



Lake Victoria Water resources: Can riparian states equitably share of costs and benefits accrued from it?

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Lake Victoria is the largest water-body shared among Kenya (6%), Uganda (43%) and Tanzania (51%). Nonetheless, the Lake Victoria basin catchments area covers Rwanda, Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo as upper riparian states and Sudan and Egypt as lower riparian states. Lake Victoria plays important socio-economic and cultural roles to the riparian states. Therefore, exploitation and utilization the lake water resources (water, fish, etc) must be governed by international laws so as to ensure that none of the riparian states benefits most. But majority of the agreements in place are century old or so and are narrowing down the concept of water resources to water. Articles of the agreements dwelt only on ensuring the lowest riparian states get sufficient water through out a year. However, they are silent on sharing benefits accrued from water use with the upper and remote riparian states that are bound not to obstruct or delay the water flow. But it should be borne in mind that the population in Lake Victoria catchments has grown drastically in the last 50 years to over 30,000,000. This implies that the demand for land for cultivation and settlement is higher. Consequently, deforestation around the lake is faster and erosion from the cleared land brings sediment and nutrients into the lake. Drought conditions prevailing in some parts of Kenya and Tanzania force the governments to think of using Lake Victoria waters for irrigation and domestic water supply. What help have the lower riparian states given to upper riparian states in managing the catchments for these years? Probably nothing. The Nile Basin Initiative has, so far, stipulated a shared vision of equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources. But that cannot be achieved without reforming the agreements signed to put in shared responsibilities between upper and lower riparian states. While the upper riparian states, Tanzania,

Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia in particular, had been calling for review of the treaties but the lower riparian states were reluctant and that stand has made the upper riparian states lose patience and Tanzania has unilaterally withdrawn water from the lake to Shinyanga. The Lake Victoria is shared unevenly among Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda but it is unfortunate that water, pollutants and fish know no boundary. How are the riparian states legally and politically prepared to share access to fishing grounds between artisanal and commercial fishermen? Waste generated from industries, agricultural farms and households around the lake also affects quality of the lake waters and eutrophication has become a menace. How do Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania share the costs from such pollution and, if any, on which criteria? How do we share power generated at Owen Falls East Africa and hydropower plants in lower riparian states shared among the stakeholders? We welcome the process underway of reforming the legal regime but we are not certain how far the final legal framework concept sharing costs and benefits among the stakeholders. That can only be achieved with greater involvement of the local community, academia, and decision makers. Let us get involved in the process now rather than later.