Uganda: Managing Water Hyacinth Infestations

Operating Units: USAID/REDSO ESA and USAID/Uganda
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Related USAID/Uganda Strategic Objective:
SO 2: Critical Ecosystems Conserved to Sustain Biological Diversity and to Enhance Benefits to Society

The noxious weed water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) was unintentionally introduced into Lake Victoria, the world's second-largest freshwater lake, probably during the 1950s. The weed now covers over 40,000 hectares of the lake and its watershed. This infestation threatens both the ecological health of the lake, and the livelihoods of lakeshore communities that depend for their income on lacustrine resources such as fish. Large-scale business and trade was also negatively affected when the port areas became inaccessible and water intake pipes for dams were blocked. Some port towns on the lake have recorded as much as a 70 percent decline in economic activity because the hyacinth has choked landing facilities and fishing grounds. With support from Greater Horn of Africa Initiative (GHAI) funds, USAID/Uganda's natural resources management program is working to mitigate the environmental and economic impact of the water hyacinth infestation.

The USAID program supports three key areas of intervention technical coordination, regional consensus and capacity-building, and operational support for water hyacinth control. Significant achievements have been recorded in all three of these areas. In the area of technical coordination, USAID has worked with key partners, including the East African Cooperation, to integrate its activities into the seven projects that comprise the regional strategy for controlling aquatic weeds in East Africa. Progress is also being made in finalizing a regional management and control plan based on this strategy.

USAID support has also been instrumental in building regional cooperation by securing the approval of five regional partners (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi) to use Uganda's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for water hyacinth control as a model EIA for the entire Lake Victoria basin. Another USAID-supported initiative is a regional water hyacinth monitoring program using remote sensing and geographical information systems (GIS). This cooperative venture with the U. S. Geological Survey EROS Data Center will become fully operational in mid-2000.

There has been a significant reduction in the distribution of water hyacinth in Lake Victoria over the past two years, due in part to USAID's operational support for control measures. Aggressive mechanical removal has been implemented in key locations such as the Owens Falls Dam and municipal water supply intakes. Two species of weevils that feed on the water hyacinth have also been released into the lake, accounting for localized reductions in water hyacinth vigor. The USAID program has also trained scientists and technicians in Rwanda and Burundi in the rearing and use of weevils in biological control, and a release program is planned for 2000 in the Kagera River, a key source of infestation that drains to

the lake.

USAID will continue to support measures to combat the water hyacinth menace in Lake Victoria, and is examining the prospects for implementing elements of the program in other threatened watersheds.