

Concerted efforts needed to curb dwindling fish stocks

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Fisheries experts and marine scientists say stocks of fish and other aquatic life are dwindling at alarming rates in most of the country's water bodies.

Tanzania is blessed with many water bodies which include the Indian Ocean, Lake Victoria, Lake Rukwa and Lake Tanganyika, where many fish species are said to be already extinct or about to be so. Lake Victoria, with a surface area of 68,800km², is Africa's largest lake by area, and the world's second largest freshwater lake (by surface area), after Lake Superior in North America.

Experts say pollution and environmental degradation has led to extinction of a large number of fish species in Lake Victoria over the last four decades. Fish in the lake continue to be plundered at an alarming rate calling for urgent steps to save marine. A recent study revealed that while there were over 400 fish species in Lake Victoria during 1920s, the number dropped to less than 30 at present. They include Nile Perch (sangara), Tilapia (sato) and sardines (dagaa).

The trend is alarming and calls for concerted efforts to safeguard the resources from over fishing and environmental pollution. Residents in the Lake Victoria Basin are in danger as a result of pollution of the lake and people are already consuming contaminated fish.

A few years ago local and international consumers raised concern over the use of dangerous fishing methods. There were reports that some unscrupulous fishermen use poison to catch fish. The poisoned fish were being sold in Mwanza, Dar es Salaam, Songea and Arusha while other fish are exported to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda.

A recent survey by Lake Victoria Environmental Management Programme (LVEMP) revealed, among other things, that the fish breeding grounds have extensively been destroyed by water pollution. Some people use illegal fishing gear, such as gillnets, monofilaments and beach seines.

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