

Researcher creates 'boutique' fish farms to combat Lake Victoria's depleted fish supplies

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Fish ponds in Uganda Credit: Prof. Berta Sivan

In a unique project to combat depleted fish supplies in Lake Victoria, researchers from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Makerere University in Kampala, have established 'boutique' fish farms in small villages around the Lake's shore in Uganda.

Predators

Local fishermen used to fish [carp](#) and perciform fish near the shores of the lake, as food for their families. But fifty years ago, the Nile Perch was introduced into Lake Victoria in order to increase local fisheries. The Nile Perch is a predator and it started to eat most of the other fish.

While the Nile Perch became the primary export of the countries around the lake - namely Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania - depleted supplies over the last ten years of the smaller fish around the shores of the lake on which local fishermen subsisted meant that the local population was deprived of their main source of protein.

Furthermore, fishing the larger Nile Perch was unfeasible for local fishermen as the fish resided in the middle of Lake Victoria and larger fishing boats were required in order to fish them.

The solution: 'Boutique' fish farms

To combat this increasing problem, Prof. Berta Levavi-Sivan of the Hebrew University's Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment found a way to spawn several species of African carp and cultivate them in fish farms around Lake Victoria in Uganda. The project was initiated five years ago and has been financed by USAID-CDR (US Agency for International Development), in collaboration with Dr. Justus Rutaisire from Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda.

Last year, the developers of the project began establishing ponds in small villages around the shores of Lake Victoria, stocking them with fish from the fish farms - thus enabling the local population to eat carp. The project has since developed and now, four large fish farms, whose owners were trained in Israel, produce enough fingerlings to populate small ponds in villages around the lake. The people of each village, and especially their children, consume the project-fish as their main source of protein.

Prof. Levavi-Sivan hopes that soon, every village around the shores of [Lake Victoria](#) will have its own 'boutique' fish farm and that the project will be expanded to include other countries in Africa. "We succeeded in inducing spawning in the carp - and these 14 villages are the success

story of this project."

Helping her in this initiative is a group of students from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda, who came to the University's Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food & Environment as part of a program organized by Mashav (Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation) and the Hebrew University's Division of External Studies to study inland water aquaculture and help develop the existing project in Uganda.

A new challenge

However, Prof. Levavi-Sivan and Dr. Justus Rutaisire are now facing another challenge. With the depletion of the smaller fish in the Lake, now the Nile Perch have nothing to eat and are themselves becoming depleted. Prof. Levavi-Sivan and Dr. Justus Rutaisire are therefore beginning a new project. Financed by the World Bank, they are working on finding ways to cultivate the Nile perch in aquaculture - thus helping to boost Uganda's [fish](#) export industry, as well as the nutrition of the local population.

Provided by Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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