# Water for Life

## Ethiopia: Partnership for a joint sustainable future of Lake Tana Watershed

Lake Tana Watershed covers about 15,000 km² including Lake Tana's water body - photo: P. Schütz

Lake Tana Watershed in North-west Ethiopia is the main source of life for millions of people. It supplies drinking water, watering for agriculture, food, energy and means of transport. But rapid population growth, intensified land use, climate change, industrialization with textile factories, tanneries and rice and flower farming, are taking its tolls on the ecosystems and their functionality.  
  
Effects such as eutrophication, dwindling fish stocks, invasive water hyacinths and declining water quantity and quality threaten the livelihoods of millions of people in Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt.  
  
Various, usually only very local, attempts to sustain and secure water quality and access to quality water have been made. But, until now, not all relevant actors and stakeholders have been involved in a targeted manner for a concerted action and positive change.  
  
With this multi-stakeholder-partnership NABU plans to connect and ally actors to ensure long-term access to safe drinking water, functional ecosystem services and sustainable sources of income in the Lake Tana Watershed.   
  
The project is supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

One of the many stakeholders of the project: fishermen in the traditional papyrus boat – photo: Philipp Schütz

Tourism and transport are amongst the growing sectors on the lake. – photo: Angelika Berndt

The watershed is dominated by smallholders’ agriculture, remnants of the former forest are only left at the so-called church forests. - photo: Bruno D’Amicis

Pollution is a serious threat to the watershed. - photo: Philipp Schütz

Pressure on wetlands and species: growing agricultural use – photo: Philipp Schütz

Access to safe drinking water is still a challenge for many communities. - photo: P. Schütz

An invasive species challenging the ecosystem: water hyacinth – photo: Bruno D’Amicis

Erosion causes heavy loss of fertile soils and influx of sediments into the lake – photo: Bruno D’Amicis

NABU involves local stakeholders into running activities of all kinds – photo: Bruno D’Amicis

Kicking off the project: first stakeholder conference in 2019 – photo: NABU

### Project facts

**Project title**  
Water for Life – Partnership for a joint sustainable future of Lake Tana watershed  
  
**Country**  
Ethiopia  
  
**Period**  
August 2019 to December 2022  
  
**Partners**  
see dropdown menu below  
  
**Sponsored by / Supported by**  
The project is supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)  
  
**With this project we are contributing to the following SDGs**  
SDG 6, SDG 12, SDG 14 and SDG 17.

#### More details

### Goal and project governance

Our common goal

Our aim is to jointly develop and establish a representative and sustainably anchored multi-stakeholder-partnership (MSP) structure, which ensures continued access to clean water and ecosystem resilience at Lake Tana Watershed, balancing development needs with conservation.

The project’s intervention logic

The partnership, involving all relevant actors and stakeholders in the area, is facilitating exchange and cooperation across sectors in order to reduce root causes for poverty and migration by  
a)    developing an integrated strategy to maintain, and where required to restore, the physical and biological integrity of the watershed,  
b)    supporting policy change and law development and reinforcement,  
c)    piloting cross-sectorial programs targeting key threats,  
d)    increasing awareness and changing behaviour and  
e)    strengthening of civil society for the purpose of enhanced nature conservation.

Governance of the project

NABU's role is to facilitate and steer processes for the multi-stakeholder-partnership. In the first phase of the project, governance structures have been developed and adopted with key actors. The project works as follows:

The Initiation Committee has been jointly set up for starting the project’s processes. Through the first stakeholder conference, the Water for Life Board was elected by key stakeholders. The board is supported by the Water for Life Secretariat. Amongst the many stakeholders, jointly six Working Groups on relevant work topics have been set up. Results and achievements of the working groups are being reported regularly on board meetings and annual stakeholder conferences. You can check details about the involved institutions by clicking on the graph below.

[CLICK TO ENLARGE] Overview of the governance structure in the "Water for Life" multi-stakeholder-partnership model (MSP) | graph: NABU

### Partners and actors

The multi-stakeholder-partnership (MSP) is an opportunity to connect the multiple actors at Lake Tana watershed by working towards jointly set goals. The project is targeting 29 districts of the Lake Tana watershed including the area of the Lake Tana biosphere reserve.

Key actors for the partnership—with diverse and sometimes conflicting interests—consist of the regional government as well as the municipal and district administrations, civil society organisations, local population, the commercial sector and science representatives. They will be involved in participatory decision-making and transparent information sharing. Based on decisions taken in agreement with the stakeholders, the project will support practical actions on the ground.

Key Actors

...are Amhara Regional Government (Environment, Forest and Wildlife Protection and Development Authority (EFWPDA), Lake Tana and other Water Bodies Protection and Development Agency (LToWBPDA), Bureau of Agriculture (BoA), Bureau of Finance and Economic Cooperation (BoFEC) and Bureau of Culture and Tourism (BoCT) with their line departments and offices at zonal Woreda and Kebele level.

Private sector (large-scale farms (flower, rice, vegetables), factories (textile/leather), cooperatives (honey/coffee/other), tourism companies and business associations (fishery, tourism, boat owners, hotels, tour guides). Further actors include Community-based organisations and associations (e.g. cooperatives, user associations) as well as Local communities (e.g. farmers, water users).

Second level actors

...are universities and research institutions (Bahir Dar University, Gondar, Debre Tabor and Enjibara, Amhara Agricultural Research Institute (ARARI), Federal Forest and Environment Research Institute, Abay Basin Authority), civil society organisations (e.g. Amhara Development Association (ADA), Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA), Bees for Development (Biological Society of Ethiopia), as well as religious organisations.

On a federal government level actors include the Ministry of Water Irrigation and Electricity (MoWIE), Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Environment, Forest and Climate Change Commission (EFCCC) as well as International development aid organisations (e.g. GIZ, JICA, DANIDA).

### About Lake Tana Watershed

The Lake Tana Watershed, in the North-west of the country, stretches over 15,000 km2 covering Lake Tana, its tributary rivers, seasonally flooded plains and extensive wetlands. It is located in the heart of the Amhara National Regional State in North-western Ethiopia, about 560 kilometres from Addis Ababa. The lake itself, which counts for one third of the watershed, is Ethiopia’s largest lake and provides together with its numerous tributaries about 50% of Ethiopia’s fresh water resources. It serves as natural flood control, collecting waters from the upper catchment while allowing a controlled outlet by forming the foundation of the Blue Nile River. The water of the lake and its 60 tributaries (major rivers: Gilgel Abay, Rib, Gumara, Megech, Dirma, Geldaw and Arno Garno) is the base for diverse services to local communities, cities and industries such as water for drinking and agriculture, food supply (e.g. fish), means of transport, fertile grounds for agriculture, electricity generation, and all sorts of income related to national and international tourism, targeting the numerous churches and monasteries of the area. The diverse habitats in the watershed host a diverse water life with threatened birds, endemic forest islands and endemic fish species. The area is home to almost four million people, 80% of whom are living of subsistence agriculture depending on natural resources. The watershed covers four administrative zones, 29 districts (Woredas) and 429 Kebeles (smallest administrative unit). The watershed hosts the cities of Gondar, Debre Tabor and Bahir Dar, the latter being the regional capital.

Ecosystems under pressure  
Water quality and quantity of Lake Tana are declining due to degradation of the natural forests and vegetation cover which causes erosion, deposition of sediments and eutrophication, unrestricted waste and waste water management causing pollution and intense rice and flower farming with irrigation and chemical input. In addition, the clearing and conversion of wetlands, canalization of major rivers for agriculture investments, construction of buildings on lake shores and diversion of water for hydropower are taking its toll. Impacts of climate change such as droughts or heavy rains as well as invasive species such as the water hyacinth challenge the sensitive ecosystems even more and endanger food security and livelihoods of the local communities. The population density and growth rate around Lake Tana is very high. To meet the communities’ demands, large areas of forest, grassland, and wetland were transformed into cropland, and more livestock was raised on grassland. Deforestation and overgrazing have resulted in the destruction of great amounts of natural vegetation, a decline in biodiversity and desertification and soil erosion. If this trend continues, the watershed with its numerous services for millions of people is at stake and may eventually lead to a total collapse of the aquatic ecosystems and thus to reinforced poverty and migration.

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**Learn more on completed NABU projects in that region**

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