



Empowering local communities for the conservation and sustainable development of the biodiversity of the Lake Victoria Basin, the Greatest of Africa's 'Great Lakes'

# Local Champions for Africa's Great Lakes

**Project Goal:** To conserve the birds and biodiversity of the Lake Victoria Basin, and sustain the ecosystem benefits

**Project Sites:** Kenya (Dunga Beach and Yala Swamp), Uganda (Lutembe and Mabamba), Rwanda (Akanyaru) and Burundi (Ruvubu National Park)

Lake Victoria is Africa's largest lake, and the largest tropical lake in the world, rich in biodiversity and natural resources. However, the biodiversity and ecological integrity of the Lake Victoria basin are threatened by pollution, invasive species, habitat degradation and overharvesting of resources.

Local communities are the chief stewards of the world's ecosystems, and the vast majority of daily environmental management decisions depend on local knowledge and are determined by local people's use of land and natural resources.

This project is empowering local community organisations by equipping them with the skills and expertise they need to protect and improve their livelihoods and wellbeing, to be heard by decision-makers, achieve political recognition, and to secure land rights which give them the confidence to plan for the future.

## Why the Lake Victoria basin?

Lake Victoria is Africa's largest lake and the largest tropical lake in the world

The lake has a rich flora and fauna. Forty four sites in the basin have been identified as being of global importance for their birds and other biodiversity (Important Bird Areas)

Globally threatened species such as the Papyrus Gonolek *Laniarius mufumbiri* and the Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex* as well as important congregations of water birds such as Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* can be found here

Local communities depend on the Lake's natural resources and ecosystem services

## What are the challenges facing this unique ecosystem?

- Densely populated rural areas
- High levels of poverty
- Pollution, invasive species and habitat degradation threaten biodiversity and ecological integrity

## What are the key components of the project?

- Participatory community development plans at IBAs in the Lake Victoria Basin
- Small scale demonstration projects
- Grassroots civil society capacity building
- Regional networking and coordination of local organizations
- Documenting and disseminating experiences to influence regional and international policy

### Why engage local communities?

Local people play a vital part in solving the world's biodiversity crisis

Local communities are the chief stewards of the world's ecosystems, and the vast majority of daily environmental management decisions depend on local knowledge and are determined by local people's use of land and natural resources

Local organisations underpin the success and sustainability of most environment and development initiatives and under the right conditions community-based organisations can mobilise local knowledge and resources to improve environmental management

### What does local empowerment entail?

Helping local community groups find their feet and find their voices

Equipping them with the skills and expertise they need to alleviate poverty

Helping them improve their socio-economic status through improved livelihoods and sustainable natural resource management

Ensuring that they have the rights of access, use and management of resources that provide conditions for responsible, long-term stewardship

Ensuring they are engaged in decision making at the appropriate levels

### What is the policy relevance of the project?

The project will contribute towards national implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), especially Aichi Targets under Strategic Goal D (Enhance the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services) and E (Enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building)

The project contributes to the Vision of the Lake Victoria Basin Commission to have: "A prosperous population living in a healthy and sustainably managed environment providing equitable opportunities and benefits"



**Project duration:** 2013-2015

#### Project Implementing Partners/Countries:

NatureKenya

NatureUganda

Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda (ACNR)

Association Burundaise pour la Protection des Oiseaux (ABO)

#### Supporting Partners:

BirdLife International (Cambridge and Nairobi)

#### Funding support:

Aage V. Jensen Foundation

## BirdLife Contacts

**Venancia Ndo**

Project Manager,

BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat, Nairobi

E: venancia.ndoo@birdlife.org

**David Thomas**

Head of Communities and Livelihoods,

BirdLife International, Cambridge

E: david.thomas@birdlife.org

Photo credits: David Thomas/BirdLife