



Impacts of Climate Change to a fishing community in Homa Bay

Left: The "Nyapus" fish which is used as bait for the Nile Perch

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Kenya - Working in the Devolution and Climate Change Adaptation program (DaCCA) has been an eye opener and a learning experience for me. During the program's introduction, we held several meetings with the community leaders and representatives from several community groups within the program's targeted wards. Wang Chieng' ward in Homa Bay County particularly stood out as a ward that was plagued by various challenges associated with the changing climate. As a ward laden with beaches- most of them fish landing sites- the beaches are always a buzz of activities. From our constant interactions with these beach communities, two issues kept being mentioned by the Community Health Volunteers; the '**nyapus**' menace and **water pollution** at the fish landing sites. According to them, these two posed a health hazard to the community members. The frequency at which this statement was being mentioned triggered my curiosity and this pushed me to find out more about the '**nyapus**' and the process of harvesting this delicacy to the community members since I had no idea what it was.

During my investigation, I was surprised to find out that the so called 'nyapus' is a small fish used as a bait for Nile perch. Nile perch is a fish which has high demand. In a good day, the fishermen can get one fish weighing up to 100kgs and this can sell for an estimated cost of Kshs: 30,000. Because of this, the fishermen would pay dearly to get the bait (nyapus).

On the other hand, the process of getting this bait requires women to physically look for the 'nyapus' by wadding their hands in dirty water which has reeds, snakes and rotten water hyacinth for hours. During this process of staying in the water for more than 5-8 hours a day, their skin becomes porous and susceptible to bilharzia, typhoid and other water borne diseases which are life threatening.

Because of changes in climate which have interfered with fish breeding, the fish population has sharply declined. On the flip side, water pollution favors the proliferation of the water hyacinth weed. This weed provides a good breeding site for 'nyapus'.

The presence of Water hyacinth at the fish landing sites and back flow of Lake Victoria which was caused by the Indian Ocean dipole phenomenon, has affected all the six fish landing sites in Wangchieng ward except one- Rambira Beach. Presently, the fishing activities have relocated to this one beach that has been fortunately unaffected. This has resulted into massive water pollution caused by trampling of rotten water hyacinth.

Below: The Nile perch which can weigh up to 100kg



Above: Rotten water hyacinth at the fish landing site

There is therefore a need to decongest Rambira beach which is the only active beach being used by all the fisher folk in Wangchieng' ward. This can be done by sensitizing the community members to diversify their sources of income and reduce dependency on fishing. There is also a need for a concerted effort to sensitize the community members on impacts of pollution to their health and environment.