



**How a little help can go  
a long way  
to better health, self-reliance and  
community empowerment  
through the**



## **Lake Victoria Programme**

**The unique cross-border programming and cooperation between the Red Cross societies in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Sweden**







Federation/ANDRE NECSU

*Fishermen head out on Lake Victoria. Catches are decreasing in the lake and fishermen now have to work harder for less fish than before.*

**A LONG WAY – THE LAKE VICTORIA PROGRAMME** • Published by the International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies • Produced by the Regional Communications Unit, Eastern Africa • Text by Anita Swarup • Photos by Anita Swarup except where noted. Main cover photo by Petrut Calinescu • Funded by the Swedish Red Cross with support from SIDA • Design and printing: The Regal Press Kenya Ltd., Nairobi • E3000/2007



In 2000 the Swedish government authorized the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) to embark on a long-term commitment to support sustainable development in the Lake Victoria basin. The commitment is based on a strategy developed by SIDA in collaboration with East African partners, in particular the East African Community. Civil society actors are important partners in implementing the, among them the RC/RC Movement.



# The Red Cross gives them hope

*"For an organisation working at a local community level, one measure of success of development interventions is how quickly you pack your bags – in other words, you've taught them how to fish, they don't need your fish and they can fish themselves."*

- Esther Okwanga,  
Head, International Federation's  
Sub-regional office for East Africa

Gleaming under a blue East African sky are the sparkling waters of Lake Victoria, a lake with unique fish, forests and minerals. Yet these beautiful waters hide the dark reality – of poverty and disease and environmental disaster.

Lake Victoria is one of the largest fresh water lakes in the world at about 68,800 square km and is a vital resource for the sustenance of over 30 million people. The countries bordering the lake – Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania – are among the least developed countries in the world (ranking no. 145, 152 and 162 respectively on the 2006 UNDP Human Development Index). Rwanda (HDI 158) and Burundi (HDI 169) are also part of the Lake Victoria basin.

## Common problems

The people who live around the lake and who mainly earn their livelihoods from fishing and farming, suffer from common problems - poverty, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, high levels of water-borne diseases like diarrhoea and typhoid and soaring rates of HIV/AIDS (which run at nearly 35% in some parts). It is also a region prone to disasters such as flooding resulting in homes being washed away and displacement of people. Environmental degradation of the surrounding areas is a major problem where trees are continually cut down for firewood that decreases the resistance of the area to floods.

## Community participation is the key

The Lake Victoria Programme was therefore initiated by the Swedish Red Cross and funded by the Swedish Government's International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in an attempt to tackle these issues in all three countries. Key to

this is using an approach that integrates some of the core areas of the Federation's *Strategy 2010*: health and care in the community, disaster preparedness and response and capacity building.

Community participation has been crucial to the success of many of the projects today. Indeed, the Red Cross/Red Crescent is unique for its large network of volunteers on the ground and its grass roots support from the community. Not only do its programmes allow people to feel more empowered but they are also more effectively implemented with better results.

Migori (Kenya) District Commissioner, Njoroge Ndirangu says: "The Red Cross could make a big contribution to HIV/AIDS, especially among the youth. They are at an

advantageous point as they have trust. When people see Red Cross, it gives them hope."

## Long-term commitment

The Lake Victoria Programme also signifies a change in direction for the Red Cross in Africa where not only emergencies are dealt with but also long-term development – and this means a long-term commitment.

This publication will look at some of the successful projects implemented by the communities involved and assisted by the Red Cross branches in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, including peer education in HIV/AIDS, latrines built by the community, tree planting projects in schools, ditches and canals built by community members to take in water overflow and avert flooding, and income generation projects. Most of these projects are inexpensive and quite simple to implement with considerable gains made.

These projects illustrate that the objective of improving the quality of life of the people in the region, particularly the most vulnerable, elderly, women and youth can be reduced through community participation and self-reliance.



*Unemployment and various health problems often associated with poverty are rampant around the lake. Many people eke out a living in the fishing industry.*



# The source of the Nile and livelihood for millions

Lake Victoria is the world's second largest fresh water lake and is shared by East African Community Partner States of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Burundi and Rwanda are also part of the Lake Victoria Basin. The largest lake in Africa covers an area of nearly 68,000 sq km. This vast expanse, about the size of the Republic of Ireland, forms the source of the White Nile. The lake rests in the Great Rift Valley on the border between Tanzania and Uganda with a small overlap in Kenya. Three nations share the waters of the lake - Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda with Tanzania having 49%, Uganda with 45% and Kenya with 6%. Fishing for tilapia and Nile perch provides a living for many of the people who live along the lakeside and trade in local markets.

## Colonial exploitation

The lake was first 'discovered' in 1858 by the British explorer John Speke. Lake Victoria was originally referred to as Ukerewe but, after its "discovery," its name was changed to Lake Victoria in honour of British Queen Victoria. Early in the 20th century, the colonialists started to exploit Lake Victoria's watershed. They cleared the surrounding natural vegetation, denuding forests and draining swamps to plant cash crops, such as tea, coffee and sugar.

## The devastating Nile perch

The plantations attracted migrant workers and, as the population grew and fishing methods advanced, overfishing became a problem and catch sizes began to drop. During the 1950s, Nile perch was introduced in the lake's ecosystem in an attempt to improve the yields of fishing in the lake. The Nile perch proved totally devastating to the local ecosystem - of the hundreds of endemic species, many are now extinct. Furthermore, the initial good returns on Nile perch catches have diminished dramatically.

Local fishermen are in a predicament: they are working harder and catching less. The populations of smaller fish, which traditionally have been their source of livelihood, have been decimated either by larger predators or by over fishing. The big, oily Nile perch is too far out in the open waters for the little fishing boats, and too big to be caught in their unsophisticated nets.

## A merciless weed

A more recent threat to the lake is the water hyacinth. With the deceptive appearance



*Most things revolve around the fishing in Lake Victoria. The introduction of the Nile perch to the lake proved disastrous, as did the later introduction of the water hyacinth.*



*Working the lake is fraught with danger – weather changes quickly and many of the fishermen don't know how to swim. The Red Cross branches around the lake hold courses in water safety.*

of a lush, green carpet, the hyacinth is a merciless, free-floating weed, reproducing rapidly and covering any uncovered territory,

trapping fishing boats and nets of all sizes. The hyacinth is also an ideal habitat for snails that cause bilharzia.



# 'Equitable and sustainable development that benefits the people'

**Goal:** To improve the quality of life of the people in the Lake Victoria basin, particularly for the most vulnerable through the development of comprehensive programmes addressing poverty-related areas in health and care, disaster preparedness, risk reduction and self-reliance.

In 1998, the Secretariat of East African Community, in collaboration with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency/SIDA, agreed on the need for a coordinated approach to foster sustainable development in the Lake Victoria Basin. A process was initiated that in early 2000 led to the establishment of a strategic partnership. On 24 April 2001 a Partnership Agreement was signed at Arusha by the EAC, representing itself and the member states on the one hand, and the donor community, led by Sweden on the other. Other signatories were Norway, France, the World Bank and the Eastern African Development Bank. The goal of the partnership is 'to achieve equitable and sustainable development that benefits the people in the lake basin.'

### Substantial contribution

Recognizing the potential of the three national Red Cross societies in the Lake Victoria region, in the autumn of 2002, the Swedish Red Cross proposed the start of a process aiming at a substantial Red Cross/Red Crescent contribution towards the partnership and its goal. The three societies, individually and through its Eastern Africa RC Network, accepted the invitation, which was further endorsed by the International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In late March the following year, a meeting was conducted in Musoma, Tanzania, which was concluded with the *Musoma Memorandum of Understanding* – a RC/RC letter of commitment to work together on the Lake Victoria Red Cross Programme (LVRCP). The meeting was attended by the three NSs, ICRC, Swedish RC and the International Federation's regional delegation for Eastern Africa in Nairobi (RDN). In early 2007 the Rwandan Red Cross joined in the programme and the Burundi Red Cross is about to join as well, both being on the edge of Lake Victoria since the Kagera River crosses their countries. LVP uses "natural" similarities of the region when addressing health, water and sanitation needs, etc.



*Hellena Akech, 25, member of the youth carpentry income-generating scheme in Uganda: "Before this workshop I lacked school fees and stopped school. Now I am back at school and I want to become a doctor."*





*Pauline Kilele, the Tanzania Red Cross branch co-ordinator in Mwanza, Tanzania attends a peer education session on HIV/AIDS at a local school.*

## Empowerment

The core components are:

- ◆ *health*, where the objective is to assist vulnerable communities in improving their health status by reducing morbidity and mortality, for example reducing HIV/AIDS prevalence through behaviour change, communication and improved support of people living with HIV/AIDS, as well as reducing malaria and improving access to safe water and sanitation;
- ◆ *disaster management*, whereby the community is empowered to predict, prevent and mitigate the impact of disasters. Trainings in community-based disaster management are given;
- ◆ *capacity building*, whereby the community is empowered in their initiative for sustainable development and to strengthen the capacity of the branch for effective service delivery, i.e. through networking and working with other organisations such as NGOs and the government and to strengthen and facilitate the branches and headquarters to be able to run their day-to-day activities effectively.

## Strengthening civil society

Development projects are mostly bound to country borders and not to regions. Although the needs are similar, policies

differ from country to country. The Lake Victoria Programme, however, is a cross-border project and aims to use the “natural” similarities of the region when addressing health such as HIV/AIDS, the water and sanitation needs etc. The programme aims to foster the spirit of community empowerment, gender sensitivity, problem identification and problem solving, utilising the network of the Red Cross/Red Crescent. The Red Cross builds activities on its volunteer base and grass root connection and takes a central part in strengthening civil society.

The LVP has been developed by the Ugandan, Kenyan, and Tanzanian Red Cross societies and builds on their national development strategies adjusted to the findings of local vulnerability studies with local community participation. The 14 participating RC branches around the lake are connected with each other through relatively

good communications (road, sea, air, telecom, internet) that gives many horizontal-learning opportunities. Cross-border contacts frequently take place, whereby more advanced branches can assist others, for example with initiation of new activities. LV is strategically situated at the meeting point of three countries and ideas of new technology and good practices can spread across the borders.



*Fishermen in Kalangala on Lake Victoria - community empowerment is key.*



# Storms, winds or crocodiles...



*Demonstration of water safety course: John Ott, Red Cross member, demonstrates how to stay afloat if you fall out of the boat.*

As fishing is the main source of income in the Lake Victoria region, there is much activity on the lake. But it can also be a dangerous place where winds can change suddenly and violent storms often cause disasters and loss of lives. The small canoes used by fishermen are easily overturned and every year hundreds of fishermen drown; most cannot swim and cannot afford life jackets. On the Kenyan side of the lake 10-20 fishermen drown each year.

Calleb Juma Ogallo, vice-chairman of the the Kenya Red Cross branch in Migori, says the Lake Victoria Programme has helped his branch focus on how to support fishermen.

## Water rescue courses

The branch has recently started courses in water rescue targeted specifically at the fishermen. It's a four-day training course involving what to do when you fall out of a boat, learning how to swim or stay afloat or take a shirt or a paddle and throw it out to the person who has fallen overboard: never jump in the water after him. People are taught not to panic and stay with the boat if they do fall into the water. Boat safety is also taught where there should be a swimmer on every boat.

John Ott, a Red Cross member who leads the training, says this is an important part of the Lake Victoria Programme.

## Rescuing self and others

"The Lake Victoria Programme is interested in the communities around the lake, so if lots of people are drowning, it is a real problem in the area. The idea is that we train trainers and then the new attitude to water safety will filter through," he says.

Local fisherman Richard Otulo undertook this course and is now a trainer himself. He has learnt aspects of water safety that he did not know before, such as using locally available floaters like large jerry cans.

"I am so much more confident now – whether I'm facing storms or wind or crocodiles, I know how to go about them," he explains.

And Jacob Okinyi, another fisherman, learnt about water rescue and safety in a First Aid course. He knows now how to rescue people.

## Seven survivors – all wearing jackets

On the Ugandan side, the Kalangala Red Cross branch is working with the

government's Beach Management Unit with regards to water safety for fishermen. Through the Lake Victoria Programme the branch has acquired 50 life jackets which are used by some of the fishermen. And they have proved their worth. On a windy day in July 2005, 23 fishermen died. Only seven survived – all wearing lifejackets.

Mwesigye Henry, Chariman of the Beach Management Unit, is adamant about the use of lifejackets. He says that although the fishermen did not appreciate the importance of the life-saving equipment at first, attitudes are now changing due to a campaign of sensitizing people about the need to wear life jackets.

## Lesser risks

Kalagala fisherman Atwine Adioz has no doubts about their importance. "We really appreciate the Red Cross trying to help us with life jackets on the water," he says. "At least in case of any problem, the risks of dying are small."

Two branches have also recently established First Aid posts, Mukono in Uganda and Migori in Kenya.



# Income-generating schemes minimize need for relief

Building capacities and increasing sustainability is a key objective of the Lake Victoria Programme. The rationale is that after funding finishes, the communities involved should be able to sustain themselves, whether it be disaster preparedness (like building ditches), peer education in HIV/AIDS, water & sanitation or income-generating schemes. The training and awareness should continue in the community by community members or Red Cross volunteers who may have joined as a result of the Lake Victoria Programme.

## Avoid depending on relief

Says Omondi Aloo, branch coordinator in Migori, Kenya: "Initially the Red Cross focused much on disaster response but with the Lake Victoria Programme there is a strong element of development – which stresses the importance of building the capacity of the branch and the community it serves. It

encourages communities to be self-sufficient by generating self-reliance, so that they don't depend on relief during hard times."

several small income-generating schemes targeted towards those most vulnerable such as youth and women.

Jessica Bagenda of the Uganda Red Cross points out that these schemes will "empower the community – especially women, they are forgotten. Here in the Lake Victoria region poverty is high and diversification of activities is limited."

## Making profit

Women in this area often resort to commercial sex. Several income-generating schemes initiated by the Mukono Red Cross Branch in Uganda targeting women have proved to be successful and profitable in the space of just a few months. Extra income for women is important - not

just for themselves but also to be able to pay school fees for their children.

Jessica Kalema is a local businesswoman and Red Cross volunteer. She found that some women had no income so they got together and formed a group. They started a small piggery with three pigs but with help from the Lake Victoria Programme, they were able to buy 10 more. The pigs reproduce and the group is now able to sell them.

## Pigs and poultry

A few months later the piggery had grown to 20 pigs which they can sell at 20,000 UG shillings each (US\$11) – a sizeable amount for the women involved. Everybody puts in one day's work on rotation. "The women need this income because some are single mothers, some need it to support their families, others need it for school fees," says Jessica Kalema.

Another women's group has started with poultry. Florence Mantongo, who is the chairperson of the women's group, had 61 chickens that she bought when they were two months old. She feeds them for two months and then sells them when they are four months old and makes a profit. Each is sold at around 5,000-7,000 shillings each but she buys them



Red Cross volunteers Patrick Baleice and Hellen Akech learning carpentry in Uganda.

## Empowering the women

Small income-generating schemes to alleviate poverty and for sustainability is government policy in some countries like Kenya. The Lake Victoria Programme is contributing to these efforts by initiating



Florence Mantongo in Uganda with the chickens she bought with the money received from the Lake Victoria Programme.





*A group of women start a piggery in Uganda. They began with three pigs but with help from the Lake Victoria Programme, they were able to buy 10 more. The pigs reproduce and the group is able to sell them.*

at around UGX 3,500. She recently sold 55 (and has six left) and with the profit made, plans to restock.

### **‘I feel empowered’**

The Lake Victoria Programme gave her this opportunity to have a poultry business and the skills to run such a venture and she wants to develop it into a big business of being a chicken and egg supplier. Eggs are in high demand in the area.

“I feel proud of this business and it has made my life easier. I feel empowered. Before I was selling clothes in a market which was not very gainful,” she says.

This is important for Florence as she has several orphans to look after, too. Now she can stay at home and look after the children as well as tend to her work.

### **AIDS orphans**

Women in the region need diversification and giving them skills to sustain a business is very important. Florence also believes that the biggest problem for women in that region who want to start small businesses is that there is no capital available. And many of the women also have to bring up AIDS orphans. Better still, Florence believes that even without continued funding from the Lake Victoria Programme, the business would sustain itself (though of course she would prefer funding).

Income generation schemes have also been successful with regard to the youth. Unemployment is a serious problem in the area. There are numerous AIDS orphans. Girls often fall into prostitution to earn money.

In Mukono district, a carpentry workshop that was set up with the Lake Victoria Programme has become self-sustaining. It is run by a group of 20 young people, both boys and girls and the income earned goes into a joint bank account. It is used for extras such as schoolbooks and pens, or for health or transport fees if needed. A group of five can make two double-beds a day selling them at UGX 35,000.

### **Back to school**

Hellena Akech is 25 years old. Before she took part in the workshop she had lacked money for school fees and left school.

“Now I am back at school and I want to become a doctor,” she says with a smile.

Twenty-three year old Patrick Baleice had also left school. “Before I was just forging life, I dropped out of school,” he says, “but the Red Cross told me about school and now I am about to complete my schooling. I want to become a lawyer.”

### **Thriving business**

In Muguru, a small scheme was started by Migori Red Cross Branch for young people

whereby they were trained in Red Cross values, First Aid etc. The group then rented disused land, around 75 x 60 metres, from a local farmer by the lake and started growing vegetables. All the work was done by them – sowing seeds, watering, digging.

In the first six months the vegetable patch became a thriving small business where they are able to sell tomatoes, kale, sweet potatoes and even watermelons to the local market, thus generating income for the group. The scheme is now totally self-sufficient without any funding from the Lake Victoria Programme – except for some advice. But had it not been for this LV scheme, many of the young people would have remained unemployed or had nothing to occupy their time.

### **Better off**

Samson Orondo, a young man of 24 years, is proud of his achievements. “I’m a young man, not employed; I need to find something to eat and help myself,” he says. “I was a fisherman but Lake Victoria is very unproductive, there is less fish. As a farmer, I am better off.”

Adds 21-year old Wilkester Shema: “If it wasn’t for this, I would be a house girl in this area. This work keeps away idleness – and I can also buy me clothes and shoes.”



The Lake Victoria region has few health facilities but diseases are rife, especially water-borne diseases such as malaria, diarrhoea and typhoid. There are also periodic outbreaks of cholera, particularly during the rainy season. HIV/AIDS is a serious problem in the area with prevalence rates at around 35% in some places, much higher than national rates and mostly due to lack of awareness and the cultural practices of the region, such as wife inheritance and the high numbers of prostitutes who are involved in the fishing trade.

### Model schemes

The Lake Victoria Programme has placed health high on the agenda and has particularly targeted HIV/AIDS. Several programmes have proved to be successful. The Red Cross branch in Mwanza, Tanzania, runs model schemes of peer group education at several local schools. This is where the students themselves are trained in HIV/AIDS awareness by the Red Cross (which takes about three days) and then pass this information to their fellow pupils. As TOTs (trainers of trainers) they also train other pupils who again train others and so the numbers multiply.

### '...or it may be too late'

Pauline Kilele, Mwanza Red Cross branch coordinator, says there is no time to lose. "Peer education minimizes costs and gives the children room to discuss with their own age group," she explains. "It is important to start early to have more impact. By the time the children get older, it may be too late".

And, according to the statistics, the youth are more vulnerable to AIDS. For example, at the nearby Angaza Testing Unit, 46 youths went voluntarily to be tested between January and March 2003. Out of those 28 tested positive (61%) which is extremely high.

### 'The children have changed'

At the Igoma Primary school, peer education has made a considerable difference. Here five TOTs have already trained ten more (fifty in total) and each one is in the process of training a further ten. There are some thousand pupils and the idea is that by the end of the year all will have received HIV/AIDS training. As well as TOTs, there are guardian teachers appointed to deal with any difficulties the children may be having.

Says Mwita Kichele, a guardian teacher: "Before this training there were a lot of cases where parents came to me saying their children were not well behaved but since the education the children have changed."

### 'Now I know...'

The children are now more aware of the dangers that await them, of not falling into promiscuous behaviour which might lead them to being infected – all too easy in this part of the world.

Fifteen-year old Benjamin Abdala is a TOT at the school. "I want to teach others about bad behaviour and how they can avoid getting HIV/AIDS," he says. "My behaviour has changed a lot. Before, I was striving to find a girl. Now I am more aware of HIV/AIDS and how I to behave. I even give advice to my mother now!"



A volunteer from the Kisumu branch of the Kenyan Red Cross teaches fishermen how to avoid HIV/AIDS.

## Fighting HIV/AIDS through

# More than one person is H

Benjamin now dreams of becoming a doctor and says that after this training he is much more confident.

### 'Now I can say no...'

Winfrida Francis, 13 years old, is one of his fellow pupils and a beneficiary and she says, "I wanted to fall into bad behaviour but the teacher told me to join the Red Cross school club and how to behave. Boys were coming to me and I was going to listen to them. But now I am more confident. When I am approached I can say that I am still young. Now I am able to say no when in the past I might have said yes."

Similarly with Nhwugo Bunengera, 13, who says he is much more confident because he knows the difference between right and wrong. In fact, he says he now wants to become a footballer and play for the Barcelona football club in Spain - with his idols. He is not alone in having this dream, boys all over the world share it.



Guardian teacher Mwita Kichele with children at the Igoma School in Mwanza district, Tanzania, where peer education ensures that all students are taught about HIV and AIDS





start new lives because they were ostracized by friends and family on the mainland for being HIV positive. The prevalence rates here are therefore extremely high. Add to this a high level of activity in terms of commercial sex.

Men also outnumber women here so it's common for women to have several partners, which again means the spread of the disease. Rapes, defilement and indecent assaults occur regularly here, as in other parts of the Lake Victoria region, and it's not uncommon for girls as young as 10 years to have had sex.

### Simple message

Here the peer educators use a lot of music and drama to convey their message and for mobilization of the communities in schools, villages and communities. As elsewhere in Africa, the message is ABC - *Abstinence, Be Faithful and Condoms* - and according to the peer educators, Ronald Lukwago, Lazarus Ssekayinga and Robert Lugambiso, they have had some successes: "When people hear the drums, they come. Now people say they want condoms and there has been some success in getting people to be tested."

Also important is the message that they do not need to separate from a friend even if he or she has the disease.

### Proud

According to Julius Ssemenda, "I am very pleased. I am proud to be part of the success story and part of the implementation team. LVP, Swedish Red Cross and SIDA have changed the people's way of life here and uplifted the Red Cross image greatly. When the Red Cross speaks now, people feel, yes, we're talking. And the government here sees us as one of their biggest partners".

The local government indeed considers the Red Cross important as a partner. Anselm Kyaligouza, District Community Development Officer in Kalangala, says the government and the Red Cross are "development partners who need and complement each other." For example, the Red Cross is seen as a rehabilitative centre where patients who test positive and are on ARV drugs are told go.

### 'When people see the Red Cross...'

Jane Namukasa, a public health nurse in Kalangala, says that while the authorities can give out drugs to the HIV positive, "but then after that we can't see how they are faring. They need to eat well, stick to appointments and take good care of themselves. The Red Cross can assist with that."

And District Commissioner Njoroge Ndirangu in Migori says: "The Red Cross could make a big contribution to HIV/AIDS especially among the youth - they are at an advantageous point as they have trust. When people see Red Cross, it gives them hope".

avoid contracting HIV.

## peer education

# every third IV positive

### Street gangs

As well as being involved with school peer group education, Pauline Kilele also trains TOTs in the youth group. Dorothy Karugila, 28 years, received the training and not only does she lead awareness sessions herself among her peer group - youth she has met on the streets who are involved in drugs or gangs who are in real danger of contracting the virus - but it has also helped her to take care of close relatives who are ill with the HIV virus.

"I can now take care of the patients and have no fear of catching it as I know how it is transmitted," she says.

### AIDS island

Peer education in HIV/AIDS is also active in Kalangala Red Cross branch in Uganda. Kalangala, is a small island of about 40,000 people in the northern corners of Lake Victoria, who mostly earn their living from fishing. However, many are not indigenous to the island and have come here to



Singing and dancing the message in the Kalangala branch.



# Planting trees for environmental sustainability

Deforestation, and the land degradation and soil erosion that goes with it, is a serious problem in all the East African countries participating in the Lake Victoria Programme and the area by the lake is no exception. In Tanzania, for example, it is estimated that half a million hectares of forest are cleared annually. Much of the land by the lake has already been stripped of their trees (with the exception of Kalangala) and people now have to travel miles to find trees for firewood. Fuel for cooking and domestic purposes is lacking in these countries; gas and electricity is too expensive and therefore there is often no option but to chop trees for firewood.

## Replanting

However, realising this crisis, the governments of the basin countries have come out with replanting policies. In Tanzania, the government target is 1.5m trees by 2008. The local government has started schemes to replant trees and it is the aim of the Red Cross branches in the region to assist these actions by mobilising the communities to do their own tree planting.



*Planting trees to battle deforestation and soil erosion: Simon Chupa of the Tanzania Red Cross protects his young and fragile plants.*

Simon Chupa, branch co-ordinator from Tanzania Red Cross, has already given out 30,000 seedlings, 700 of which are in Musoma Secondary School. The headmaster now takes considerable pride in the growth of these trees in the school compound.

In another local school, teacher Simon Emmanuel, says that the school needs a forestry club and "planting trees makes students realize that trees have some importance in our lives". He adds that they still needed assistance from the Red Cross to give advice and seedlings.

## Red Cross nurseries

Many other Red Cross branches are starting their own nurseries. The Tanzania RC Mwanza branch has a nursery with guava, paw-paw and jacaranda seedlings, which is looked after by a volunteer and they now have a site where a large nursery will be created.

The Migori Branch has its own nursery alongside one belonging to the local government. Employees freely move from one nursery to another as the Red Cross and local government in Migori share manpower and resources.



*Working across borders: the Busia branches of Kenya and Uganda meet to discuss common issues, led by Jessica Bagenda of the Uganda Red Cross.*



*Running towards the future – Kenyan border-town children coming home from school.*

## Cross-border cooperation and advocacy

# Able to influence the local councils on both sides of the border

Working in partnership is also key to the Lake Victoria Programme since many of the Red Cross branches share the same concerns. The branches in Busia, Uganda, and Busia, Kenya, are an example of close cross-border cooperation.

Busia is on the border between the two countries and HIV/AIDS prevalence is high because of the number of sex workers who operate in the area – due to lorry drivers travelling through and frequent border crossings by local sex workers. If HIV/AIDS is only being fought on one side of the border, it then becomes practically unviable. Disease outbreaks also affect both countries.

## The value of cooperation

In 2005 there was a cholera outbreak on the Kenyan side which quickly spread

into Uganda. Experience has shown the added values of cooperation and sharing of activities, not least because of the limited funds and that experience was put to good use during the outbreak, quickly bringing it under control.

## Harmonizing policies

Branch field coordinator Vincent Okonera has no problem pointing out the advantages of the cooperation: "The programme has brought us closer," he says. "We are able to harmonize policies. For example, life jacket policies are the same on both sides. And because of the project, we can meet and share and build our capacity - and therefore influence the local councils on both sides."





*Mukono branch Red Cross volunteers with branch co-ordinator Patrick Kabugo inside the student hostel they are building.*

# Strengthening branch capacity

Sustainability and self-reliance of local Red Cross branches involved is a crucial element of the idea behind the LVP. Several of the participating branches have now started their own income-generating schemes that enable them to operate with office and administrative costs.

The Mwanza Red Cross branch in Tanzania is in the process of building more space to rent out to small businesses or medical practices. The ground floor has already been rented out to various businesses such as an optician and to a medical centre.

Pauline Kilele, the branch co-ordinator, aims to expand since this has proved to be a good way to earn extra income for the branch. Since 1996, income from the rent has increased from US\$1,000 to US\$8,000, a considerable rise.

## Capturing a niche market

Patrick Kabugo, co-ordinator of the Mukono Red Cross branch in Uganda, is proud that,

with the help of volunteers, they are in the process of constructing a building that will be used as a student hostel. Mukono University is nearby and Patrick and his mates believe they will capture a niche market – each student will pay UGX 200,000 per semester (approximately US\$110) – which will fund other branch projects. Through earning more income, branch capacity would also be increased. There would be more paid workers and/or trainers and as information is disseminated, more people would become members or volunteers. In other branches, capacity has already increased, such as in Migori, Kenya, where membership has risen from 100 in 2003 to 800 in 2007.

## Working with partners

Networking and working with partners is also crucial to the Red Cross branches involved in the Lake Victoria Programme. Not only do many collaborate with other civil society and non-governmental organisations such as Care Kenya or World Vision, working with

local governments has also been beneficial. Local government may not have funds to distribute but they do share expertise, particularly technical expertise in terms of drugs for HIV/AIDS or engineers for wells and borehole maintenance etc.

In Kalangala, for instance, government water engineers work closely with the Red Cross branch to build and maintain wells. Local government also highly values Red Cross input and expertise, particularly when it comes to contact with the community. As most Red Cross members and volunteers live within the communities, it is easier to get new ideas accepted – the Red Cross has the confidence of local communities and governments often find they can rely on the Red Cross during times of floods or droughts when food relief has to be distributed.

In some cases the relationship is so close that the local government have given the Red Cross branches land on which to build offices, for example in Kalangala and Migori.





*Nyando Branch Red Cross volunteers assist in digging of canal around a village settlement.*

## Changing attitudes and reducing the risk of the inevitable disaster

# Preparing ourselves as a community

Being prepared for disasters and attempting to reduce vulnerability before disasters happen is one of the prime targets of the Red Cross and the Lake Victoria Programme. Much of the land around the lake is flat and the soil non-absorbent, leaving it prone to flooding. If there are heavy rains, houses and roads become easily flooded, resulting in displacement, as was the case during the rains in April/May 2006 and in November 2006.

With the help of funds from the programme, the Nyando Red Cross branch in Kenya has made considerable inroads into disaster preparedness by mobilizing and assisting the community in building ditches

and canals alongside roads and settlements. Excess water then flows along the canals and empties into the lake and is remarkably effective in curbing flooding. Even better, these ditches are easy to build, requiring no more than a simple and inexpensive hoe. If everyone in the communities were to participate, it would take only an hour to dig a 20 metre ditch. So far, almost 1,000 km of canals have been built in the Nyando district which greatly helped during the heavy rains in November 2006.

### **‘We have changed attitudes’**

Many people in the community have undertaken the Integrated Disaster

Management training programme and have learnt how to dig their own ditches – which saves their homes from flooding or even collapsing during the floods. And roads, previously flooded, are now passable. As well as building the ditches, the communities also try and maintain them by regularly monitoring the water level in the ditches and clearing them of silt that clog them up.

Amos Odago, vice-chairman and volunteer in the Nyando Red Cross branch and Tom Aiko, volunteer dissemination officer, say: “Our activities have changed people’s attitude, that they should not just be dependent on the government for relief but do it for themselves, as a community.”



## 200 km of village ditches

Farmer Jackson Okuna, a village elder and Red Cross member from Ayweyo village, is very pleased with this project. He has been involved in building canals around his community and home. In 2005 his house collapsed in the rains and floods but a year after the canal was built, the area does not flood as much and the flow of water is considerably improved.

"Today my house is still standing in these heavy rains and the area clears of water after 2-3 days. Before it used to take a week. What remains now is just the wetness but at least the water has gone," he says.

So far nearly 200km of ditches and canals have been dug in Ayweyo village that has considerably lessened the impact of heavy rains.

## Long wait for the government to do everything

Charles Juma and Joseph Onyango, both rice farmers, were also involved in building ditches outside their homes. "Before we had the ditch, homes were washed away but now the water can find its way to the river and doesn't go into the homes. If you sit and wait for the government, it's a long process," they say.

In one community a large canal of around 3m wide and 1 km long was built by all the villagers including women and the youth – which took about four weeks. This, though, has made an immense difference to water flooding surrounding areas.

Edward Opiyo is another rice farmer and Red Cross member and he regularly monitors the water in the ditch as well as keeping a check on maintenance. And the information is usually relayed back to the Nyando Red Cross branch office.

## Too expensive to move

There are, however, some areas where canals are not possible or even sufficient such as in Kigoche Village. The area regularly floods once or twice a year for weeks at a time because large reeds by the river prevent proper drainage, resulting in displacement of the communities as well as water mixed with sewage and human and agricultural waste.

Says rice farmer Charles Odhiambo: "When we see the rains, we are really scared because automatically you know that you'll be displaced. Now that can happen twice a year."

Adds Duncan Eric Otieno, another a rice farmer and technician: "We would move if we could, but it is too expensive."

## Higher ground

Migori District in Kenya is also sporadically badly hit by heavy rains and floods. Here, the Migori Red Cross branch assists people to become flood-aware; when they see rain approaching, they know floods will come and the strategy is to transport animals and household items to higher ground for safety

and move in with relatives. But when the situation becomes very bad, the people need to leave their homes. That's when the Red Cross branch here works with the government to put up temporary shelters and blankets where they camp until the water subsides.

This happened in November 2006 when the River Kuja overflowed and burst its banks as it so often does since the river became silted up further upstream and diverted to this region several years ago.

according to District Commissioner Njoroge Ndirangu.

"The Red Cross is in a unique position and very well-known and respected in Kenya," he says. "The government is still responsible for disaster management but our capacity for mobilizing funds and expertise is limited. And the government provides relief food but has no capacity to distribute. So we draw a lot of support from the Red Cross volunteers who are very well suited to do this work."



*Now marooned on an island, Kenya Red Cross volunteer Jack Chuchu of the Migori branch uses a canoe to get to and from his house.*

Jack Chuchu, branch vice-chairman, now finds himself marooned on an island and has to use a canoe to get to the other side everyday. But the recent heavy rains meant he and his family had to leave the area and their home. His home, like many others in the area was flooded; many others were simply washed away.

## Lot of support from the Red Cross

Aloo Omondi, branch coordinator in Migori, says long-term solutions are needed and in this case ditches are not enough; large dykes need to be built by the river. Relief operations are carried out in cooperation with the local government.

The relationship between the Red Cross branch and local government is very close,

## Partnerships

According to both the Migori and Nyando branches in Kenya, building and strengthening networks and working with other organisations such as local CBOs, NGOs and the district governments is crucial in disaster preparedness and in the building of these canals – since many more are still required.

Veronica Wambi, District Officer in Nyando Division, was assessing the floods caused by the heavy rains. "I have requested to team up with the Red Cross in Nyando to see how we can tackle these floods. We will compare notes and look for a way forward," she says. "Also when it comes to food distribution, Red Cross is the ideal agency as this is more difficult for the local government to do."





Federation/PETRU CALINESCU

*The lake is a source of household water, a source of food – and a place where many take a bath.*

# Massive health problems

About 30 million people live in the Lake Victoria area, yet a large proportion of them live below the poverty line, their average income usually below one euro per day.

The literacy rate is also very low among fishing communities: in the Mukono area of Uganda almost 90% of the people are illiterate. Infrastructure is weak with few

roads which have hindered the development and accessibility, little electricity and few health facilities that are often far away from fish-landing sites.



*Poverty, illiteracy and the accompanying bad health are among the issues being tackled by the Red Cross in the Lake Victoria communities. Here people fetch water from an open source*

## Nearly half are HIV-infected

Bilharzia (caused by parasites living in the lake) affects 90% of the population and malaria is very common because mosquitoes are able to breed by the lakeside and in areas where there is poor drainage and sanitation. At around 35%, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is well above national averages, because of the levels of prostitution, lack of awareness and cultural practices such as wife inheritance. The region is also prone to disasters such as flooding - made worse by deforestation and excessive chopping of trees for firewood; after 40 years of human activity around the region, the land has become severely degraded.

## The all-purpose lake

Most of the water for the communities' needs comes from the lake and is used for all purposes; cooking, toilet, drinking, washing clothes and washing dishes. This has been the way as long as anyone can remember. But tests have shown that water from the lake is unsafe for human consumption - with





*Local farmers and Red Cross volunteers from Nyando branch, Kenya, look at collapsed latrine.*

high levels of bacterial micro-organisms such as E.coli, staphylococcus and vibrio SSP, responsible for cholera, typhoid and diarrhoea prevalent in raw water. Water coverage in the region ranges between 30-60% (usually not much over 30%). However, this does not measure the *functional* coverage (i.e. facilities that are actually working). Only including the functional water facilities, the coverage figures drop to as low as 10% in certain areas.

In the target areas for the Lake Victoria Programme in Mara, Bukoba, Migori and

Nyando, more than 90% of the population fetch water from the lake or from rivers. The remaining 10% fetch water from community hand pumps, unimproved springs or water kiosks. And when they buy water from vendors, the water is usually untreated surface water. This has a real impact on the health of the local population, leaving them ill and weak.

### **The latrine-lucky few**

Few households have latrines and people have to openly defecate by the lakeside, or in the bush if they live further

inland. In Mara, Kalangala, Busia (Kenya side), Migori and Nyando about 90% of the population have no access to improved and safe latrines. Apart from Kalangala, around 40% of the people make use of open defecation and the rest have access to temporary latrines that are usually destroyed during the rainy season due to loose soil.

On average 30% of the people use open defecation, and 40% use open pits or temporary latrines. The remaining population use improved latrines or public latrines and a few have access to flush



*Girl drinking contaminated flood water next to a collapsed latrine.*

toilets. Except in Bukoba, the coverage of VIP latrines (Ventilated Improved Pit latrine) is lower than 10%. Only a few EcoSan (i.e. environmentally-friendly) latrines exist in the area. Those lucky enough to have latrines, have to build these themselves – out of mud which usually collapse during the rainy season and certainly do not withstand flooding. Soil is loose in these areas, which further exacerbates the situation.



*Women and children wash pots and pans in Lake Victoria.*



# 'I have seen the impact'

## - I'm fitter and my children are healthier

A specific objective of the LV Programme is to increase the number of people with good access to water and sanitation, mainly through exploring shallow and deep aquifers and introducing suitable latrine models. This will result in better access to higher quality water, better health, less money spent on medication and curative health care, improved security for girls and women and more time to work and study. Strengthening civil society means more effective and efficient human cooperation and ability to solve common problems, especially with regards to maintenance of water and sanitation facilities. All this contributes to economic growth - i.e. more efficient use of human time and energy.

the bush or by the lake - but when the rain comes, that waste will reach the lake, even if it's a year later. They have to know that the effects are not direct."

### Major push

The proposal is that in 2007, Simon and his branch will train TOTs to disseminate information on using latrines. In 2005 and 2006 they were actively mobilizing Red Cross sub-branches in the district to build latrines. Two public latrines are currently being built - one in Bukima fishing village and another in Buka village - with the aid of Red Cross volunteers with funding from the Lake Victoria Programme (though further funding is still required for completion).

Biseko Maira, a village elder and Red Cross member in Buka village, says that they had come up with the idea themselves, and sent the proposal to Simon Chupa at the regional office.

### Controlling epidemics

"In a modern world, it is essential having a toilet because of hygiene - human beings need to have good hygiene for their well-being," the village elder says. "Without this, there will be outbreak of diseases."

And according to Passy S. Majogoro, Red Cross volunteer and a local councillor in Bukima, "building this latrine was a Red Cross initiative to make the environment clean and to control epidemics and diarrhoea."

In recent months three people died of a cholera outbreak in the village. The public latrines are therefore sorely needed in these villages, particularly on market days when up to five thousand people a day come to Bukima to sell and buy wares. Most people who come in on market day end up defecating in the bushes.

Angelina Murusuri is one such person who comes to sell clothes on market day and she says, "Yes, a latrine would help me. I feel bad to use other people's homes around here. It's very important, otherwise the environment becomes filthy".

### Changing habits and culture

The problem is that people have little awareness of sanitation issues. Building

latrines provides a model for how to change habits. Red Cross member Weseja Stephen says, "It's a problem. Some people think they are doing things in the right way when they are not."

Building latrines has also been a successful venture in the Nyando district in Kenya, though they have the problem of collapsing latrines during the rainy season due to poor soil. These have to be rebuilt again in nearly the same location. However for those on higher ground, latrines are more sturdy and the Nyando district branch, together with its group of active volunteers,



*A tiny chlorine tablet can purify a bucket of water. These are being distributed by a number of the Red Cross branches around the lake.*

### New attitude to latrines

In the Mara district, Tanzania, water and sanitation was a key concern for the communities by the lake, according to a baseline survey and results of focus group studies undertaken by the local Red Cross branch.

The first step, according to branch coordinator Simon Chupa, was to mobilize Red Cross volunteers to promote better hygiene and increase water and sanitation knowledge.

The aim, he says, "is to change people's attitudes to latrines. People usually go in

### Own funds

As well as being examples of grassroots participation in implementing the projects, both have shown great resourcefulness in taking on these building projects, having to employ architects for the design, obtaining the building materials such as the bricks and hiring casual labour, as well as supervising the budget. Although there was funding for the materials, most of the labour, time and costs have come from Red Cross volunteers. Some of the members even contributed funds.



have encouraged many members in its community to build their own latrines.

### My children are not off sick

Michael Mogige is a farmer in the area who felt he had immensely benefited from a latrine which he built himself in 2005. He was given the community-based water & sanitation training, including a session on latrines.

“It’s important to have latrines,” he says. “Before I heard this from the Red Cross, I used to go to the toilet in the bush but now that I recognize the problems of mixing water with human waste, I use my latrine. I saw the impact, I have less diarrhoea and diseases, I’m fitter than I used to be and my children are healthier. I have also noticed increased attendance of my children in school, they are not off sick”.



*In Bukia village the Mara (TZ) branch is building communal latrines. Here, branch coordinator Simon Chupa stands surveys the progress of the construction.*

### Sensitization

Clean water is also crucial for good health but in the Lake Victoria basin many are forced to drink either the contaminated lake water or out of polluted ponds, rivers and puddles – and even flood water mixed with sewage.

Sensitizing people to the importance of clean water is a crucial part of the work in the Red Cross branches and the Lake Victoria Programme. At both the Migori and Nyando Red Cross branches, volunteers continue to be active in distributing free chlorine tablets which makes drinking water much safer and sensitising the community to the need of these tablets.

Lucy Atieno, a community health worker and farmer in the Nyando district, has received the water purification tablets and uses them regularly instead of the traditional mix - white chalky material which is used to stir into muddy water and then separates the mud from the water making the water clearer, albeit not much cleaner.

### So much happier

In fact, many locals still believe that because the water is clear, it means it is safe to drink, the rationale being that since the water appears clean it is: but the invisible bacteria

is still there. In the past Lucy also used the local material but now will only use chlorine tablets.

“I used to think the water was safe if it was clear but at the time I used to get lots of stomach upsets, diarrhoea, vomiting and it was affecting my work,” she says. “Now I don’t fall ill so much, I am so much happier. And when I go out for work, I can work more hours.”

Branch volunteers and Tom Aiko and Amos Odago now regularly use the chlorine tablets which they feel has immensely improved their health and the health of their families.



*Nyando farmer Michael Mogoge repairs the mud latrine that he built for his family*



*Women collect drinking water from Lake Victoria. The lake is heavily polluted and is responsible for numerous deaths each year*





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By coordinating international disaster relief and encouraging development support it seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

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