

Bringing in the catch

For Uganda's Katosi Women Development Trust, fish farming offers a way out of various social, environmental and economic challenges

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Katosi is a fishing village located in the northern shores of Lake Victoria in Mukono District in southern Uganda. It is known for landing huge catches of Nile perch and tilapia. Its exports reach as far as Belgium and Italy. The thriving village has developed only within the last 20 years, drawing individuals from over ten ethnic groups across Uganda. Yet with so much production, where is the fish in the local market?

Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT), currently an organization of 11 women's groups

onshore became a challenge. As Lake Victoria opened up to international market players, the price of fish at the local market increased and local consumption went down. Overfishing of the lake's resources led to a rapid decline in fish populations, forcing marginalized fishers to harvest juvenile fish, resulting in further depletion.

As a response to this complex mix of environmental and economic issues, the KWDT decided to turn to land-based fish farming. "When you tell an individual to conserve resources and not overfish the lake, but you don't give them an alternative to their current activities, you haven't solved the problem," says Margaret Nakato director of KWDT. "Individuals need an income and they need to feed their families."

Fish farming allows community members to address both the health and economic needs of the community. Fish is harvested without harming the lake's fragile ecosystem. Also, better quality fish is available at a fair price.

The construction of KWDT's first fish pond began July 2007. KWDT members dug out the pond on low-lying property belonging to one of them, chosen for its natural access to surface water. The pond was then ceremoniously stocked with tilapia and catfish that had survived a tremendously bumpy three-hour ride from Kampala to Bunakijja, just outside Katosi.

As the fish grew, so did the challenges. These included stabilizing oxygen levels in the pond and warding off local reptiles, grateful for the new addition to their diet. Yet with dedication to the project, the women are looking forward to their first harvest. Tilapias grown in the pond are expected to weigh about one kilo and bring in UGX1,000 (US\$0.60), per fish. Catfish, not common to the region, are expected to fetch approximately UGX2,500 (US\$1.50) per kilo. This is a dramatic increase over the small fish sold in the local market for UGX500 (US\$0.30) per piece. After the harvest, the pond will be restocked and harvested again after eight months. There are also plans for the construction of additional ponds.

Addressing the issues of Katosi's rural fisher women has required flexibility and determination. Competing in a market dominated by men, the women have had to

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across Ntenjeru and Nakisunga sub-counties, was formed in 1996 with the objective of improving women's income from the fishing industry. In the initial years, the organization acquired a motorized boat and nets and set out to fish in Lake Victoria. But the competition was high and the market unfair. The women were unable to compete with their male counterparts, frequently being cheated out of a fair price at the market.

As processing companies began dominating the trade, the fishing industry became more and more hostile, marked by stiff competition. In order to fish, women had to set up residence on one of the islands. Looking after their family

think outside the box, turning from lake to land for an income from the fishing industry. The issues facing fishing communities around Lake Victoria are complex, encompassing social, environmental, economic and health factors. Decreasing the demand on

the lake will help sustain the fishing industry. Land-based fishing will give women the opportunity to create their own sustainable market, improve the nutrition levels of their communities, and further their own economic development. ❖