**Project Update: April 2018:**

Reporting period; 21stApril 2017 to 20th April 2018

Brief introduction:

The project was aimed at fostering recovery of the populations of critically native tilapia fishes namely; Victoria tilapia (*Oreochromis variabilis*) and Singidia tilapia (*Oreochromis esculentus*) on lakes Kayanja and Kayugi. In order to achieve project goal, we worked with Fish Conservation Committees (FCCs) and other stakeholders including public, district and local leaders to undertake various conservation activities namely: (a) daily surveillance to protect the mapped breeding and nursery areas, and safe havens of these threatened native tilapia fishes established on lakes Kayanja and Kayugi, (b) monitoring of the populations and abundance of critically endangered native fishes in the two lakes and (c) awareness creation through landing site talks, schools outreach and direct involvements of FCCs in protecting and monitoring of threats to fish fauna and their habitats. The capacity and knowledge of school pupils and their teachers from schools near these lakes were also raised and built on the conservation status of native tilapia fish and their habitats. The main conservation impacts or achievements of the project recorded included:

(a) Recovery of the populations of threatened native tilapia fishes has been observed on both lakes according to the findings gathered during the quarterly fish surveys undertaken to monitor changes in populations of native tilapia fishes. These findings concurred with reports from fishermen which indicated Singidia tilapia (*Oreochromis esculentus*) being frequently encountered on their daily fish catch from the two lakes. Additionally, other fish species like African catfish currently being caught from these lakes are of good marketable sizes weighing between 0.5 and 2 kg. This is helping fishermen to boost their household.

(b) The numbers of endangered grey-crowned crane at Lake Kayanja catchment areas has substantially increased; this could have been attributed to the reduction in habitats destruction, modification, fragmentation and loss of riparian vegetation.

(c) The cage fish farming of Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) which competes aggressively with native tilapia fishes like *Oreochromis esculentus* for food, spawning, and nursery grounds has been stopped on Lake Kayanja. This has facilitated recovery the populations of critically endangered native tilapia fishes.

(d) There is increased commitment and enthusiasm of fishing communities and public to conserve fish fauna and their habitats. This was witnessed from their involvement in undertaking various activities like awareness creation, daily surveillance of critical habitats of fish and sharing of their local knowledge to better manage these lakes.

(e) The attitude and behaviour of fishermen changed positively to better manage and protect aquatic fauna and their habitats through awareness creation and involving them directly on implementation of project activities.

(f) School pupils groomed and trained to become future ambassadors for fish and other aquatic biodiversity conservation.

Challenges encountered:

(a) Use of destructive fishing techniques like longlines within the mapped breeding and nursery sites of native tilapia fishes, particularly on Lake Kayanja. The FCC team and other stakeholders have been addressing this challenge by conducting a more robust sensitisation of culprits on the importance of these critical habitats in relation to improving fish stock. Additionally, the FCC team and other stakeholders are in advance stage of coming up with sustainable solutions to address this challenge which may include stopping the use of long lines fishing techniques on these lakes.
(b) Lack of motorised boat for efficient and effective patrol of these lakes, However the FCC team has been using non-motorised boat to undertake patrol activities but it's much slower in terms of response time.
(c) Illegal fishing at created No Take Zones (NTZs) by some fishermen, and the culprits were sensitised more on the relevance and benefits of these zones to facilitating fish stock recovery.

Next Plan of Action:

(a) Continue to work with FCC teams to protect and monitor recovery of the populations of threatened native tilapia fishes on lakes Kayanja and Kayugi.
(b) Continue to conduct more awareness about the conservation status of threatened fish species and their habitats among youth, fishermen and other stakeholders.
(c) Continue to work with fishermen to conserve and protect critical fish habitats and safe havens mapped on lakes Kayanja and Kayugi.

Left: Preparation of Rafts and nets for quarterly fish survey on Lake Kayugi. Right: FCC team and Researcher monitoring unwarranted activities on Lake Kayanja.

Left: Singidia Tilapia and African catfish caught during monitoring of the recovery of fish populations on Lake Kayugi. Right: Fish caught from Lake Kayanja during quarterly monitoring of the recovery of fish populations.