in a protected area and fishing is the only livelihood activity that takes place.

In pursuit to address this crisis, MOBBISUD with financial support from the Rotary-IHE-Delft Alumni Support fund 2023 is championing a project to conserve papyrus vegetation on the shores of Lake George through Vermiculture as an alternative source of fishing baits at the three landing sites (kahendiro, hamukungu, and kasenyi) in Kasese district part of the lake. The project intends to train the fishermen in vermiculture, establish three vermiculture units, and share lessons learnt during implementation with other fish landing sites on Lake George in other districts of Rubirizi and Kamwenge upon completion. The projects' implementation progress is therefore highlighted;-

Project inception

A meeting was held by MOBBISUD in early April to convene key and relevant stakeholders (plates a-c):- Kasese rotary club representative, district fisheries & natural resources, & environment officers, community development officers, beach management committees, fishermen, media, and the political representatives (Resident district commissioner, Local council V, & I chairpersons). This offered a platform for introducing the project, and specifically garnered support from the area leaders, and the targeted community who were very positive.



Plate (a). MOBBISUD staff welcoming participants at the meeting



Plate (b). Kasese rotary representative addressing participants during the meeting



Plate (c). IHE Alumnus/MOBBISUD staff presenting the project to the participants

Multi stakeholder engagement

This exercise was done for all the three landing sites in May. Involved persons included sub county fisheries assistants, & officers, fishermen groups/committees, and fisheries protection units to choose suitable training periods, and sites for hosting the vermiculture demonstration units. This was very successful with most fishermen groups setting their preferred training periods, and agreeing on ideal sites for erecting the structures once trainings were completed.

Trainings

This activity was done in July for the fishermen groups in the three landing sites. Key training topics covered were included general and economic benefits of vermiculture, organic matter separation/storage, stocking units with worms, and continuous maintenance of the units. Key to note here; all fishermen groups have identified caretakers who have been tasked with daily care of the structures. Fishermen found it convenient since most times they are occupied in the fishing exercise. Boat owners have also been so helpful in ensuring the success of the trainings through sourcing ample training venues, and seats for participants.



Plate (d).One of the training sessions facilitated by MOBBISUD staff at kahendiro fish landing site

Procurement, construction of vermiculture units, and stocking

Sourcing, and purchase of materials for all the vermiculture units was done in August. However at the moment, only the unit at Kahendero landing site is fully constructed and stocked with the red worms (plate g). The other two units for hamukungu, and kasenyi respectively will be stocked by mid-November because they are under construction. Stocking at Kahendero was done in the early September. The first harvest is anticipated at the end of this coming November.



Plate (e).Partitioned vermiculture unit during construction



Plate (f).Garbage separation at the unit prior to stocking



Plate (g). Stocking of the unit with mature mother stock of the red worms.



Plate (h). Clear sample of red worms used as mother stock.

Challenges

- (I). There is huge expectation from the community in terms of expansion of the project by MOBBISUD
- (ii). Ill-health of project lead was a big setback to the implementation speed of the project between May to July, 2024.