

FACT SHEET ON LAKE NATRON CAMPAIGN

Focal Country: Tanzania

Focal Site: Lake Natron, an Important Bird Area and Ramsar Site

Focal Species: Lesser Flamingos, Near-threatened

Focal community: Indigenous Maasai, partly semi-nomadic

Scope of the Campaign: Local, national (Tanzania), Regional and International

Start Date: February 2007 and ongoing

Main Financial Support: Horn of Africa Regional Environment Centre and Network (HoA-REC/N)

Website: http://www.birdlife.org/action/campaigns/lake_natron_flamingos/downloads.html

The Threat

Tata Chemicals Ltd in Collaboration with the Government of Tanzania proposed to build a \$450 million soda ash plant at Lake Natron, which is a trans-boundary ecosystem. The project would use brine from the Lake to make sodium bicarbonate which is used for various industrial purposes.

Overall Goal of Campaign: To protect the Lake Natron wetland ecosystem in Tanzania and to stop impeding threat through the proposed soda ash plant.

Rationale: Lake Natron is the only breeding site for lesser flamingos. The 1.5-2.5 million Lesser Flamingos in Eastern Africa, are all bred at Lake Natron. If the proposed soda ash plant is built, it could jeopardize the breeding of this near threatened species as well as the livelihoods of the local communities.

Main Activities undertaken

- Formation of Lake Natron Consultative Group – 5 institutions in 2007 to 53 in 2010
- Immense awareness creation in Tanzania, Eastern/Horn of Africa and Globally
- Reaching out to Government entities involved in decision making – e.g Nemo
- Participation and input into key processes - e.g Environmental Impact Assessment
- Reaching out to the local community
- Intensive media and publicity
- Sharing of lessons with other threatened sites in Africa

Recent developments:

The Government of Tanzania through the National Development Corporation has renewed interest in the soda ash plans by identifying gaps in the earlier project. The main point is to provide a stronger justification for the soda ash plant since the earlier EIA was rejected by stakeholders.

There are also strong indications that the Government could be looking around for another Investor following the departure of Tata Chemicals Ltd.

What needs to be done?

A lot needs to be done to secure the Lake Natron ecosystem and promote regional cooperation. These include:

- Promoting livelihoods enhancement projects within the local community.
- Building a strong constituency for conservation at local level
- Enhancing the protection status of the Lake – e.g World Heritage Site
- Collecting information to support decision making – e.g Cost Benefit Analysis
- Promoting Lesson Learning between Tanzanian and Kenyan local communities.
- Promoting Lesser Flamingo conservation across the Horn of Africa Region
- Supporting planning processes to ensure they exclude soda ash mining.

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