

Press Release of Global Nature Fund for World Wetlands Day on 2nd February 2017

Lake Tanganyika, a lake of superlatives, is “Threatened Lake of the Year 2017”

Global Nature Fund nominates Lake Tanganyika as “Threatened Lake of the Year”.

Sedimentation, pollution and overexploitation jeopardise Africa’s second largest lake. With almost 17 % of the world’s available fresh water, Lake Tanganyika is of global importance and source of life for millions of people.

Radolfzell, Germany / Bujumbura, Burundi, 31 January 2017: The environmental foundation Global Nature Fund (GNF) nominates Lake Tanganyika in Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania and Zambia as the “Threatened Lake of the Year 2017”. On the World Day of Wetlands, the GNF draws attention to the importance of lakes and wetlands all over the world. Together with the local Living Lakes partner organisation Biraturaba, the GNF calls for sustainable measures to preserve Lake Tanganyika.

A Lake of Superlatives

Lake Tanganyika is an important hotspot of biodiversity. 40 % of the 1,500 plant and animal species are endemic, means that they cannot be found anywhere else on the earth. It is the second largest freshwater lake by volume and with 1,470 metres it is the second deepest lake in the world, containing almost one sixth of the world’s unfrozen fresh water. With 673 kilometres it is the longest lake in the world.

A growing human population entails serious problems for the lake

Overexploitation of biological resources is threatening Lake Tanganyika. The lake basin is facing multiple challenges, resulting from a rapidly expanding human population in the riparian countries. But rising population numbers cause an increased need for housing and food; the natural habitats around the lake are destructed by the expansion of land use for agriculture or construction. Intensive and inadequate agricultural cultivation practices lead to land degradation and erosion. As a result, sedimentation becomes a major threat to the lake. Water runoff from the mountain area carries an immense amount of soil into the lake. Moreover, the agricultural production declines and cultivable plots become scarce.

“But not only sediments enter the lake. Pollutants of industrial, craft and domestic waste from the cities and villages are directly discharged into the lake without any pre-treatment. Further pollution is caused by transport on the lake and fishermen using oil for generators

and lamps during night fishing,” said Emmanuel Nshimirimana, executive director of Biraturaba.

Already one of the ten million people living in the Tanganyika basin is directly depending on the fishery resources of the lake. But more and more people try to find in fisheries an alternative source of livelihood. As a consequence this leads to overfishing and a dramatic reduction of the fish population in the lake. Between 1995 and 2011, the total fish stock has decreased by 25 % in Burundi, while the number of fishermen increased fourfold. At the same time the harvest per fisherman and year decreased by 81 %.

Solutions

Pollution and sedimentation need to be reduced, the local population has to be made aware of the causes of problems they are facing every day and alternative and sustainable sources of livelihood need to be developed for the local population.

Biraturaba and GNF plan to implement a drinking water supply project in the village of Gitaza, which is located 26 kilometres south of the capital Bujumbura at the Tanganyika Lake shores. *“The villagers suffer from a lack of clean drinking water. Currently the population consumes water from Lake Tanganyika without any treatment. Therefore waterborne diseases are frequent. The project aims to improve the living conditions of the population in Gitaza by suppling drinking water to the 800 households in the village, the 2,800 students from two schools, a health centre, a market and an artisanal fishing beach. The project also aims to develop an effective community management of Gitaza's drinking water infrastructure by the community, with technical support of the Municipal Water Board”*, stated Udo Gattenlöhner, executive director of Global Nature Fund.

Background information

For further information about Lake Tanganyika and an interview with Emmanuel Nshimirimana, executive director of the Burundian Association Biraturaba, please visit: www.globalnature.org/ThreatenedLake2017

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