

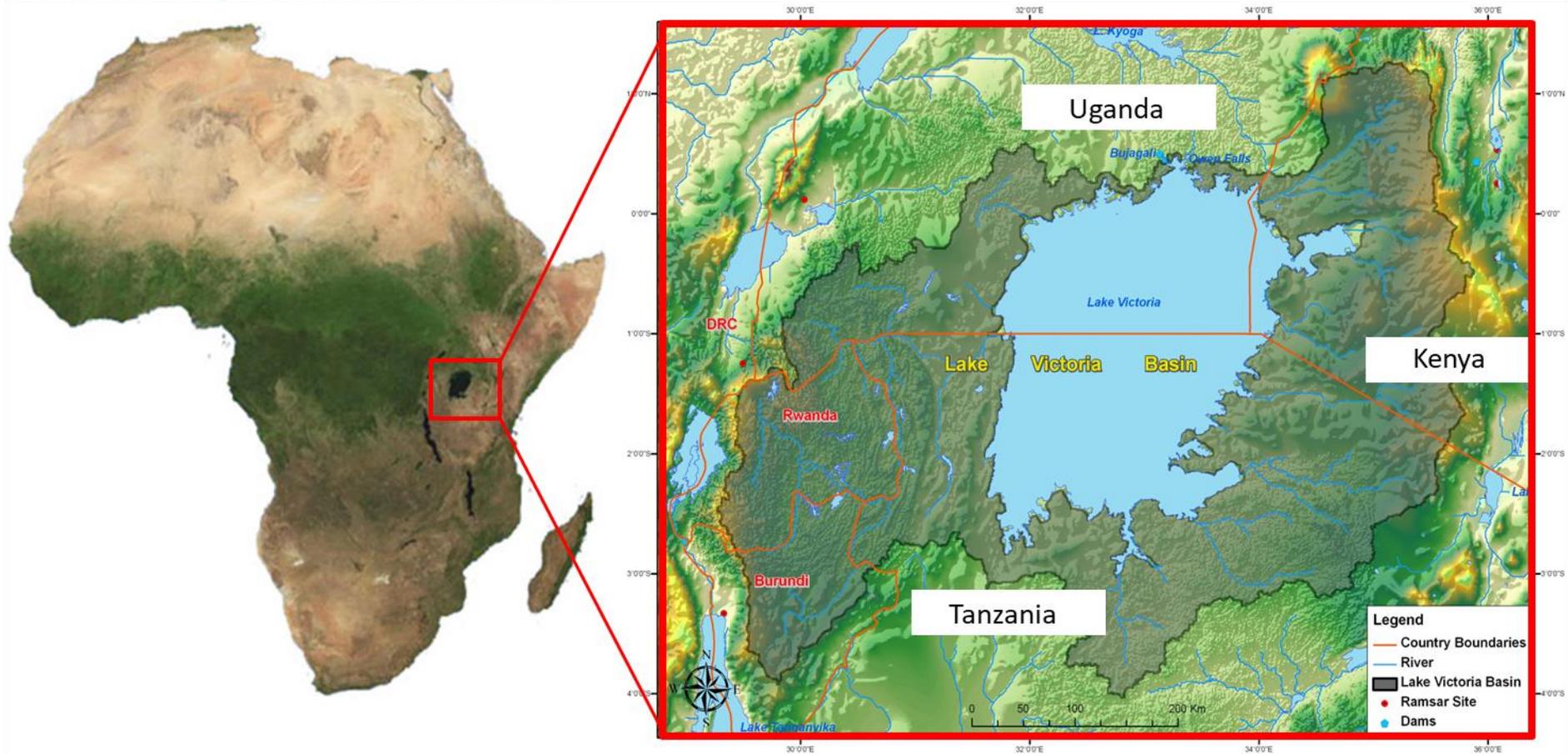
# Enhancing adaptive capacity in Lake Victoria's fisheries through legitimate governance and gender equity



Dr. Elizabeth Nyboer Gender Aqua Fish – Bangkok, Thailand

October 1, 2025

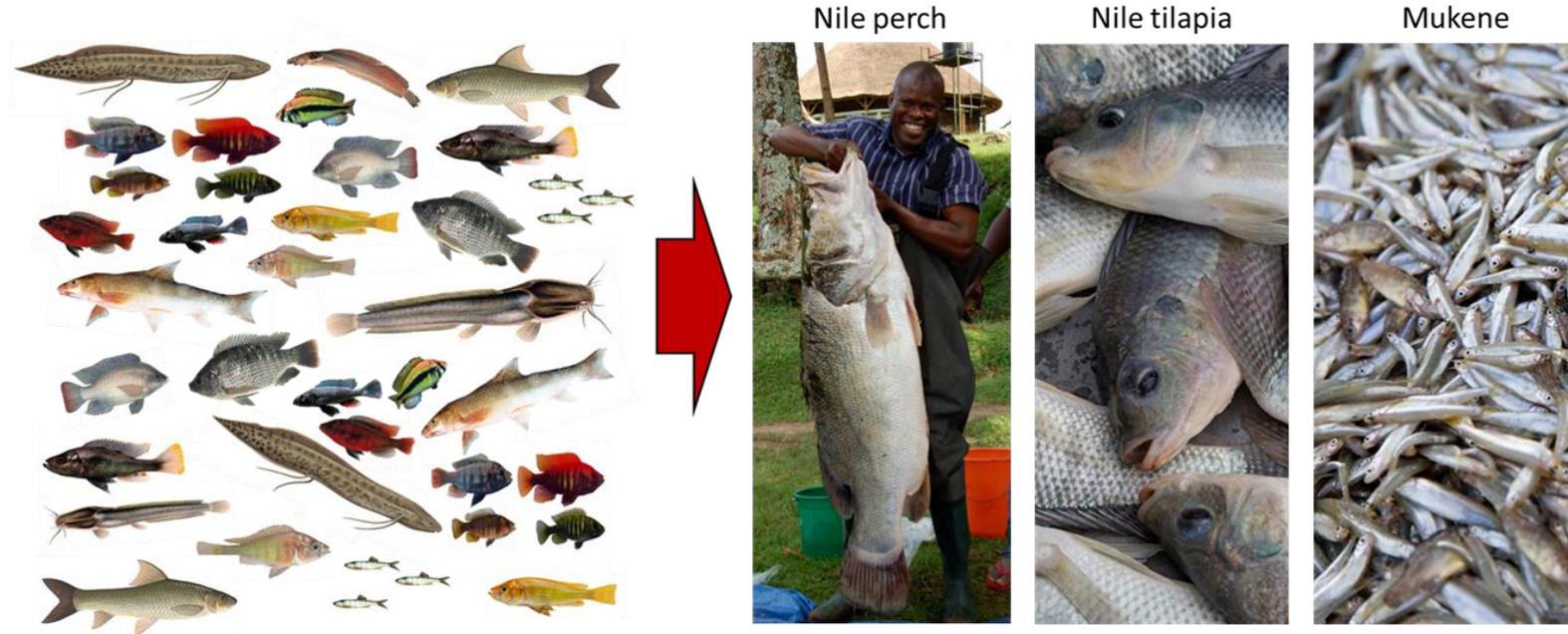
# Lake Victoria, East Africa



- Africa's largest source of inland fishery production
- > 3 million people with 1° source of income
- > 30 million with critical source of animal protein

# This system has undergone major social and ecological change

- Species introductions and industrialization of fisheries
- Unstable governance
- Climate change



*Altered species composition changed socio-economic dimensions*

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*Beach Management Unit system gives way to military takeover of fisheries enforcement, 2017*

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*Flooded fishery landing site, 2024*

# How do systemic shocks affect food security and livelihoods?



Ecological



Governance



Climatic

Adaptive Capacity of Fishing Communities

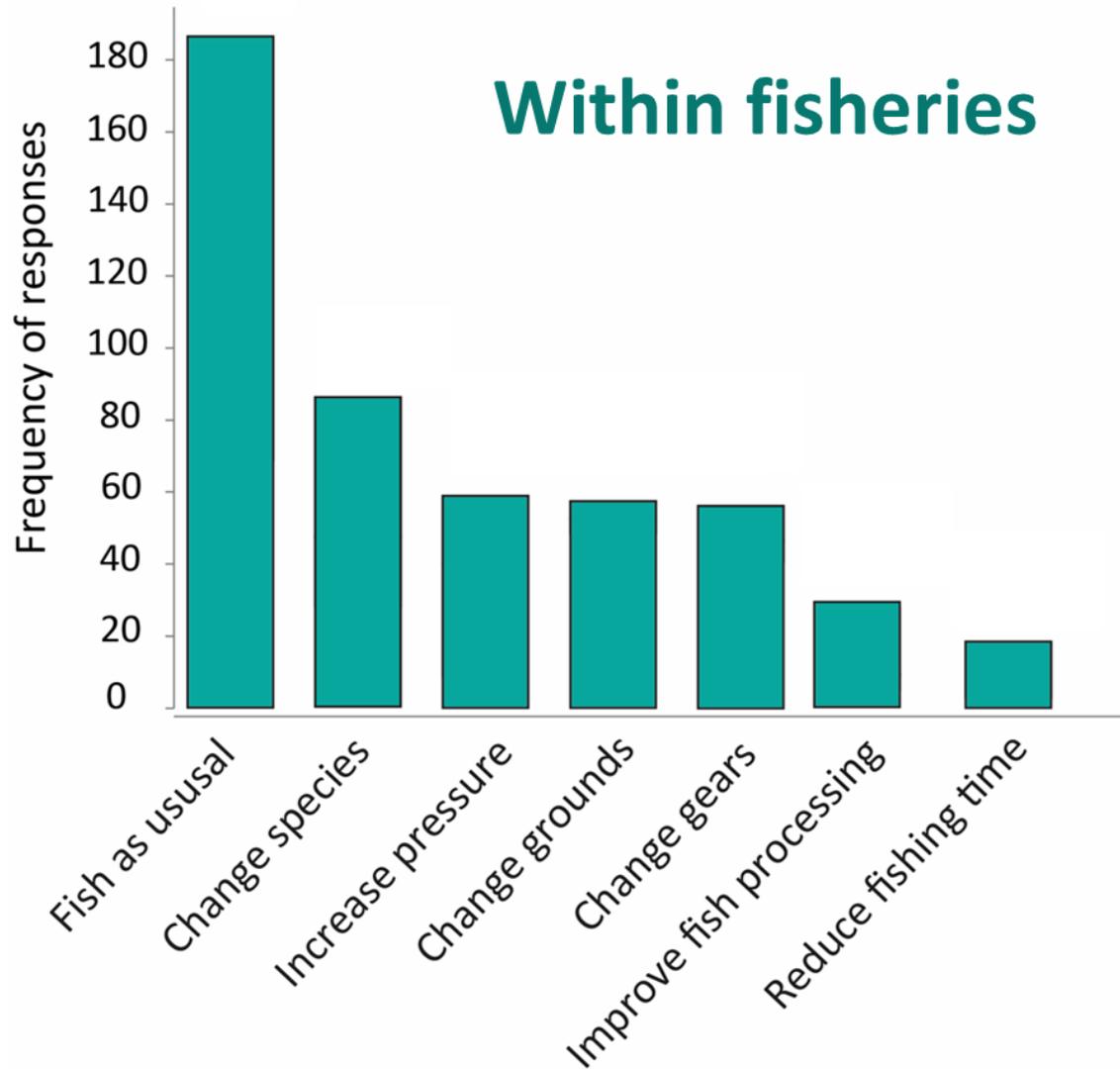


# Women in Lake Victoria's fisheries

- ~1/2 million women work in post-harvest sector
- Typically deal in lower market-value but high nut. value fish (e.g., mukene)
- Essential contributions to household and community food sec & nutrition
- Marginalized in decision making at household and policy levels



# How do fishers / fish people adapt to climate change?



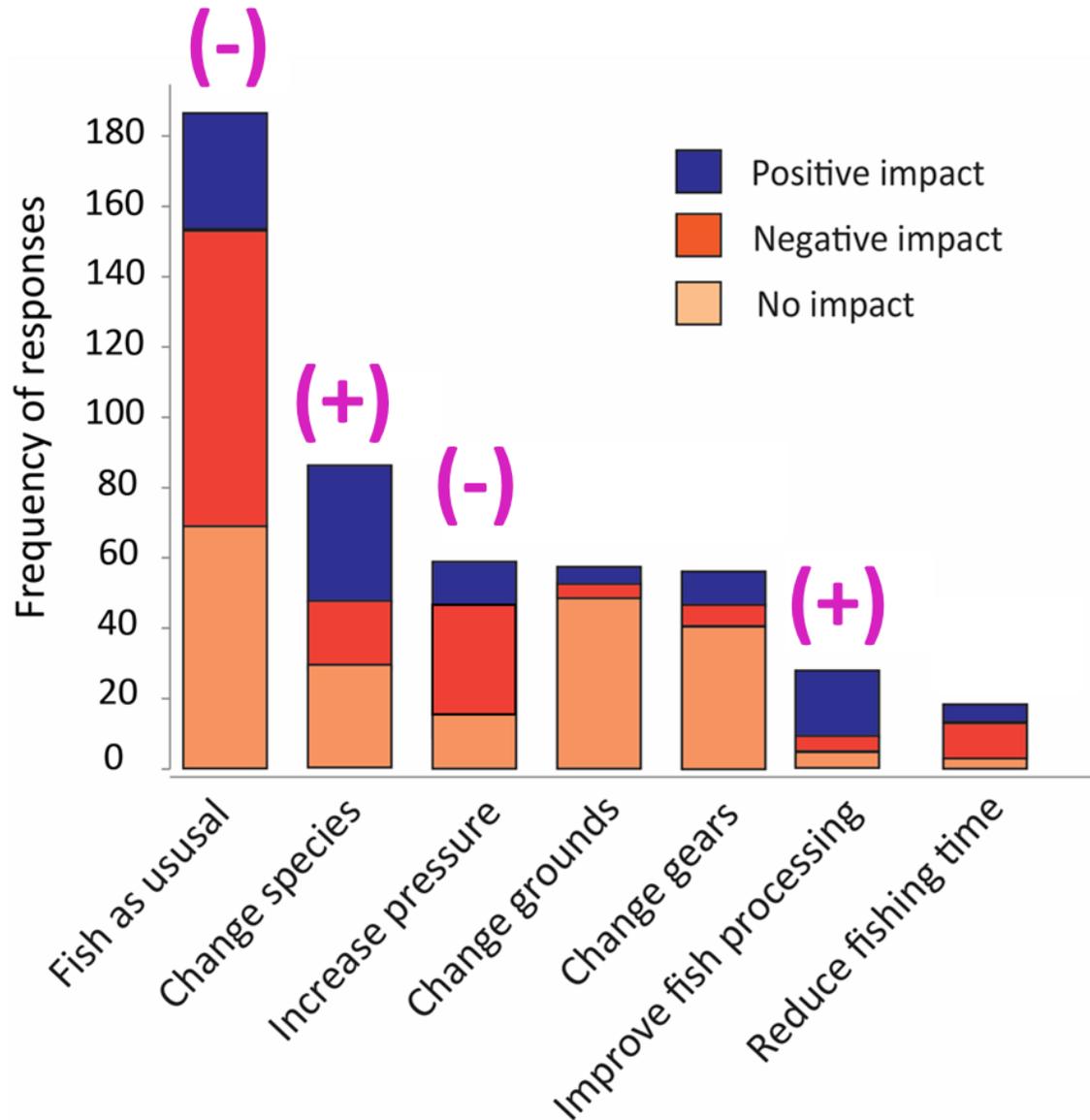
## Outside of fisheries

- Livelihood diversification
- Saving food and money
- Forming groups

## Mitigation

- Reforestation
- Habitat protection

# Adaptive strategies and efficacy



Nyboer et al., 2022. *People and Nature*.

## Outside of fisheries

- Livelihood diversification (+)
- Saving food and money (+)
- Forming groups (+)

## Mitigation

- Reforestation (+)
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# Legitimate governance is needed to enhance adaptive capacity

- **Legitimacy** – stakeholders' acceptance of governance processes due to perceptions that they are just, correct, and appropriate for the context.
- **Illegitimacy** – can erode agency and trust at local and national scales

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(top-down legitimacy)

2. Legitimacy of the rules by the users  
(local level legitimacy)



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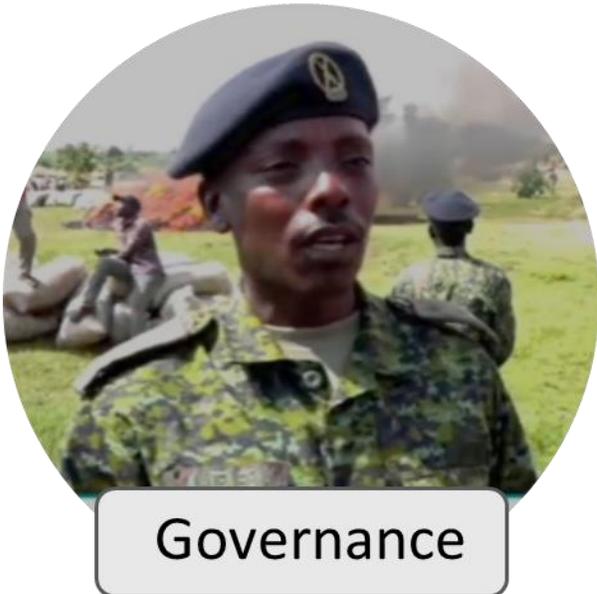
2. Legitimacy of the rules by the users  
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## Key research questions:

How does (il)legitimate governance shape adaptive capacity?

How does gender mediate the impacts of (il)legitimate governance on adaptive capacity?



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  - *“we are not getting any help from the government; they have forgotten us” – Focus group respondent*

### Its impact on adaptation

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- Lack of trust among fisheries users and local enforcers of regulations
  - *“Our local leaders are corrupt; they will steal from us and give to the next village” - Focus group respondent*

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### Its impact on adaptation

- **Promotes (-)** adaptive actions like illegal fishing (exacerbated by perceptions of inequity)

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**Word analysis of FGD responses:**

**Livelihood impacts:**

- W → childcare & household needs
- M → environment & diversification barriers

**Adaptation priorities:**

- W → education, group support, community cohesion, collective action
- M → enforcement, regulation, site control, financial support



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### Gendered Division of Labour

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### Gendered Division of Labour

- Women's larger share of household work limits time for governance participation or adaptation programs.
- Neither local nor high-level governance prioritize supportive mechanisms (e.g., provision of childcare during trainings)

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### Needs specific to women: Post harvest losses

- Disproportionately impacted by lack of infrastructure / technologies
- Need stronger top down and local governance (community cohesion)

*The government has not helped us.*

*Nothing is being done. That's why you see that all the ladies have been mobilizing.*

*They are fed up." Female FG respondent*

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### Weaker bargaining power and inequity in local-level enforcement

- Local rules perceived as inequitable
- Low trust, fragile cohesion

*“Normally, fishermen bring fish and the ladies buy it. When the law enforcers come, they confiscate our fish, yet we have got it from the fishermen. Normally we ladies lose our money and the fishers go free.” Female FG respondent*

# Gendered impacts of governance-related shocks on livelihoods



- Mukene gear ban effected in February 2024 due to conflicts with the Nile perch sector
- Abrupt implementation and enforcement had substantial impacts on livelihoods



# Gendered impacts of governance-related shocks on livelihoods



Photo by Emma Rice

- Drastic negative impacts on household **food security, nutrition, and income** for all in the mukene sector
- For women, impacts go beyond economic given their role in family and **household responsibilities**

# Women's Fisheries Organizations – strategies that work

WFOs are formal and informal **community-based organizations** that open opportunities for **sustainable fishery enterprises** for women, provide access to **savings and loan** programs, and enable participation in **fishery decision-making (FAO, 2022)**.

**Helping to strengthen women's role in governance**



# Adaptive capacity in Women's Fisheries Organizations (WFOs)

## How do WFOs help members adapt to shocks?

- Examining **social foundations**
  - power dynamics
  - governance structures
  - trust
- How do these contribute to meeting collective and individual goals



L-R: Beth Nyboer, Lovin Kobusingye, Emma Rice

# Adaptive capacity in Women's Fisheries Organizations (WFOs)



## Inroads to transformative change

Effective routes for **women's mobilization:**

- Improved access to education
- Access to finance / control over income
- Practical experience in marketing/business management
- Training and empowerment in decision making spaces (leadership skills)



# Womens Fisheries Organizations help achieve management goals



## Emerging insights from interviews with fisheries managers

- As women more frequently access higher value markets, they raise the standards of fish they will buy
- They are demanding legal sized fish and slowing the market for illegalities
- Strengthening local-level governance

# Conclusion



## Governance illegitimacy constrains adaptation for all

- Exacerbated for women due to:
  - Heavier home duties
  - Limited infrastructure and finance
  - Weak recognition of voices
- Addressing these inequities can unlock adaptive potential

# Thank You



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