

PEACEBUILDING ACROSS LAKE ALBERT

Reinforcing environmental cooperation between Uganda and
the Democratic Republic of Congo

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ACRONYMS

ACODE	Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
AFIEGO	Africa Institute for Energy Governance
ARCOS	Albertine Rift Conservation Society
CEPGL	Communauté Economique des Pays des Grands Lacs
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CSO	Civil society organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
FARDC	Forces Armées De la République Démocratique du Congo
FRPI	Front de Résistance Patriotique d'Ituri
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGCP	International Gorilla Conservation Project
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
JPA	Joint Production Agreement
LEAF	Lakes Edward and Albert Fisheries
MONUC	Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en RD Congo
NALU	National Army for the Liberation of Uganda
NAPE	National Association of Professional Environmentalists in Uganda
NBD	Nile Basin Discourse
NBI	Nile Basin Initiative
NELSAP	Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Program
NEMA	National Environment Management Authority
PRA	Peoples' Redemption Army
PWYP	Publish What You Pay
TBNRM	Transboundary Natural Resource Management
SINELAC	Société Internationale d'Electricité des Pays de Grands Lacs
UGREP	Unité de Gestion des Ressources en Eaux et de Pêche
UNDF	Ugandan Nile Discourse Forum
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
UWA	Ugandan Wildlife Authority
WWF	World Wide Fund For Nature

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the face of multiple violent conflicts, researchers and practitioners alike debate the potential and limits of peacebuilding. The role of the environment and natural resource management in this context is particularly important, as it can facilitate trust-building and benefit sharing. The analysis of the case of Lake Albert, shared by Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), shows that peacebuilding opportunities exist when initiatives integrate and rely on local stakeholders, even in cases of lacking high-level political agreements. The study of three domains of environmental interaction (environment and protected area management; water and fisheries; energy and oil) reveals that while there is increasing competition and tension around resources, they also offer entry points for improving trust-building between and within countries. In this context, donors should focus on strengthening existing ties between communities, providing opportunities for benefit-sharing from sustainable resource management, and increasing inclusiveness of all stakeholders into local, national and transboundary development processes.

Keywords:

Transboundary resource management; peacebuilding; Uganda; Democratic Republic of Congo; Lake Albert; Albertine Rift; environmental cooperation

INTRODUCTION

Lake Albert is located on the border between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda.¹ From a geographical and political perspective, the region reflects major transboundary concerns related to natural resources and bilateral relations.

A shared history of conflict, poor livelihoods, border disputes and recent oil findings in the region jeopardise common resource management and political relations. The occupancy of the DRC's eastern district, Ituri, by Ugandan forces between 1998 and 2003, greatly disrupted the region. Environmental degradation linked to oil extraction, as well as increasing pressure on other natural resources such as water and land, directly impacts the fragile ecosystem and local livelihoods. Against the background of oil exploration today, the DRC and Ugandan governments have engaged in first steps to normalise their relationship, but aggressive verbal attacks and violent cross-border incidents still occur.

In spite of these difficulties, a key entry point for cooperation between both countries' lakeshores lies in their natural resources. The direct impact of resource management and degradation on local livelihoods highlights this potential. In spite of difficult bilateral relations, local initiatives for common natural resource management exist and contribute to building trust and improving relationships. Developing conservation areas for tourism, securing livelihoods through sustainable resource use and minimising negative impacts of climate change and oil exploitation are all domains of mutual interest with potentially high spill-over effects for peacebuilding. Cooperative natural resource management can build upon existing ties between communities, such as ethnic relationships, linguistic compatibilities, ongoing communication and trade networks across borders.

The present study on Lake Albert builds upon the key findings of the first phase of research accomplished by the "Regional Cooperation on Environment, Economy and Natural Resource Management" Cluster within the Initiative for Peacebuilding project. The present investigation in the Lake Albert region builds upon the results from the four previous case studies on regional cooperation (Great Lakes, Southern Caucasus, Latin America and the Middle East).² After a short introduction to the region, this study will analyse three entry points for transboundary cooperation: environment and protected area management; water and fisheries; and energy and oil. It addresses the following key questions:

- Which roles do natural resources play in the local socio-economic context?
- Where is transboundary cooperation already established or likely to emerge/be reinforced, and what challenges do both countries face in this regard?
- How can transboundary cooperation on natural resources contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding at the local and bilateral levels?

Finally, the study summarises six premises for successful transboundary natural resource management (TBNRM) approaches and proposes concrete recommendations for improving collaboration and strengthening peacebuilding.

1 The present study is based on a review of existing publications on the region and extensive discussions with local stakeholders during two field missions: one to Uganda and one to the DRC. While the Ugandan mission included interviews at the lakeshore, the security situation did not allow similar assessments on the DRC's side of the lake. However, key stakeholders involved in transboundary natural resource management as well as local authorities in the field of environment were consulted in Kinshasa.

2 All case studies and the synthesis report are available at <http://www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu>.

LAKE ALBERT: THE SETTING

Uganda lies on Lake Albert's eastern bank, while the western lakeshore belongs to DRC's territory. The (disputed) border between both countries lies within the lake itself. The lake contributes to the region's ecosystem with its high biological diversity, and plays a key role for the socio-economic benefit of the people. Hence, both countries consider the lake a focal point of interest. The present chapter briefly introduces the region's environmental and socio-economic setting and highlights ways in which cooperation and conflict have characterised bilateral relations.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONCERNS

Lake Albert belongs to the Great Lakes in Africa and the upper Nile system. The lake forms part of the Uganda-DRC border, is about 160 km long, and averages 32 km wide (Figure 1). Its main sources are the Victoria Nile and the Semliki River. The land around Lake Albert is partly classified as a protected area (on the Ugandan side), but is also used for agriculture (crops and livestock) and human settlements.³ The lake itself provides fish to the surrounding communities and beyond (see next section). The Congolese district, Ituri (likely to become a province in 2010), and the Ugandan districts of Nebbi, Amuru, Buliisa, Hoima, Kibaale and Bundibugyo surround the lake. The region is a complex ecosystem with high biological diversity, and represents one of the most important locations for the conservation of mammals, birds, and freshwater fish in Africa.⁴ However, as the population in the region and the pressure on natural resource grows, environmental degradation increases as well.

Figure 1: The Ugandan-Congolese border region



Source: Fabienne Houdret, based on the map in: 'Do you want to share or to fight?' *The Economist*, 23rd August 2007. Available at http://www.economist.com/world/middleeast-africa/displaystory.cfm?story_id=9687573

3 NEMA (2009a). *Environmental Sensitivity Atlas for the Albertine Graben*. Kampala, Uganda: New Era Printers, Publishers and Stationers Ltd. p.12.

4 NEMA (2009a). *Op. cit.* p.17.

In spite of environmental challenges and growing competition over natural resources, the populations in the Lake Albert region can also build upon common ethnic roots, shared livelihoods and trade flows. However, the recent history of conflict within and between both countries also impacts the relationship between Ugandan and Congolese local communities.

Due to longstanding ethnic conflicts and the two Congo Wars (1996–97 and 1998–2003) both lakeshores are prone to insecurities from neighbouring tensions, rebel insurgency, refugees and tribal clashes.⁵ The ethnicity of the people is diverse and in spite of many instances of peaceful coexistence, ethnic clashes within and between the two countries also occurred, especially in Ituri during the second Congo War. In the last few years, an influx of Congolese and Ugandan immigrants and refugees to the Ugandan lakeshore districts has led to increasing competition over natural resource use and land. This has raised tension between different tribes and endangered the fragile, peaceful communities.⁶ However, in some parts around the lake, Congolese and Ugandans have common tribal origins and share the same languages such as Swahili or Alur. Inter-marriages between the Congolese and the Ugandans are quite common and Congolese living in Ugandan lakeshore communities are – mostly – fully accepted and integrated.⁷ Additionally, it is common to find Congolese nationals on the Ugandan side of Lake Albert participating in local leadership positions (among others, in local councils and Beach Management Units).

The livelihoods of the local populations around Lake Albert are closely linked to natural resources and trade. The inhabitants rely on fishing, cattle breeding and agriculture. Trade in border towns such as Mahagi allows the locals to buy and sell goods such as timber, agriculture products and fish.⁸ Furthermore, Ugandans and Congolese cross borders in both directions for cattle breeding, logging or fishing to sustain their livelihoods.⁹ Lake Albert not only provides income to the local population, but also contributes 15 percent to Uganda's national fish catch and will be a significant source of oil exploitation in the near future.¹⁰

The DRC district of Ituri is economically orientated towards Uganda. Many of the goods produced in eastern DRC are exported to and via Uganda as there are no reliable transport routes between the eastern and the western part of the DRC. Due to lack of effective governance structures in the DRC's border regions, tax collections are often arbitrarily collected by different individuals and illegal trade is widespread.¹¹

In addition to being economically important, the Lake Albert region is highly relevant for the Ugandan-Congolese security relations. The Congo Wars, the occupation of Ituri by Uganda and the recent border tensions (see below) represent only some of the most significant events for the border region. The overall bilateral relationship between the two riparians also plays a significant role.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

The recent wars in the Great Lakes region form the background of the bilateral relations between the DRC and Uganda in the Lake Albert region. The two Congo Wars are widely considered the most deadly wars since the Second World War, totalling nearly four million deaths since the conflicts began in 1996. The root causes of the armed conflict in Ituri are 'the result of the exploitation, by local and regional actors, of a deeply rooted local conflict over access to land, economic opportunities and political power'.¹² Control over minerals plays a major role in these violent struggles for power and influence. The gold mining areas in the region is one obvious example of these struggles.¹³

5 A. M. Karungu (2009). *Overview of conflicts in the Greater Horn of Africa*. Presentation at the Workshop on Global Conflict Atlas, 8th and 9th June 2009, JRC, Ispra, Italy.

6 Compare B. Oketch 'Country's oil bonanza is overshadowed by a tribal land dispute'. *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, 8th September 2009. Available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/200909081257.html>; International Alert (2009). *Harnessing oil for peace and development in Uganda*. Investing in Peace, Issue No. 2. Kampala, Uganda: International Alert; A. M. Karungu (2009). *Op. cit.*

7 Interview, Ugandan lakeshore community, Lake Albert, August 2009; International Alert (2009). *Op. cit.* p.76.

8 Compare H. Sunman and N. Bates (2007). *Trading for Peace. Achieving security and poverty reduction through trade in natural resources in the Great Lakes area*. London: DFID.

9 Interview, Ugandan CSO, Kampala, August 2009.

10 NEMA (2009a). *Op. cit.* p.15.

11 H. Sunman and N. Bates (2007). *Op. cit.* p.19.

12 K. Vlassenroot and T. Raeymaekers (2004). 'The politics of rebellion and intervention in Ituri. The emergence of a new political complex?' *African Affairs*, 103, no. 412. pp.385–412. p.387.

13 Human Rights Watch (2005). *The curse of gold: Democratic Republic of Congo*. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/drc0505/drc0505text.pdf>.

One of the regional actors implicated in the Ituri conflicts was Uganda. The Ugandan state, under President Museveni, invaded eastern DRC in 1996 with the aim of overthrowing the DRC's President Mobutu and defeating Ugandan rebels.¹⁴ With the beginning of the second Congo War in 1998, Uganda occupied Ituri until 2003. The reasons for the occupation are still disputed,¹⁵ however, Uganda was probably motivated by its aim of controlling the eastern and northern part of DRC in order to dominate the extraction of natural resources.¹⁶

Today, large uprisings are absent in Ituri. However, the district remains politically fragile, local social fabric has declined and the rebel group Front de Résistance Patriotique d'Ituri (FRPI) still controls the south of Bunia.¹⁷ Key issues to be addressed for long-term peacebuilding are land disputes, impunity and the return of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).¹⁸ Moreover, little trust exists between local communities and the governmental administration due to continued human rights violations by the Congolese army. The absence of a coherent and reliable strategy to govern the district further complicates the situation, as the International Crisis Group states.¹⁹ After the withdrawal from Ituri in 2003, the DRC accused Uganda of supporting or sheltering Congolese rebel organisations in the Lake Albert region. Furthermore, according to the verdict of the International Court of Justice, there are still outstanding reparation payments (of US\$10 billion) that Uganda must pay to the DRC for its involvement in the second Congo War.²⁰

Recent events prove the ambivalence of Ugandan-Congolese relationships. On the one hand, Ugandan lakeshore communities are growing more suspicious of the Congolese as they fear their livelihoods are threatened by Congolese crossing the border to occupy their land and deplete their fish stocks.²¹ Furthermore, unclear border demarcation is leading to deadly disputes in the Lake Albert region.²² Disputed areas include the Rukwanzi Island in Lake Albert (see Figure 1), located at the centre of prospective oil fields. Uganda claims that colonial borders indicate that the island falls within its territory, though 90 percent of the inhabitants are Congolese. Moreover, the bank of the Semliki River in the south of Lake Albert has shifted over the years due to soil erosion and moved in favour of the DRC. The latter insists that the river is the natural boundary – no matter where it flows.²³ On the other hand, communities along the Ugandan lakeshores coexisted peacefully in the past. Many of the problems linked to daily life in the lake region continue to be solved peacefully due to strong ties between the local Ugandans and Congolese. At the national level, several meetings between the two presidents and officials during the last few years²⁴ demonstrate the increasing willingness and determination of the two states to cooperate in resolving conflicts.

14 Uganda claimed that the Congolese border region was used by Ugandan rebel organisations such as Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU) and Peoples' Redemption Army (PRA) as retreat. Human Rights Watch (2003). *Ituri: Covered in blood. Ethnically targeted violence in Northeastern DR Congo*. New York, US: HRW. p.8; 'Press Conference on Democratic Republic of Congo 2005'. UN Department of Public Information, News and Media Division, 6th October 2005. Available at http://www0.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2005/051006_DRC_PC.doc.htm.

15 Clark argues that Rwanda initiated the war against Kabila in 1998 and Museveni followed for political and personal reasons, for example the close fellowship with the Rwandan President Kagame. J. Clark (2001). 'Explaining Ugandan intervention in Congo: Evidence and interpretations'. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp.261-287. p.280-281.

16 An expert group of the UN accused Ugandan military and businessmen of exploiting Ituri's natural resource wealth for their own goods and Clark states that troops of the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) were stationed up to 1000 km away from the shared borders and thus away from Ugandan rebel hideouts. J. Clark (2001) Op. cit. p.272; UNSC (2002). *Interim report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. S/2002/565.

17 Interview, Ituri expert, Berlin, July 2009; K. Vlassenroot and T. Raeymaekers (2004). Op. cit. p.411.

18 ICG (2008). 'Congo: Four priorities for sustainable peace in Ituri'. *Africa Report* No. 140. p.8.

19 ICG (2008). Op. cit. p.i.

20 A. Balimwikungu and H. Mukasa, 25th August 2009. 'Uganda, Congo relations back to normal'. *The New Vision*. Available at <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/692444>.

21 Interview, Ugandan lakeshore communities and Ugandan CSO, Lake Albert, August 2009.

22 In 2007, violent clashes at the Ugandan-Congolese border at Lake Albert occurred and several civilians were killed. Tensions heightened again in June 2009, when Congolese authorities put up a checkpoint on the shores of Lake Albert without waiting for results from a study on the border dispute between the two countries, which is part of the Ngurdoto Agreement (see explanation to the agreement in footnote 24) and apparently under way. S. Ballong (2009). 'Uganda-DRC: Tensions mount over Lake Albert resources'. *Afrik.com*, 12th June 2009. Available at <http://en.afrik.com/article15802.html>.

23 D. Kamugisha (2008). 'Civil Society Groups urge DRC, Uganda to resolve border spat in the oil-rich Albertine Rift', Nape Lobby in NAPE Lobby No. 28: *Mining in protected areas. wisdom or? Uganda's experience*. Kampala, Uganda: NAPE. p.12; NEMA (2009b). *Uganda: Atlas of our changing environment*. Kampala, Uganda: NEMA. p.140.

24 The Ngurdoto Agreement was signed by President Museveni and President Kabila in Tanzania in September 2007. Both parties agreed to re-mark the contested border areas to determine ownership through a joint permanent commission. The agreement also included the revision of the joint exploration agreement of oil at Lake Albert formulated in 1990. Following the agreement, several meetings between head of states and governmental officials took place. In March 2009, the two presidents met again, this time at Lake Albert to discuss areas of cooperation, including 'joint oil exploration, [...] and strengthening cooperation'. H. Mukasa and J. Thawite. 'Museveni, Kabila meet'. *The New Vision*, 4th March 2009. Available at <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/673514>; Editorial. 'Uganda: Refer Congo Border Dispute to the UN'. *The New Vision*, 8th June 2009. Available at <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/14/684015>.

The relationship between the Ugandan president Museveni and the DRC president Kabila is characterised by pragmatism and quickly changing political priorities. However, the relationship at the local level between the Congolese and Ugandans in the Lake Albert region are less weighted down with political manoeuvres. The ties between Uganda and DRC are still strong as the border regions are characterised by intense social and economic interchange. Against this background, the inter-linkages in the Lake Albert region offer a window of opportunity for improving bilateral relations. The need for sustainable use of the environment and natural resources, the interest in benefits from oil exploitation as well as the need to preserve local livelihoods and improve regional stability, are all issues where common strategies could help solve shared problems.

TOPICS FOR TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION

The section below analyses the interests and needs of both countries with respect to the supply of and demand for natural resources, and highlights cooperative approaches and institutions. Environment and protected area management, water and fisheries as well as energy and oil are identified as key domains for interaction of the two countries.²⁵

ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT

OVERVIEW

The Lake Albert region's biodiversity of flora and fauna is exceptional. The landscape is shaped by escarpments, forests, savannah, grasslands, wetlands and deltas. Protected areas exist only on the Ugandan shores. They range from forest reserves and wildlife resorts to national parks (NP). The protected areas in Uganda are major tourist attractions, with about 40,000 visitors per year for the Murchison Falls National Park (NP) alone.²⁶ In the DRC, the closest protected area to Lake Albert is the long-stretching Virunga National Park (classified as a World Heritage Site in Danger), located on the border of the Ugandan Semliki NP.

Despite the protected areas, flora and fauna are endangered due to multiple reasons. Firstly, the population is highly dependent on natural resources. Water (fisheries) and land (agriculture, cattle and logging) are the basis of employment and food security, but are increasingly stressed by resource overuse and degradation. Rudimentary methods of natural resource exploitation further increase the pressure on the environment.²⁷ Secondly, the security situation and lack of governance structures – foremost in the DRC – hinders adequate protected area management. National Parks like Semliki face deforestation caused by illegal logging and insecurity due to nearby rebel activities. Thirdly, the planned oil extraction and processing poses great risks to the environment. Test drilling already started in the Murchison Falls NP and the Kabwoya Wildlife Reserve in Uganda, but (at least until August 2009) no solution has yet been found to handle the toxic waste water and mud.²⁸ Furthermore, animals are substantially disturbed by the drilling activities. The necessary infrastructure (a landing site with several flights per day in the Kabwoya Wildlife Reserve, roads to the sites and drilling stations) and the increased population density in the immediate surroundings of the sites greatly disturb the animals' breeding grounds. The migration of people from Uganda and the DRC, and also the presence of employees from drilling companies, large military and police forces increases the pressure on local natural resources.²⁹ Hunters/poachers are also a threat to the wildlife in the protected areas.

Outside the protected areas, the situation is even worse and many plants and animals are threatened or even extinct.³⁰ South of Lake Albert, around the Semliki River, tensions between local communities are rising. The

25 The findings are based on a desk study and interviews with relevant stakeholders and representatives from transboundary institutions in Uganda and in the DRC.

26 Uganda Tourism Travel Guide website: 'Uganda's oil versus wildlife', Accessed on 7th October 2009. Available at <http://www.ugandatourismguide.com/general-travel-news/ugandas-oil-versuses-wildlife/>.

27 A. Nakyeyune and I. Aminigaruhanga (2009). *Transboundary natural resources management in the River Semliki Basin*. Kampala: Uganda Nile Discourse Forum. p.25.

28 Interview, Ugandan governmental institution, Kampala, August 2009.

29 Interviews, Ugandan lakeshore communities and Ugandan governmental institutions, Lake Albert, September 2009.

30 NEMA (2009a). Op. cit. p.22.

increasing pressure on natural resources and the shifting of the border between both countries cause insecurity. The loss of fertile land and overgrazing in Uganda urge its local population to cross borders, while the Congolese let their cattle graze in Uganda because of political instability in Ituri.³¹ According to a study by the Ugandan Nile Discourse Forum (UNDF), Ugandan farmers must pay high taxes to cross borders and to receive access to fertile land in the DRC, while Congolese migrants are not obliged to pay taxes in Uganda for cattle grazing.³² This causes additional inequalities and suspicion between both population groups. Furthermore, there has been an ongoing trend of land acquisition by migrants for cattle keeping and other agricultural activities in the areas around Lake Albert in Uganda, especially in Kibaale and Buliisa Districts since early 2000. This has been a great source of conflict and tension locally. Unconfirmed reports indicate that the powers behind the land acquisitions are investors who want to acquire land with underground oil resources for possible sale or compensation later on. This has made the indigenous people become hostile to even genuine migrants.³³

POTENTIALS FOR COOPERATION AND CHALLENGES

The Ugandan-Congolese environmental interdependency requires joint approaches to protect the ecosystem and sustain livelihoods and, thus, contribute to a peaceful environment. Furthermore, joint management may not only prevent negative environmental impacts, but rather offer opportunities for economical diversification such as the expansion of trade and tourism. Considering the fragile ecological environment and existing overexploitation of natural resources, such activities would need to be designed and implemented in a sustainable way. Subsequent shared economic benefits can serve as a strong motor for improving joint approaches. One positive experience in this regard is a project in the southern border region between DRC, Uganda and Rwanda. The *Central Albertine Rift Transboundary Protected Area Network* between the three states serves as a successful approach for sustainable conservation across boundaries. The cooperation, which started as a bottom-up approach, was formalised at the national level in 2009, with the creation of a transboundary secretariat in Kigali. Even during the Congo Wars, the approach succeeded in bringing the stakeholders together for regular meetings and in establishing a shared understanding of the situation, including shared visions for the future.³⁴ The process of formalising the cooperation was successfully supported by international organisations through the *International Gorilla Conservation Project* (IGCP). The IGCP functions as a financier and technical supporter, but more importantly, as a neutral facilitator, including in difficult security situations.³⁵ The cooperation initiative started within the national parks, where the endangered mountain gorilla lives. Gradually, the work grew to include regions further north like the Ugandan Semliki NP, which borders with the Congolese Virunga NP. Since no gorillas live in Semliki NP, the implementation approach here is more difficult. Furthermore, little to no international attention or pressure is present, given the underdeveloped tourism industry.³⁶

Very few initiatives exist for transboundary protected area management around Lake Albert. Though there are multifold national parks, wildlife and forest reserves bordering Lake Albert on the Ugandan side, few are close to the Congolese terrain. There are attempts to manage biodiversity hotspots through better coordination, for example through the *Conservation of Biodiversity in the Albertine Rift Forests of Uganda* project of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), funded by UNDP. However, the project's objective to 'conserve and manage rich biodiversity forests' refers only to Ugandan protected areas.³⁷

Consequently, institutions and frameworks for transboundary environmental cooperation do exist and build the basis for cooperation in the Semliki and Virunga NPs. Though, chances to implement similar structures in the border regions on the lakeshores are currently difficult, as no close protected areas on the Congolese side exist and the security situation remains fragile.

However, Ugandan governmental organisations such as the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and the Ugandan Wildlife Authority (UWA) are highly engaged in managing protected areas in the

31 A. Nakyeyune and I. Aminigaruhanga (2009). Op. cit. p.30.

32 A. Nakyeyune and I. Aminigaruhanga (2009). Op. cit. p.28.

33 Interviews, Ugandan CSOs and lakeshore communities, August and September 2009.

34 Interview, Ugandan governmental institution, Kampala, August 2009; A. Hammill and A. Crawford (2008). *Gorillas in the midst. Assessing the peace and conflict impacts of the International Gorilla Conservation Project (IDGP) activities*. Winnipeg: IISD.

35 A. Houdret and C. Roettger (2010). *Transboundary natural resource cooperation in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Entry points for improving regional stability*. United Nations Environment Programme.

36 Interview, Ugandan governmental institution, Kampala, August 2009.

37 Further information of the project is available on the website, at <http://www.undp.or.ug/projects/9#>.

Lake Albert region. Furthermore, international NGOs such as WWF or national civil society organisations (CSOs) such as the Nile Basin Discourse (NBD) and the Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS) are involved in initiatives that link Ugandan and Congolese environmental protection activities. Moreover, cooperation does not always have to reach a very high political level to be effective. For example, the direct contacts between the UWA and security agents on both sides of the border have reportedly helped in many situations to deescalate tension and reach peaceful agreements to cross border issues.³⁸

WATER AND FISHERIES

OVERVIEW

Water is the vital line for the rich biodiversity in the Lake Albert region and local livelihoods directly depend on water and fishery resources. Although, the water is saline, it supplies much of the human and livestock populations' drinking water. The lakeshore communities on both sides of the lake live almost exclusively from fishing and the fish trade, which is thus essential for income and food security. On the Ugandan side, the Hoima District alone has over 37 fishing docks on Lake Albert, providing income to the district treasury.³⁹

However, the fish stock in the lake is reported to be declining in species diversity, overall production, and the average size of fish caught mainly due to the extensive use of destructive and partly illegal fishing gears and methods by Ugandan and Congolese fishermen. Besides overfishing, these methods contribute to the destruction of breeding grounds and decreases the fish stock further. The large influx of migrants into the region lacking alternative income opportunities other than fishing has further increased the pressure. While agreements on the minimum size of fishing nets existed between Uganda and the DRC before the Congo Wars, some Congolese fishermen reportedly ignore this guideline since control of these norms is impossible.⁴⁰ While the Ugandan law on fishing prohibits use of gillnets of less than five inches on Lake Albert, no such law exists on the DRC side.

The planned commercial exploitation of oil in the Murchison Falls NP and in the Kabwoya Wildlife Reserve will further impact water quantity and quality. While the implementation of an oil transformation unit close to the Kabwoya reserve is highly probable, this will require important water resources, which will need to be supplied by the lake. The waste, including mud from the drilling activities, may be an additional factor of environmental degradation if not treated properly. Additionally, Lake Albert is facing increasing pollution threats from human activities. Many pollutants and contaminants are discharged into the water body from riparian towns, rural growth centres and fish landings. These degrade water quality and affect negatively both aquatic plants and animals including fish. Unsustainable land use practices including deforestation cause soil erosion. Existing problems such as the insufficient supply of clean drinking water, resulting in diseases as well as lacking sanitary provisions may further be exacerbated by decreasing water quality and quantity. Furthermore, local fishermen complain about the negative effects of oil exploration. Seismic tests reportedly led to a temporary decreased availability of fish and changed the water quality.

POTENTIALS FOR COOPERATION AND CHALLENGES

The main challenges related to water and fisheries in the region result from four trends: population increase and destructive fishing methods, oil drilling and lack of support for local development. At the local level, these not only lead to the above-mentioned environmental problems, but also negatively impact the fragile socio-economic equilibrium. While Congolese migrants and Ugandan inhabitants have lived peacefully together in the villages along the Ugandan side of the lake, the migration inflow from other Ugandan regions has recently led to interethnic rivalries and clashes.⁴¹ This is not due to migration as such, but rather linked to the lack of political support in the region by the central government in terms of income-generation, food security and rural infrastructure, which has led to increased competition over livelihoods. The decrease of fish reportedly jeopardises the relationship between rich and poor fishermen as well as between indigenous people and migrants.⁴²

³⁸ Interviews, Ugandan governmental institution, Kampala and Lake Albert, August 2009.

³⁹ F. Mugerwa. 'Uganda: Dwindling catches worry Lake Albert fishermen', *The Monitor*, Uganda, 15th August 2009.

⁴⁰ International Alert (2009). Op. cit.

⁴¹ Interviews, Ugandan governmental and non-governmental institutions, August and September 2009.

⁴² A. von Sarnowski (2004). *The artisanal fisheries of Lake Albert and the problem of overfishing*. Conference on International Agricultural Research for Development, Deutscher Tropentag 2004, 5–7th October 2004, Berlin, Germany.

Furthermore, there are also conflicts between fishermen practicing legal fishing and those engaged in illegal fishing methods. One example is conflict between fishermen who use gillnets to fish Nile perch and those who use lamps to fish sardines because these methods are mutually exclusive. Other conflicts concern the fishing ground in the lake, as no clear boundary separates the Ugandan from the Congolese side. These challenges also affect transboundary relations: indirectly through their impact on mixed local communities and directly through rivalries between fishermen on the lake. While the majority of disagreements over fishing rights and the border demarcation are still resolved peacefully through established social networks,⁴³ the political and military interests of both governments in the region have contributed to an escalation in violence between the security forces of both sides. Disputes over oil findings on and around Rukwanzi Island have been especially volatile as well as the politicisation of the border demarcation. Both have led to the intervention of security forces, kidnapping and even deadly shootings.⁴⁴

Besides the tension between local inhabitants, conflict potential between the local population on the one side and oil companies and local governments on the other is also increasing. For instance, fishermen were reportedly forbidden to fish during the seismic tests, but not compensated for their loss of income.⁴⁵ Local authorities are perceived to neglect local infrastructure and development needs. Furthermore, they are also insufficiently prepared to monitor the oil companies' activities in the region in terms of comprehensive social and environmental impact assessment, long-term strategies for the exploitation and related socio-economic processes and conflicts. However, these issues are closely related to water as a source of livelihoods.

Water (lakes, rivers, drilling points) thus acts as a potential trigger of conflict if problems of quality, quantity and access remain insufficiently addressed. However, water is also central for cooperation as local communities have informal arrangements and close social networks linked to the shared use of water and fisheries. Common ethnic origins and the presence of a large number of Congolese on the Ugandan lakeshore facilitate these arrangements and contribute to a social system of "early warning", preventing in most cases a violent escalation of conflicts. These social networks must be complemented by formal institutions for improving water and fisheries management and facilitating transboundary approaches. Besides improving livelihoods, this would also further strengthen the ties between communities of diverse ethnic or national origin and improve conflict prevention and peacebuilding in this highly fragile socio-political setting. Existing initiatives provide promising entry points for further activities in this regard. Some of the past or existing water projects in the region directly aim at a transboundary approach.

At the international level, the *Nile Basin Initiative* (NBI) and particularly its *Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Program* (NELSAP) provide entry points for water cooperation across boundaries. NBI is one of the few institutions engaged in the water sector that explicitly links improved natural resource management to cooperation, peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Within the multilateral initiative of the NBI, NELSAP is a sub-programme assembling eight countries (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Egypt and Sudan) and focusing on economic integration and developmental issues, including natural resource management. In Uganda and the DRC, NELSAP, with funding from the African Development Bank, financed several small-scale projects for improved resource management in the Lake Albert region,⁴⁶ through the *Lakes Edward and Albert Fisheries* (LEAF) Pilot Project. The LEAF Project was designed to address the problem of lack of coordination in regulations on fishing between the riparian countries of Lake Albert. The Integrated Lake Management Plan developed within this project has strategies to address this issue. Overall, the project aimed at providing both governments with a sustainable investment and management plan for jointly using water and fisheries resources from the two lakes. In its pilot phase, the project succeeded in establishing transboundary contacts through the introduction of the fisheries co-management concept, including the prevention of conflicts.⁴⁷ Detailed natural resources management plans and an institutional framework for the

43 Interviews, Ugandan lakeshore communities, Lake Albert, September 2009.

44 A. Tumusiime and H. Mukasa. 'Congolese abduct Ugandan fishermen', *The New Vision*, 23rd August 2009. Available at <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/692259>; 'Uganda, DR Congo in new border dispute near oil-rich lake', *Agence France-Presse*, 10th June 2009. Available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/ASAZ-7SVG3P?OpenDocument>.

45 Interviews, Ugandan lakeshore communities, Lake Albert, September 2009.

46 These microprojects are implemented through local CSOs and include conservation activities, awareness-raising, fighting erosion and improving agricultural practices.

47 This "early warning system" works in an informal way: when persons cross the borders and are arrested or accused of illegally exploiting resources, informal networks enable calling the person in charge of the project in the other country who intervenes to solve the dispute peacefully. Interviews, Ugandan water management institutions, Kampala, September 2009.

joint management of the resources are to be implemented in the second phase. The *Nile Basin Discourse* (NBD), a civil society forum present in all countries of the NBI as the *Nile Discourse Forum*, acts as an umbrella organisation for the different NGOs working in each country on issues related to the Nile. The Ugandan and the DRC's fora have so far mainly concentrated on national issues, but plan to implement joint activities beginning in 2010. The commitment of its members, its presence at the local level and its transboundary networks are important and could facilitate additional cross-border activities. Furthermore, they offer possible contact for dialogue, agreements and joint activities in water management.⁴⁸

Other projects usually work in one of the countries and take transboundary concerns into account. WWF, for example, implemented the *Lake Albert Eastern Catchment Management Initiative Project* with the aim to improve Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), including on the Congolese bank. Although the project succeeded in establishing contacts with Congolese counterparts, the main activities occurred on the Ugandan side.

In the Ugandan villages surrounding the lakeshores, the districts set up *Beach Management Units* in 2005 to improve decentralised water and fisheries resources management and act as an intermediary between the fishermen and local authorities. However, members of these units, who are often fishermen concerned about resource degradation, work on a voluntary basis and do not dispose of adequate equipment and financial means to exert their tasks. In some of the DRC's communities at the lakeshore, a similar structure called *Unité de Gestion des Ressources en Eaux et de Pêche* (UGREP) exists, but the working conditions prove even more difficult, therefore the impact remains limited. Other initiatives include support by the *Global Environmental Fund* to the *Uganda Fisheries and Fish Conservation Association*, but with limited transboundary activities.

Water cooperation projects in the Lake Albert region have in the past faced similar problems to other development activities in the region, namely: lack of relationships to Congolese institutions (often the temporary absence of these institutions on the ground during and after phases of violent conflict); difficulties of conducting projects in an insecure environment; and lack of governance and commitment from both governments and local authorities. Lack of decentralisation of water policies, related institutions and means cripple effective resource governance at the local and transboundary level. When local authorities are willing to cooperate on water projects, they may face difficulties linked to governance structures: insufficient decentralisation and subsequently lack of political power and financial and human resources of their authority may hamper effective action on the ground if this is not backed by the central government. They also face insufficient political backing to make relevant decisions at the local level, lack the funds to implement policies, and the political and administrative structure necessary to render integrated approaches for water management.

New initiatives in the field of integrated transboundary water resources management are therefore urgently needed, starting with basic activities for improved water governance, data collection, treatment and data sharing, raising awareness as well as capacity-building of local institutions for monitoring water quality and quantity and fishing activities. In order to handle common challenges, projects need to adopt a transboundary and integrated approach from the beginning. Projects conducted simultaneously in both countries can focus on developing similar capacities for water monitoring and management and – on the basis of established contacts – develop common principles, norms and institutions. Due to the recent developments in the region, principles for conflict settlement and a common approach that manages pollution are especially important to integrate in order to prevent violent conflict.

ENERGY AND OIL

OVERVIEW

The eastern part of the DRC and Uganda heavily depend on Kenya for energy imports, which have proven to be irregular in supply and pricing. 'Eastern DRC [is] especially vulnerable, depending for transit on Uganda which in turn depends on Kenya'.⁴⁹ The Lake Albert region does not only depend on foreign energy supply, but suffers from energy shortages as well. On the Ugandan side of the lake, only three percent of the population has access

48 Nile Basin Initiative of the Democratic Republic of Congo (2009). *Local micro grants coordination Goma*. Monthly project follow up, September 2009. Unpublished report.

49 D. Johnson (2003). *Shifting sands: Oil exploration in the Rift Valley and the Congo conflict*. Goma, DR Congo: Pole Institute. p.7.

to electricity.⁵⁰ The people of Ituri receive even less electricity due to lack of infrastructure. Consequently, the main energy source in the region is firewood and imported petroleum.⁵¹

On the Ugandan shores of Lake Albert, exploration of oil reserves started in the last few years. The findings point to important quantities of oil compared to other sources in the Sub-Saharan region. The Ugandan soil alone holds two billion barrels of oil and estimates reach as high as six billion barrels.⁵²

The prospect of oil production is intertwined with rapid changes, hopes and fears in economic, political, social and environmental dimensions. Economic expectations of the oil wealth are very high.

Locals and migrants hope for jobs and better living conditions, speculators and investors seek valuable land and the government envisions itself as independent of oil imports and as a regional supplier. Within Uganda, civil society groups massively mobilise against the production-sharing agreements the government signed with international oil companies and which are not made public. No concrete strategy for the use of the revenues from oil exploitation has been communicated so far by the Ugandan Government. The Ugandan CSO Greenwatch has petitioned the court, requiring the handing over of all contracts concluded between the Government and the international oil companies.⁵³ An oil refinery could cover Ugandan oil demands for 20–25 years, including export supplement to the Great Lakes Region.⁵⁴ This also explains the high political value of the resource, as Uganda could soon become a major regional player if it succeeds in exploiting and refining the oil to sell it to neighbouring countries.

Besides the chances of economic development, the oil findings pose environmental and socio-economic problems as well as security risks. Firstly, while Uganda is already planning oil exploitation and production in the near future, the DRC is still debating who they will give the concessions to. At the same time, the DRC fears Uganda will defraud it. One of the major DRC concerns is that Congolese oil could be extracted from Ugandan soil, thus “stolen” by its neighbour.⁵⁵ These fears are further supported by the fact that Uganda conducts oil test drillings directly on the lakeshore.

Secondly, the tense security situation in the Lake Albert region might worsen. The securitisation of the oil issue is linked to two main concerns of the government: potential involvement of rebel organisations and increasingly critical voices from the local level. Ugandan and Congolese rebel groups are suspected to launch attacks in the oil area, which will eventually be supported by local communities.⁵⁶ Mistrust of local communities and CSOs towards the Ugandan government is already growing. They fear a “second Niger Delta” in the Lake Albert region,⁵⁷ as a lack of transparency and insufficient involvement from local stakeholders exist pertaining to oil-related decisions, that is to say benefit sharing, environmental and social impact assessments and compensation measures.⁵⁸ Suspicion is further fuelled by the fact that the oil companies progress very quickly on the ground and are far

50 NEMA (2009a). Op. cit. p.12.

51 M. Westerkamp, M. Feil and A. Thompson (2009). *Regional cooperation in the Great Lakes: A contribution to peacebuilding?* Regional Cooperation on Environment, Economy and Natural Resource Management Cluster, Initiative for Peacebuilding. p.13.

52 The “petroleum area” starts in the West Nile region and goes downwards to Kasese District. Only 30 percent of the exploration programme has been done so far and it is expected that much more oil is to be found beneath Lake Albert, shared by Uganda and the DRC. NEMA (2009b). Op. cit. p.141; I. Kasita and E. De Temmerman. ‘Two billion barrels of oil confirmed in Uganda’. *The New Vision*, 27th August 2009. Available at <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/692645>.

53 H. Nsambu: ‘NGO sues government over oil deals Monday’, *New Vision Online*, 4th January 2010.

54 Uganda plans to build a refinery to process all domestic crude and supply oil products such as diesel, petrol and naphtha kerosene to the region. ‘Uganda to build oil refinery in Albertine Rift’. *Energy Business Review*, 3rd August 2009. Available at http://oilgasrefining.energy-business-review.com/news/uganda_to_build_oil_refinery_in_albertine_rift_090803; J. Herron (2009). ‘Tullow, Heritage face tough choices on Uganda oil development’. *Rigzone.com*, 29th May 2009. Available at http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a_id=76642; E. Watkins (2009). ‘Uganda to study feasibility of refinery’. *Oil and Gas Journal*, 4th August 2009. Available at http://www.ogj.com/index/article-display/0623053915/s-articles/s-oil-gas-journal/s-processing/s-articles/s-uganda-to_study_feasibility.html; P. Kagenda (2009). ‘Oil revenue could double Uganda’s wealth’. *The Independent*, 7th July 2009. Available at <http://www.independent.co.ug/index.php/cover-story/cover-story/82-cover-story/1169-oil-revenue-could-double-ugandas-wealth>.

55 Interview, Ugandan CSOs, September 2009.

56 Interviews, Ugandan CSOs, August and September 2009; ‘Uganda rebels plotting oil attacks’. *Upstream Online*, 22nd June 2009. Available at <http://www.upstreamonline.com/live/article181533.ece>.

57 The fear of a “second Niger Delta” refers to the occurrences in Nigeria. Though the Delta is rich in oil resources that are commercially exploited, oil revenues do seldom reach the area. Hence, instead of being an economically prosperous area, the Niger Delta faces great environmental and security risks.

58 Herron (2009). Op. cit.

ahead of local governmental officials, communities and CSOs in terms of technical know-how, financial and human capacities.⁵⁹

Thirdly, neither Uganda nor the DRC are prepared for the socio-economic shifts that the communities in the Lake Albert region will face. Many villages struggle to cope with the influx of migrants and support measures for urban planning, housing, livelihoods and social infrastructure are lacking as well. As a result, tensions between ethnic groups are rising. Moreover, the increasing presence of UPDF in the border region may exacerbate political and social unrest.

Fourthly, due to oil extraction, water and land pollution may occur and place additional pressure on already stressed livelihoods.⁶⁰ Decreasing water quality and quantity (as water is needed for the extraction process) may negatively impact local communities and wildlife, including on the Congolese side. NEMA stated that 'the currently worrying status of fishery resources in the region would be greatly exacerbated by oil spills or pollution resulting from oil development activities'.⁶¹

Consequently, the extraction and refinery process in the Lake Albert region entails major environmental, political and socio-economic changes with probable negative effects on security at the local and the transboundary level.

POTENTIALS FOR COOPERATION AND CHALLENGES

Oil exploitation in the Lake Albert region does pose great risks for conflict, yet provides important opportunities for cooperation between Uganda and the DRC as well. Ugandan-Congolese relations are entirely affected by the oil issue at governmental and local levels. One way or another, all other transboundary issues of natural resource management in the Lake Albert region are – or will be – affected by oil exploitation in the area. Therefore, it will be crucial to find cooperative ways for dealing with the exploitation of the resource, but also with the negative social and environmental impacts.

International Alert asserts that political and technical cooperation leading to a Joint Production Agreement (JPA) between Uganda and the DRC is necessary to fully exploit the oil resource.⁶² In spite of this need, however, according to local interviewees, the chances of success for an institutional framework for jointly managed oil resources in the near future are low. Further and larger-scale conflicts may even erupt when oil exploitation in Uganda commences.⁶³ However, several meetings between the presidents have taken place, including joint declarations of goodwill to resolve disagreements over the oil exploitation. The meetings are part of an acknowledgement process towards normalising relations between the two states, yet the bilateral process of cooperation is still very superficial and highly fragile. The successful implementation of the agreement depends on the legitimacy of the states and functioning governance structures in the Lake Albert region. In Uganda, first steps are being taken to implement the results of the meetings in the ministries of foreign affairs and energy.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, in Ituri, the prompt and full implementation of governmental decisions is unlikely as government legitimacy is lacking and state structures are deficient.

While joint management of other natural resources in the region can also be effectively addressed by local stakeholders, cooperation on the oil issue requires the collaboration of both national governments. In the face of the upcoming national elections as well as at the regional level, oil exploitation is a top priority and a highly sensitive issue for Uganda's President Museveni. Interview partners in Uganda were therefore very doubtful that the present context offers opportunities for mediation to occur.

However, Great Lakes regional institutions have facilitated bi- and multilateral agreements on benefit-sharing from joint natural resource exploitation and management in other cases. The Communauté Economique des

59 Interview, Ugandan CSO, August 2009.

60 D. Katusiime 'Like oil, our environment is equally very important'. Available at http://www.afiego-ug.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=1.

61 NEMA (2009a). Op. cit. p.17.

62 International Alert (2009). Op. cit. p.68, 71, 73.

63 Interviews, Ugandan and international institutions, August and September 2009.

64 Interview, Ugandan governmental institution, September 2009; B. Augé (2009). *Border conflicts tied to hydrocarbons in the Great Lakes Region of Africa*. Institut Francais des Relations Internationales (IFRI). p.177.

Pays des Grands Lacs (CEPGL), for example, implemented the trilateral joint-venture SINELAC, an entity for the joint management of the hydropower dam of Ruzizi II.⁶⁵ Considering the recent wars in the region, this cooperation between Burundian, Congolese and Rwandan electricity agencies is remarkable and allows electricity to continuously supply the region, even during the wars.⁶⁶ Another joint venture that jointly exploits methane gas from Lake Kivu between the same three countries was initiated in 2009. In spite of the large discrepancy between the Rwandese and the Congolese with respect to expectations from the project and dependency on energy supply,⁶⁷ the project was finally implemented. These two positive developments may serve – besides all critiques – as a window of opportunity for jointly managing the oil resources at Lake Albert.

At the local level, transboundary cooperation on the oil issue can progress through bilateral or regional networks. In the context of transparency initiatives and within the conservation community, bilateral contacts exist and CSOs have taken first steps for joint communications and measures. For example, the Ugandan CSOs Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE), the Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) and the National Association of Professional Environmentalists in Uganda (NAPE) work closely together to improve sustainable exploitation of the resource. They advocate for transparency and accountability of governments and oil companies by supporting Publish What You Pay (PWYP) and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in Uganda and the DRC as well as through joint cooperation measures across borders. Moreover, they help to enable local communities to tackle their problems related to the oil findings and strengthen peacebuilding through awareness-raising and capacity-building.

The CSOs stress the importance of strengthening local capacities by intensifying cross-border relations. Improving data collection on the quantity and quality of natural resources and sharing the data between countries are key aspects in this regard. However, the transboundary work of the CSOs is still in its initial phases and the security and governance problems in the Congolese part of the Lake Albert region render common activities difficult.

65 Further information about SINELAC, CEPGL and regional cooperation potential in Westerkamp et al. (2009). Op. cit.

66 Compare Westerkamp et al. (2009). Op. cit.

67 See also A. Houdret and C. Roettger (2010). Op. cit.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study on Lake Albert confirms the latter's crucial importance for the Ugandan-Congolese relationship. The increasing securitisation and militarisation of environmental and natural resource issues in the region is not only provoked by national security concerns, but also by increasing competition at the local level. The box below summarises the major causes of transboundary tensions and conflicts in the field of natural resources. In spite of this politicised environment, windows of opportunity are opening and should be utilised in order to improve peacebuilding within and between the two riparian states.

Root causes of transboundary conflicts in the Lake Albert Region include:

- **Lack of trust between the two governments** due to the recent history, and exacerbated suspicions related to the oil findings.
- **Lack of regulation and decentralised policy measures and/or the implementation thereof for natural resource use and their increased degradation and depletion.**
- **Ineffective governance** to enforce regulations and laws; the DRC also lacks local institutions for enforcement.
- **Inadequate measures** to address the high influx of migrants, urban planning, housing, livelihoods and social infrastructure.
- **Lack of formally recognised and trusted partners** for the mediation, prevention and resolution of natural resources and other conflicts at the local level.
- **Lack of security** due to the high and still increasing militarisation of the region and ongoing rebel activities in the surroundings.

President Museveni seems to view the control of the oil resources as not only a central objective of his power in Uganda, but also at the regional level. This may provide a new entry point for improved relations with the DRC, when both countries seize opportunities for benefit-sharing. Such opportunities need to be systematically assessed and subsequent scenarios developed jointly by the two parties.

At the local level for both countries, sharing revenues from the oil sector can improve government legitimacy if invested for the improvement of livelihoods and employment. However, these opportunities in the oil sector as well as in the fields of environment, water, fisheries and energy cooperation can only yield significant results if they succeed a) in linking local to national-level decision-makers and b) in building coalitions between the two countries based on broad alliances that move beyond the personal relationship between statesmen. In this context, the role of donor agencies is to clearly stress cooperation potentials at all levels, contribute to conflict prevention by mainstreaming conflict-sensitivity in all programmes, and enhance peacebuilding opportunities by timely intervention, building on established relationships and local networks.

The present conclusion identifies six essential premises for sustainable transboundary natural resource management between Uganda and the DRC, and proposes concrete recommendations for the implementation of related activities. Moreover, it builds upon the key findings of the synthesis report from the IfP Cluster “Regional Cooperation on Natural Resources, Environment and Economy” with respect to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.⁶⁸ The recommendations are primarily addressed to the European Union as well as other bi- and multilateral donor organisations. However, while these institutions can provide relevant support, the problems identified can only be tackled by genuine local and regional approaches that mobilise relevant actors, spread positive experiences vertically and horizontally, and contribute to increased peacebuilding in the Lake Albert region.

The present study reveals how pressure on the environment triggers conflict in the surroundings of Lake Albert, but also highlights opportunities. Donors and development organisations need to build upon the links between the environment and peacebuilding for preventing violent conflict and enforcing sustainable development in this important area of the Great Lakes region.

Lake Albert provides a crucial opportunity for early action. Firstly, it crystallises the links between the environment, conflict and peacebuilding and shows how progress at the local transboundary level can directly contribute to the stabilisation of bilateral relations.

Secondly, the region presents multiple environmental challenges, but also promotes vivid local initiatives that work on resource governance while at the same time addressing inter-communal relationships. This probably offers a much more efficient way to address tension than individual peacebuilding programmes.

Finally, this is a region where many of the current focal themes of development cooperation are interlinked: poverty reduction and resource governance and also conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The setting therefore offers a unique opportunity for implementing comprehensive peacebuilding approaches including poverty reduction and resource governance, and for addressing several priorities at the same time. The following concluding section proposes six premises for successful transboundary natural resource cooperation in the region.

PREMISES I & II: TRUST-BUILDING AND OWNERSHIP

Mistrust between quarrelling parties and an aversion to communicating openly can severely hamper transboundary cooperation. Trust-building and ownership, based on the common interests, aspirations and needs of the parties, therefore offer essential premises for long-term cooperation. However, as findings from other regions show, conflict parties must consider common interests important enough to overcome their resentments towards each other and show a willingness to cooperate. External intervention in such settings can only be successful if conflict parties maintain ownership of the process, as ‘only people engaged in and affected by a conflict can transform it into sustainable peace’.⁶⁹ The true interest of all groups in the society and their active involvement at the grassroots, intermediary and high political levels are key ingredients in this process.⁷⁰ Highlighting best practices of conflict prevention and peacebuilding can be an important measure to strengthen trust and build ownership.

In the case of Lake Albert, lack of trust is particularly visible with respect to oil exploitation. Both regional and bilateral relations have been deeply wounded by the recent past. Uganda’s occupation of Ituri and support of rebel organisations, its involvement in Congolese natural resource exploitation, and the Ugandan government’s ambitions to gain more regional power are probable points of friction in this respect. In addition to the historical context, trust-building is also hindered by more technical issues such as differing languages, cross-border restrictions and the lack of infrastructure and data on the environment and resources.⁷¹ Any activity with a real or

68 The synthesis report of the first IfP phase summarises the key findings of research on regional cooperation in four cases: the Middle East, the Caucasus, Latin America and the Great Lakes. The reports are available at <http://www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu>.

69 M. Feil, D. Klein and M. Westerkamp (2009). *Regional cooperation on environment, economy and natural resource management: How can it contribute to peacebuilding?* Synthesis Report, *Regional Cooperation on Environment, Economy and Natural Resource Management Cluster, Initiative for Peacebuilding*. Available at www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu/publications/index.php. p.12.

70 J.-P. Lederach (1994). *Building peace. Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Harrisonburg.

71 Interviews, non-governmental organisations and public authorities, Kampala and Lake Albert, August and September 2009.

perceived negative transboundary impact, such as oil drilling, instigates mistrust and is prone to misunderstanding. As high politicisation levels and increasing securitisation of the oil issue make it a very sensitive topic in bilateral relations, strengthening ownership and trust may be more easily achieved first through other entry points, and should in any case be based on existing initiatives and networks. The recommendations below propose activities and approaches in this respect.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING TRUST-BUILDING AND OWNERSHIP.

Reinforce sustainable management of natural resources; these are key issues of concern for local communities and governments on both lakeshores, and their utilisation and preservation is of common interest. Fisheries and forest protection as well as land ownership and utilisation are particularly relevant in this regard. Besides the utilisation and preservation of natural resources, joint strategies to adapt to environmental degradation and scarcity present promising entry points.

Identify environmental standards and rules, including their adequacy and effective application. On this basis, harmonise these rules and create common networks for their implementation and monitoring. Weak governance, especially in eastern DRC, renders this activity difficult, but local organisations in both countries can significantly contribute to developing shared norms, guidelines and benefit-sharing agreements.

Keep local needs and interests at the centre of transboundary activities, as they provide opportunities for concrete benefit-sharing, create ownership and thereby enforce compliance. Strengthen awareness of the role of users for natural resource protection and sustainable management both locally and in a transboundary context. Provide adequate alternative income opportunities and livelihoods to support natural resource protection.

Build upon broad coalitions for sustainable peacebuilding. Joint resource management should involve public authorities, CSOs, local communities and the private sector. Besides existing cooperation structures of CSOs, potential counterparts for joint activities include governmental authorities at the district and local levels of both countries (including the less formal Beach Management Units), which can strengthen legitimacy and ownership throughout the process. Informal contacts between committed individuals can significantly help foster relationships and solve problems.

Common institutions for improved resource governance should be created on the basis of in-depth stakeholder analysis and include specific conflict-settlement mechanisms as well as a clear structure of the institution. Beyond resolving conflicting issues, this can contribute to creating shared collective identities and render violent conflicts less probable.⁷²

Build on legitimate existing initiatives and networks to facilitate ownership and trust-building in a highly politicised environment. Frequent meetings and joint activities with all stakeholders help to institutionalise contacts and improve communication, resolve misunderstandings and overcome suspicions. Organisations such as NBI, AFIEGO, NAPE, ACODE, WWF and others provide opportunities in this respect.

Make use of the two-fold potential of joint resource management: this improves the quality, quantity and equitable allocation of resources. At the same time, the stakeholders also benefit from joint governance mechanisms for trust-building at the vertical level (local and national stakeholders) as well as on the horizontal level (between public, civil society and private actors; between Ugandan and Congolese stakeholders). The joint resources management should apply the ecosystem approach which is a comprehensive strategy for integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way.

⁷² For further accounts see also P. Kameri-Mbote (2007). Op. cit. p.5; K. Conca and G. Dabelko (2002). *Environmental peacemaking*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.10.

PREMISES III & IV: SYMMETRY BETWEEN PARTIES AND INCLUSION OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS

The IfP synthesis report states that asymmetries in power relations, benefits, communication and information jeopardise regional cooperation. Moreover, the exclusion of some stakeholders makes them prone to becoming spoilers to the cooperation effort. With respect to Ugandan-Congolese relations and the current structure of bilateral agreements, lack of symmetry and inclusion of all stakeholders into the process are clear problems.

Asymmetry is particularly visible with respect to governance structures. The DRC is one of the most fragile states in the world, struggling with unstable state governance in the eastern provinces. In the aftermath of the two Congo Wars, Ituri is still insecure, suffering from a weak rule of law and administration, corruption and fraud. Uganda, on the other hand, is currently (as of 2010) more stable than its neighbour, with relatively reliable political institutions, even if the legitimacy and capacities of local authorities are limited. The developmental status of both countries also reflects their asymmetry, a problem which is often linked to the weak security situation on the Congolese side. Offering a more stable political environment and fewer security problems than its neighbour, Uganda has been able to significantly progress on oil exploration, which in turn further increases the asymmetry between both countries.

Asymmetry at the transboundary level is further complicated by internal political inequalities. Politics in Uganda and the DRC are highly personalised, which tends to exclude some stakeholders from the political processes. Bilateral agreements and projects often lack the integration of local communities and CSOs or even local governments.⁷³ CSOs in Uganda and the DRC also complain about the lack of transparency and the antagonistic relations between local and national structures, even if the administration ought to be engaged.⁷⁴

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING SYMMETRY AND THE INCLUSION OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS.

Address existing asymmetries when designing cooperation initiatives. This includes acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses as well as the different skills and capacities of the parties, and identifying the impact of these inequalities in the process and its presumed output. Furthermore, cooperation initiatives must consider different legal and institutional settings, unequal security and infrastructure situations, as well as differing cultural and social backgrounds.

Support the active participation of all relevant stakeholders across and within national borders. Negotiation processes need to integrate all parties, but in some cases, their capacities need to be reinforced in order to avoid asymmetries. Supporting measures for marginalised groups including women may include the provision of resources and tools as well as raising awareness. Existing activities from CSOs in Uganda and the DRC can provide entry points in this regard, but need to be complemented with the focus on awareness-raising, communication and specific target groups.

Consider the objectives and potential “hidden agendas” of stakeholders to prevent the emergence of spoilers. Potential spoilers might hamper transboundary cooperation, if conflict prevention and collaboration are not in their genuine interest. For example, in the Lake Albert region, stakeholders express fears that rebel organisations or ethnic groups may become active against oil exploitation as they are not benefitting from it. In regards to protected area management, compensation of local communities for the loss of fertile land and support for growing crops or cattle grazing may prevent potential spoilers of environmental protection activities from emerging.

Ensure transparency and accountability and non-corruption in decision-making processes, information and communication between local inhabitants, local or national governments and private companies. Transparency and the availability of information (on resource quality, development plans, etc.) are key guarantees for the possibility of participation in related processes. The case of the unpublished oil contracts between the national

⁷³ Interview, Ugandan governmental institution, September 2009.

⁷⁴ Interviews, Ugandan CSOs, Kampala and Lake Albert, August and September 2009; AFIEGO (2008). *Governance of extractive resources in the Albertine Rift Conference: A Uganda and DR Congo civil society perspective*. Proceedings Report. 5th September 2008, Kampala, Uganda: AFIEGO, p.7.

government and the extracting companies shows how lack of transparency can lead to conflict and difficulties when engaging in the process.

Bridge disparities in international projects and negotiation processes, thereby facilitating a common understanding between Uganda and the DRC on issues and joint approaches. Symmetry can be improved through capacity-building, but also via better data availability and joint assessments on environmental issues, as well as scenarios for shared resource governance.

Promote common standards and rules as these allow for transparent negotiations and policy design and implementation in the field of TBNRM. These standards and rules concern the collection and sharing of data, the work and design of institutions, the allocation of financial and human capacities by third parties as well as managing conflicts.

PREMISES V & VI: CONFLICT-SENSITIVITY AND MULTIPLIER EFFECTS

The key findings related to conflict-sensitivity⁷⁵ and strategies for effecting change by building upon “multiplier effects”⁷⁶ highlight opportunities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding through the integration of peace and conflict-analysis frameworks in transboundary cooperation approaches. However, ‘only when cooperation initiatives in one area [such as natural resource management] lead to and coincide with a change in structures, attitudes and behaviours causing the conflict, do they genuinely contribute to sustainable peacebuilding’.⁷⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING CONFLICT-SENSITIVITY AND MULTIPLIER EFFECTS.

Consider the root causes of conflicts in transboundary cooperation efforts by adjusting the scope, structure and objectives of the projects so that they promote equal benefit-sharing and opportunities, avoid marginalising stakeholders and avoid negative side-effects. This includes the mainstreaming of conflict-sensitivity in TBNRM initiatives, but also in other projects. The “do no harm” approach provides useful measures in this regard, which can be further developed to include a transboundary perspective.⁷⁸

Evaluate existing local coping strategies and structures of cooperation in the Lake Albert region in the social and environmental context and beyond. This allows identifying local capacities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Family and tribal ties, for example, help solve local problems in natural resource management and establish institutions and structures, especially on the DRC side where the government is weak and institutions are not prevalent. Adaptation to the economic and social effects of resource degradation is also happening on the ground, but little is being assessed.

Proclaim conflict-prevention and peacebuilding objectives only when there are realistic prospects of progress in this regard. Unrealistically high expectations in this context cannot be met. Likewise, insufficient financial, technical and human resources cannot be met, which may not only limit the scope of action, but also cause disappointment and create less ownership for the peace processes.

Identify opportunities for up-scaling positive experiences without, however, neglecting the specific local context. Therefore, initiatives for up-scaling or transferring experiences should ensure strong political backing, active local participation, adequate financing, and adaptability to the new setting.

75 The term “conflict-sensitivity” implies the understanding of the (conflict) context, the understanding of the interactions between the operations and the (conflict) context and the action upon the understanding of this interaction in order to prevent negative impacts and support positive impacts on the (conflict) situation. For more information, see ConflictSensitivity.org website ‘The Resource Pack’ accessed 30th November 2009. Available at http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/resource_pack.html.

76 The term “multiplier effects” in the context of this report refers to the expansion of cooperation on other levels, vertically and horizontally.

77 M. Feil et al. (2009). Op. cit. p.13.

78 M. B. Anderson (2000). *Options for aid in conflict: Lessons from field experience*. Cambridge: Collaborative for Development Action.

Benefit from insights and knowledge from other cases where natural resource management and peacebuilding has yielded positive results, either in other regions of Uganda,⁷⁹ in a transboundary context,⁸⁰ or in other countries.⁸¹ Even though there are no blueprints for transferring peacebuilding experiences, some of the lessons learned may be adapted to the respective context.

Choose efficient and legitimate partners with a strong institutional and personal network to create opportunities for multiplier effects. The report proposes some of these potential partners, foremost local and international CSOs, but also governmental institutions working on the ground. A key criterion for effective multipliers is their function as intermediaries at the horizontal and/or vertical level.⁸² Support should not only focus on such intermediaries between the DRC and Uganda, between CSOs, public authorities and the private sector, but also between local, national and international institutions in natural resource management.

Develop mechanisms for participative monitoring and evaluation of all measures, including all relevant stakeholder groups. The EU and other donors should designate appropriate local institutions following up these processes.

79 See for example P. C. Sanginga, R. N. Kamugisha and A. M. Martin (2007). 'The dynamics of social capital and conflict management in multiple resource regimes: A case of the southwestern highlands of Uganda'. *Ecology and Society*, 12(1): 6.

80 See A. Houdret and C. Roettger (2010). *Op. cit.*

81 See the other case studies of the IfP project.

82 See J. P. Lederach (2000). 'Les niveaux de leadership' in L. Reychler, T. Paffenholz (Eds.). *Construire la paix sur le terrain*. Bruxelles: Mode d'emploi, p.161-172.

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