

Stakeholders happy with new Lake Natron cost benefit analysis report

Title Stakeholders have given a nod of approval to a new economic analysis study showing that soda ash mining at Lake Natron is not economically viable. Speaking this week at a meeting held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to disseminate the report, participants said tourism should be promoted at Lake Natron rather than soda ash mining. The Cost Benefit Analysis report shows that projected return on soda ash investment over the next 50 years would be a loss of between \$44,354,728 and \$ 492,142,797, even if exempted from paying tax by the Government. However, the Tanzanian public and local communities stood to gain between \$1.28 and 1.57 billion in 50 years, if the Government of Tanzania invests in tourism, protection of the environment and promotion of local livelihood alternatives. The study was commissioned by the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania (WCST- BirdLife in Tanzania) with funding from A.V Jensen Charity Foundation. The meeting held at Utalii College and attended by 35 participants from government, NGOs and local community, was called to seek views and input from the public. In the opening speech, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Natural Resources, Tourism said the Precautionary Principle should be applied to secure Lake Natron from any further damage. "The value of the pride that we have as a country; the cultural sense and self-worth of the Maasai; the breathtaking sceneries of the Rift Valley and the debt to future generations cannot be monetised and may never be known. Therefore, if we lose Lake Natron, we may never truly know what we will have lost," the PS said. The MP for Kahama Mr. Daudi Lembeli warned Tanzanians to be wary of investments that leave them poorer. Citing examples from his area which has many gold mines, he said "We do not support soda ash mining even if the soda ash factory is located 100 kilometres away from Lake Natron. We have seen empty promises made by gold diggers in Kahama which led to inequality and impoverishment. We should accept the results of this high quality research which has been done by our own professionals?" National Development Corporation officials at the meeting said their intention was to mine soda ash using technology that does not harm flamingos, an argument that was rejected by those at the meeting. "We are still carrying out research to find out the best mining methods" they said. However, Mrs Mary Saiguray of Ngare Sero Women's Cultural Boma said: "We do not want any project which will interfere with tourism. Our area is dry so we can't farm. Tourism is our farm; it puts food on our tables. It helps us educate our children. Why is the Government insisting on building a soda ash plant?" While presenting the global and regional perspectives, Ken Mwathe of BirdLife International said Tanzania should take advantage of global trends in tourism, which is now the fastest growing sector. "The Government of Tanzania received the WWN Blue Globe Award in 2010 for protecting Lake Natron. This reputation should be jealously guarded?"

he said. WCST The Honorary Treasurer Mr. Everist Maembe closed the meeting with a passionate appeal for sobriety from those calling for soda ash mining as it would diminish the value of the area. ?You must listen to the voice of the people and explore other investment opportunities. For now, forget about soda ash? he concluded.