



TRANSBOUNDARY COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND DIALOGUE ON INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION IN THE KAGERA BASIN

(BURUNDI, RWANDA, AND TANZANIA)



NGARA TANZANIA 29-30 APRIL 2026

With Support from



Executive summary

The Kagera/Akagera Basin is a critical shared resource linking the communities, ecosystems, and economies of Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania. With an estimated 15 million people depending on the basin, most of them are subsistence farmers. The basin faces growing pressure from population growth, expanding agriculture and livestock activities, and poor land management. Rampant deforestation, wetland encroachment, and soil erosion are degrading the landscape and increasing nutrient runoff, fuelling water hyacinth growth and eutrophication in Lake Victoria. Combined with declining water quality and climate variability, these pressures pose direct threats to agriculture, energy security, and livelihoods across all three riparian countries.

From 29–30 April 2026, NBD convened a two-day Transboundary Community Consultation and Dialogue in Ngara District, Tanzania, focusing on IWRM for Climate Adaptation in the Kagera Basin; designed to narrow the gap between established governance frameworks and the communities most affected by basin pressures, whose indigenous knowledge remains underrepresented in transboundary decision-making.

The consultation brought together 57 participants from all three countries (16 women, 41 men, 26% youth), representing government, civil society, inter-governmental entities, the private sector, faith leaders, and women and youth groups, pursuing four objectives: strengthening local ownership; capturing indigenous knowledge; promoting collaborative climate adaptation; and informing regional cooperation frameworks.

National presentations confirmed shared challenges; catchment degradation, pollution, unpredictable rainfall alongside active interventions including terracing, riverbank planting, rainwater harvesting, and equity-based IWRM frameworks. NELSAP-CU and LVBC presented basin-wide coordination frameworks, citing the 2012 Kagera Basin Development Plan and the Rusumo Hydropower Plant as proof of what transboundary cooperation can deliver, while flagging gaps in monitoring, funding, and inclusive participation.

Group discussions identified soil erosion, wetland encroachment, competing water demands, and funding shortfalls as the most pressing shared concerns, with community-led solutions; agroforestry, contour bunds, eco-tourism, and water user committees recognised as effective but needing stronger policy support. Crosscutting issues included women and youth underrepresentation, the policy-implementation gap, and the need for cross-border data sharing.

The consultation concluded with agreed priority actions: harmonising buffer zone policies, scaling climate-smart agriculture and ecosystem restoration, establishing bi-annual transboundary review meetings, and creating sustained communication channels among participants.

This activity brief documents the proceedings, key messages, and outcomes of the consultation as a contribution to ongoing efforts to strengthen IWRM governance and community resilience across the Kagera Basin.

Table of Contents

List of abbreviation	iv
1. Introduction	1
2. Overview of the Consultation	2
2.1 Opening Session.....	2
2.2 IWRM implementation and climate resilience in the Kagera Basin.....	4
2.2.1 National perspectives.....	4
2.2.2 Regional perspectives	10
3. Crosscutting key messages from all presentations	12
4. Group discussions and plenary presentations	14
4.1 Key Challenges Identified and Discussed	15
4.2 Existing Practices and Local Solutions Presented	15
4.3 Key Crosscutting Issues	16
5. Recommendations	16
6. Way forward	17

List of abbreviation

AREECA	Alliance for Restoration of Forest Ecosystems in Africa
BNDF	Burundi National Discourse Forum
COMBIO	Community based biodiversity conservation project
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EAC	East African Community
GIS	Geographic Information System
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
IWRMDP	Integrated Water Resources Management and Development Plan
LVBC	Lake Victoria Basin Commission
LVBWB	Lake Victoria Basin Water Board
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NBD	Nile Basin Discourse
NBI	Nile Basin Initiative
NCSCR	Nile Civil Society for Climate Resilience
NDF	National Discourse Forum
NELSAP-CU	Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Program – Coordination Unit
RBM	River Basin Management
RFA	Rwanda Forestry Authority
RNDF	Rwanda National Discourse Forum
RWB	Rwanda Water Resources Board
TNDF	Tanzania National Discourse Forum
TREPA	Transforming Eastern Province through Adaptation

1. Introduction

The Kagera/Akagera Basin is a vital shared resource connecting the communities, ecosystems, and economies of Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania. Home to an estimated 15 million people, most of them are subsistence farmers. The basin is under mounting pressure from rapid population growth, intensifying agriculture and livestock activities, and unsustainable land management practices. Widespread deforestation with almost no reforestation, wetland exploitation, and soil erosion are accelerating land degradation and increasing nutrient loads into the river system, contributing to water hyacinth proliferation and eutrophication in Lake Victoria. These pressures, compounded by declining water quality and climate variability, directly threaten agriculture, energy security, and community livelihoods across all three riparian countries.

On 29–30 April 2026, the Nile Basin Discourse (NBD) organised a two-day Transboundary Community Consultation and Dialogue held in Ngara District, Tanzania. This activity, “Community Consultations and Dialogues on Nile Cooperation and Transboundary Water Resource Management”, was implemented under the Nile Civil Society for Climate Resilience (NCSCR) Project, with a thematic focus on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) for Climate Adaptation in the Kagera Basin. The consultation responded directly to the recognition that despite existing national and regional water governance frameworks, community perspectives remain underrepresented in transboundary decision-making and yet the communities most affected by these pressures hold valuable indigenous knowledge and adaptation practices essential to basin-wide solutions.

The consultation brought together 57 participants from Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania; including 16 women and 41 men, with youth representing 26% of the total attendance. Attendees represented a broad and inclusive cross-section of stakeholders: government officials, inter-governmental entities, civil society organizations, community representatives, private sector actors, women groups, youth groups and faith and religious leaders. This diversity of voices was central to the consultation's design, recognising that sustainable water governance requires the active engagement of all who depend on and steward the basin's resources.

Consultation Objectives/Expected Outcomes

- Enhanced community awareness on climate-resilient water management
- Community-informed water governance policies; feeding local perspectives into IWRM strategy development
- Strengthened social inclusion; greater participation of CSOs, women, and youth in water decision-making
- Strengthened cross-border cooperation among all stakeholders sharing the Kagera Basin

2. Overview of the Consultation

2.1 Opening Session

The consultation commenced with an interfaith prayer - reflecting the diversity of the participants. This was followed by a round of introductions, during which delegates presented their names, affiliations, and countries they are representing.

Welcome remarks were subsequently delivered by the Chairs of the National Discourse Forums (NDFs) and heads of the respective country delegations, who underscored the importance of strengthening transboundary cooperation and community engagement in the sustainable management of the Kagera Basin.

The Burundi Delegation through their representative underscored the significance of the gathering as a timely opportunity for governments, civil society, and Community representatives to reflect on their shared responsibilities in the management of the Akagera/Kagera Basin. They called on all parties to consider their contributions and responsibilities toward a Transfrontier project that unites Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania, one that could strengthen friendship, peace, understanding, and security among basin communities.



Figure 1: Burundi NDF Chairperson delivers remarks on behalf of the Burundi delegation



Figure 2: Mr. James RUBAKISIBO delivers remarks on behalf of the Rwanda delegation

The Rwanda delegation through their representative drew on Rwanda's hands-on cross-border environmental experience, including community tree planting, terracing, and soil erosion control along the Akagera River, as a practical model for what collaborative basin management can achieve. The message stressed the value of coming together to listen, share experiences, and draw lessons from neighbouring countries.

The Tanzania delegation representative expressed appreciation to NBD's Tanzania NDF for hosting the dialogue, noting that Ngara District situated at the heart of the Kagera Basin provided the perfect setting for such a gathering.

The remarks from Tanzania acknowledged that Tanzania has firsthand experience of the Basin's climate challenges, including reduced river flows, soil erosion, and pressure on community livelihoods. They noted that local communities hold valuable traditional conservation knowledge that deserves to be shared across borders. Tanzania called on participants to use the two days to build not only shared knowledge but lasting cross-border relationships of trust and cooperation.



Figure 3: Felix delivering remarks on behalf of Tanzania delegation

The Consultation meeting was officially opened by the Host Government Representative from Ngara District, who welcomed participants on behalf of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania. In the opening remarks, the representative highlighted the importance of the Kagera Basin as a shared resource that sustains communities, ecosystems, and economic activities across national boundaries.



Figure 4: Government Representative from Ngara District in his opening remarks

The remarks commended the initiative for its inclusive and multi-stakeholder approach to addressing transboundary challenges and opportunities within the basin. Participants were encouraged to engage actively in the discussions, share their perspectives openly, and contribute constructively towards identifying sustainable solutions.

The opening session concluded with a presentation by the Nile Basin Discourse (NBD), which provided an overview of the organization, its mandate, and its role in promoting stakeholder participation in the sustainable management and development of the Nile Basin's water resources.

NBD also introduced the Nile Civil Society for Climate Resilience (NCSCR) Project, outlining its objectives, implementation approach, and expected outcomes.

In addition, the purpose and objectives of the transboundary community dialogue were presented, emphasizing the importance of community engagement, knowledge sharing, and collaborative action in addressing transboundary environmental and water resource management challenges within the Kagera Basin.



Figure 5: NBD's Regional M&E Officer presenting objectives and expected outcomes of the consultation

2.2 IWRM implementation and climate resilience in the Kagera Basin

This session brought together national and regional perspectives on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and climate adaptation. Three country representatives (Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania) shared national experiences and priorities, followed by regional institutions' presentations from the Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC) and the Kagera Basin River Basin Management (RBM) Project Office (NELSAP-CU).

2.2.1 National perspectives

a) Burundi: Experiences and Priorities in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and Watershed Management in the Kagera Basin

The Burundi perspective was presented by Nestor Mburente, an Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) expert.

The presentation provided an overview of the Kagera Basin, a transboundary watershed extending approximately 400 kilometres and covering about 60,000 km² across Tanzania (35%), Rwanda (34%), Burundi (23%), and Uganda (8%). Originating in Rwanda's Nyungwe Forest, the river system supports more than 20 million people and sustains rich biodiversity, including extensive forests, wetlands, agricultural landscapes, and over 500 bird species. Despite its ecological and socio-economic importance, the basin faces increasing environmental pressures that threaten its sustainability.



Figure 6: Mr. Nestor Mburente, an expert on IWRM

The presentation situated the Kagera Basin within the broader Nile Basin context, highlighting growing water stress across the region. Rising water demand, inefficient distribution systems, and expanding industrial activities are placing significant pressure on available water resources. These challenges underscore the importance of effective water governance as both a development priority and a matter of regional cooperation.

Within Burundi, the presentation identified two major categories of challenges affecting the Kagera Basin. The first relates to land degradation, including severe soil erosion, deforestation, recurrent windstorms, gully formation, uncontrolled artisanal mining and quarrying, land subsidence, and landslides. The second concerns the degradation of water resources through pollution from agricultural runoff and plastic waste, declining agricultural productivity due to unsustainable land use practices, increasing rainfall variability, and inadequate access to safe drinking water and sanitation in many communities. Examples cited included environmental degradation associated with artisanal gold mining in Kamaramagambo and drought-affected landscapes in Masaka.

The presentation emphasized the importance of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) as a framework for addressing these challenges. IWRM was presented as being founded on three core principles: equity, participation, and sustainability. Equity promotes fair access to water resources for all users; participation recognizes water as a shared resource requiring the involvement of governments, communities, civil society, women, and youth; and sustainability focuses on the responsible management and conservation of water resources for future generations.

Current efforts in Burundi to advance IWRM and watershed management include strengthening transboundary governance through bilateral agreements and basin management structures; investing in sustainable water infrastructure such as drip irrigation

systems and hillside reservoirs; protecting wetlands through ecological monitoring and erosion control measures; establishing community-based water management committees supported by training and participatory monitoring; and implementing climate-responsive land-use planning, including zoning, flood prevention, and riverbank restoration.

Several priority actions were also identified to strengthen future interventions. These include the development of a comprehensive IWRM strategy for the Malagarazi Basin, establishment of joint natural resource management committees, production of awareness-raising materials on IWRM, implementation of environmental impact assessments, development of mechanisms for resolving water-related conflicts, organization of a financing roundtable with development partners, and undertaking a Water-Food-Energy Nexus study.

A key message emerging from the presentation was that sustainable transboundary management of the Kagera Basin requires the active engagement of all stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations, and local communities, supported by appropriate legal and policy frameworks. The presentation concluded with a call for strengthened regional solidarity and cooperation under the theme, “One Nile, One Family.”

b) Rwanda: National Experience and Interventions for Akagera River Protection

The Rwanda perspective was presented by Emmanuel Nsengimana, Director of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Kirehe District, Eastern Province.

The presentation outlined Rwanda's national IWRM architecture, anchored by three key institutions. The Rwanda Water Resources Board (RWB) leads the sustainable management, protection, and conservation of water resources, developing the policies, regulations, and strategic plans that govern water use and allocation. The Ministry of Environment oversees environmental protection and climate resilience through integrated approaches combining land, water, and ecosystem management. The Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources contributes through land husbandry, irrigation development, and soil erosion control, including terracing, agroforestry, and sustainable land use practices. Rwanda's water and environmental policies formally embed IWRM principles into law, encompassing stakeholder participation, decentralised decision-making, and equitable water allocation.

At the national level, five major achievements were highlighted: implementation of integrated watershed rehabilitation projects; widespread adoption of terracing and agroforestry; improved institutional coordination across government; enhanced community participation in environmental protection; and expansion of irrigation and water storage infrastructure.



Figure 7: Mr Nsengimana Emmanuel sharing experiences practices implemented in IWRM in Kirehe -Rwanda.

On-the-ground interventions in Kirehe District, which shares a boundary with the Akagera River: Implementation at district level is carried out in partnership with the Rwanda Forestry Authority and organised around three pillars. The first is rainwater harvesting, with over 2,600 reservoirs distributed across communities and schools, reducing pressure on the Akagera river by providing communities with alternative water sources. The second is terracing, with protected sloping land almost tripling in two years from approximately 1,500 hectares in 2023/2024 to a projected 4,100 hectares in 2025/2026. The third is tree planting along the river's banks and buffer zones, delivered through the TREPA, COMBIO, and AREECA projects under the Rwanda Forestry Authority. Tree species selected for their soil-binding capacity at water's edge — including *Acacia kirkii*, *Acacia polyacantha*, *Maesopsis eminii*, *Markhamia lutea*, bamboo, and *Senna siamea* — have been planted with communities involved from the outset and taking ownership of every plantation.

Kirehe District has also formally demarcated the Akagera buffer zone, making its boundary legally clear and enforceable, supported by land use regulations and sustained community awareness campaigns. Observed benefits include recovering riparian habitat, improved water quality where vegetation filters are in place, emerging eco-tourism opportunities, and stronger community livelihoods linked to a healthier river.

Challenges remain significant; Population growth continues to drive land pressure against buffer zone boundaries, and soil erosion persists at a scale beyond any single district's capacity to address alone. Community understanding of the buffer zone's purpose requires sustained engagement over years rather than a single campaign, and the Akagera faces competing demands from domestic users, farmers, and downstream communities that require governance structures still under development.

The key message from Rwanda's Kirehe District's experience: practical, community-driven, and consistently scaled action delivers measurable results. The priority going forward is deepening community ownership so that local people become the primary guardians of the river — not passive beneficiaries of external projects.

c) Tanzania: The IWRMD Plan for the Lake Victoria Basin and the Kagera Catchment

Hydrogeologist at the Kagera Catchment of the Lake Victoria Basin Water Board (LVBWB), Mr. Mbisha Maswaga presented the Tanzania perspective.

The presentation opened with an introduction to the LVBWB, established in 2000 and operating under the Water Resources Management Act No. 11 of 2009. The Board oversees water resources across eight regions; Mwanza, Mara, Kagera, Geita, Simiyu, Shinyanga, Arusha, and Tabora organised into five management catchments: Simiyu, Isanga, Central, Mara-Mori, and Kagera. Its mandate spans preparing basin management plans, issuing water use permits, resolving conflicts among water users, and advising government on transboundary issues.

The total Lake Victoria Basin covers 194,000 km², with Tanzania's share at 115,400 km², supporting approximately 16 million people out of the basin-wide population of 45 million. The Kagera Catchment receives between 1,300 and 1,600 millimetres of rainfall annually above the basin average distributed across two seasonal patterns: the long rains (Masika) from March to May, and the short rains (Vuli) from October to December.

The presentation highlighted the Integrated Water Resources Management and Development Plan (IWRMDP) for the Lake Victoria Basin; a blueprint for sustainable management of water resources developed in response to the rapidly growing population, expanding economic activities in mining, livestock and agriculture, and rising pressure on the entire water system. The plan was developed through four phases: inception and reconnaissance; a full assessment covering socio-economic study, institutional review, water availability analysis, demand projections to 2045, and water balance calculations; a planning phase producing both basin-wide and catchment-level plans; and an implementation phase comprising a strategy and investment plan. The central finding on water availability was broadly reassuring: the basin is projected to have sufficient water to meet development needs through 2045 - provided resources are managed equitably and efficiently, with hydropower and environmental water requirements dominating total demand.



Figure 8: Mr. Mbisha Maswaga, Hydrogeologist at the Kagera Catchment of the Lake Victoria Basin Water Board (LVBWB)

The basin-wide IWRMDP identified priority areas where action is needed - each a response to a specific challenge:

- Water quality is deteriorating due to agricultural runoff, industrial discharge, and domestic wastewater, requiring control at both point and non-point sources.
- Access to safe water and adequate sanitation remains insufficient, particularly in rural areas.
- Equitable water allocation across domestic, agricultural, industrial, and environmental uses lacks adequate governance frameworks.
- Catchment degradation through deforestation, wetland encroachment, and destruction of riparian zones is reducing the land's capacity to hold and filter water.
- The institutions responsible for implementing IWRM lack sufficient staff, skills, and resources. The monitoring network is critically under-resourced: of 29 hydrometric stations, 84 water quality stations, and 46 rainfall stations, many are non-operational, leaving significant gaps in the data needed to manage the basin effectively.
- Community and civil society participation in water governance remains nominal rather than genuinely meaningful.
- Finally, climate change is compounding all existing pressures, with rainfall becoming less predictable, droughts more severe, and floods more intense.

Kagera Catchment specific intervention areas: improving data availability through rehabilitation of gauging stations and establishment of regular water quality monitoring; ecosystem conservation through calculation and gazetting of environmental water allocations; expanding water supply with targets of 95% of the urban population receiving their full daily demand and 90% of urban areas covered by distribution networks by 2030; ensuring water availability for economic use including irrigation, mining, livestock, and hydropower; and controlling pollution entering the Kagera from all sources.

The challenges facing the catchment are wide-ranging: water quality deterioration; growing demand from agriculture, livestock, and mining; inadequate water supply and sanitation; monitoring network gaps; insufficient institutional capacity; catchment degradation through deforestation and encroachment; climate change impacts; soil erosion and sedimentation; low irrigation efficiency; ineffective stakeholder participation; operation and maintenance deficits allowing infrastructure to fall into disrepair.

The IWRMDP provides an evidence-based blueprint, but a plan alone is insufficient. Sustained and coordinated investment is needed in monitoring infrastructure, pollution control, community water supply, and inclusive participation. Critically, the Kagera Catchment cannot be managed by Tanzania in isolation transboundary coordination with Rwanda and Burundi on monitoring, data sharing, and catchment restoration is not optional, but a technical necessity.

2.2.2 Regional perspectives

Two regional institutions - NELSAP-CU and the Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC), shared basin-wide perspectives on IWRM coordination, strategy, and implementation in the Kagera Basin.

a) *NELSAP-CU: Coordinated Water Resource Management for Sustainable Growth in the Kagera River Basin*

Damascene Kayiranga, a Project Officer for the Kagera River Basin Management Project at NELSAP-CU, presented the basin's significance: the Kagera sub-basin covers 59,800 square kilometres shared by Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda; supports 16 million people, and contributes roughly 33–34% of total inflow to Lake Victoria.



Figure 9: Mr. Damascene Kayiranga, Project Officer for Kagera RBM Project

Historically, uncoordinated development across the four riparian countries generated inefficiencies, environmental risks, and conflicts. The Kagera River Basin Management Project was established specifically to address this through an IWRM approach that integrates water supply, irrigation, hydropower, environment, and livelihoods planning into a single coordinated framework. The centrepiece of this work is the 2012 IWRM Basin Development Plan, developed inclusively with all four riparian countries.

Key achievements of the project include the Basin Development Plan itself as a unified planning framework; a structured five-area implementation plan covering water management, sanitation, livelihoods, environment, and disaster management; enhanced benefit-sharing arrangements and institutional coordination; and a Planning Atlas and GIS database supporting evidence-based decision-making. Priority investments include the now-operational Rusumo Falls hydropower plant - a tangible demonstration of what transboundary cooperation can deliver alongside multipurpose dams, the Kagera Integrated Watershed Management Programme for soil conservation and wetland protection, domestic water supply systems across the four countries, and NELSAP's ongoing capacity building and hydrometric network support.

Noted Challenges: population pressure is driving land fragmentation and wetland encroachment; mobilising funding for large-scale infrastructure remains difficult given donor

interests; institutional capacity at national and local levels is insufficient; and transboundary coordination is complex given political differences and varying national priorities. These are balanced by real opportunities; the NBI/NELSAP platform serves as a trusted neutral forum, climate finance interest is growing, data and modelling tools are improving, and EAC regional integration is increasingly aligned with basin goals.

The Basin Development Plan is not a static document but a living framework, and NELSAP's role is to sustain political commitment and translate it into ground-level action.

b) LVBC: Basin-Wide IWRM Strategy and Coordination Mechanisms in the Kagera Basin

The Water Resources Management Officer at the Lake Victoria Basin Commission, Eng. Simon Otoung presented LVBC's perspective on basin-wide IWRM strategy and coordination.

The presentation framed IWRM not as a one-time project but as a continuous, adaptive governance cycle moving from assessment to policy, implementation to monitoring grounded in the four Dublin Principles: freshwater is finite and vulnerable; management must be participatory; women play a central role in water governance; and water has economic value.

The Kagera Basin's regional significance was reflected by its contribution of 33–34% of Lake Victoria's total inflow, making its ecological health consequential for the entire East African region. Against this backdrop, the basin faces compounding pressures: land degradation, pollution from agriculture and settlements, climate variability, competing sectoral demands, and the structural complexity of coordinating four countries.



Figure 10: Eng. Simon Otoung, Water Resources Management Officer at the Lake Victoria Basin Commission

The presentation highlighted the basin-wide IWRM strategy, built around five objectives: sustainable water use, ecosystem conservation, transboundary cooperation, climate resilience, and socio-economic development; pursued through components covering monitoring and data systems, catchment management, water quality, climate adaptation, and stakeholder engagement. The institutional architecture through which this coordination operates spans multiple levels: the NBI as the overarching regional framework; NELSAP for

project implementation; the LVBC for Lake Victoria Basin coordination; national water ministries and agencies; and local governments and community water user associations at the ground level. Within this structure, the LVBC's specific role encompasses supporting IWRM policy implementation, facilitating transboundary cooperation, coordinating basin-wide projects, promoting data sharing through the Lake Victoria Basin Water Information System, and linking regional decisions to local action.

IWRM-based solutions were presented in direct response to documented basin problems: integrated flood management and early warning systems to address climate extremes; terracing, agroforestry, and riverbank vegetation to counter erosion and sedimentation; pollution control regulations and wetland restoration to improve water quality; and ecosystem protection combined with alternative livelihoods including eco-tourism and beekeeping to address wetland and biodiversity loss.

Persistent gaps were acknowledged: limited funding for large-scale interventions; inconsistent data and monitoring systems; institutional overlaps reducing coordination efficiency; and weak community-level capacity.

The presentation from LVBC emphasized that no single actor, whether at the national or regional level, can achieve sustainable basin management independently. What is required is stronger regional coordination, improved data sharing, increased investment in land and water management, genuinely inclusive participation, and the systematic integration of climate adaptation into every IWRM intervention.

3. Crosscutting key messages from all presentations

The following crosscutting messages emerged from all national and regional presentations:

- The basin faces serious and growing pressures. Land degradation, soil erosion, wetland loss, declining water quality, and climate variability are accelerating, directly affecting agriculture, energy, and livelihoods in all riparian countries.
- IWRM is the agreed foundation for water governance. All countries and regional institutions recognise Integrated Water Resources Management as the right framework built on equity, efficiency, sustainability, and participation for managing shared water resources.
- National governments have policies and legal frameworks on IWRM, yet challenges including water pollution, land degradation, soil erosion, sedimentation, and competing water demands persist.
- Concrete national IWRM actions are already underway including terracing, riverbank tree planting, rainwater harvesting, wetland protection, and community-based water management, but sustaining these requires contributions from all actors.
- Regional initiatives are producing results. The 2012 Kagera Basin Development Plan laid the foundation for coordinated action, with NELSAP-CU and LVBC driving implementation. The Rusumo Hydropower Plant stands as a tangible example of what transboundary cooperation can deliver.
- Data availability and sharing are critical to harmonise IWRM actions across national boundaries.

- Community voices must be strengthened. Regional institutions (NBI, LVBC, and NBD) should play a critical role in coordinating dialogue, harmonising policies, and sharing data.
- Multi-stakeholder forums are essential for sustaining IWRM actions; particularly as shifting donor priorities threaten long-term continuity.
- Communities must be at the centre of water governance. Top-down approaches are insufficient; community participation, local ownership, and gender inclusion are essential for any IWRM intervention to succeed.
- Climate adaptation must be grounded in Nature-Based Solutions. Reforestation, wetland restoration, riverbank protection, and rainwater harvesting are practical, proven responses that must be integrated into national and basin-wide water management plans.
- Dialogue is the foundation of transboundary cooperation. Sustained, inclusive engagement among governments, communities, regional bodies, and development partners must be an ongoing process; not a one-time event.

Spotlight: Rusumo Catchment Environmental Challenges.

The Rusumo Hydropower Company highlighted that the Rusumo catchment is experiencing significant environmental and resource management pressures associated with the operation and sustainability of the hydropower facility:

- Alteration of natural river flow regimes, affecting downstream ecosystems
- Biodiversity impacts including habitat disruption and changes in species composition
- Accumulation of water hyacinth at intake structures, affecting operational efficiency
- Catchment degradation, sedimentation, erosion, and climate risks affecting water quality and power generation

Active participation from local communities and member governments is required to address these challenges.



Figure 11: Rusumo Hydro power Company staff member sharing their experience



Figure 12: Participants interacting with presenters

4. Group discussions and plenary presentations

The second day of the consultation opened with recap and key messages from the first day followed by breakout group discussions. Participants were organized in three country-based groups; Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania and held discussions under the theme: **Community Role in Catchment Protection** (*Erosion Control, and Watershed/Ecosystem Restoration, along with existing sustainable practices and recommendations from their respective national contexts*).



Figure 13: Group discussion per country on Community Roles in Catchment Protection, Erosion Control, and Watershed/Ecosystem Restoration

Each of the group presented outcomes of the discussions in plenary; participants engaged, asked questions, and validated findings. Despite coming from different national contexts, the three groups converged on remarkably similar challenges, practices, and recommendations, reflecting the shared environmental realities across the Kagera Basin. The following is a synthesis of their presentations:



Figure 14: Participants deliberating on recommendations and the way forward

4.1 Key Challenges Identified and Discussed

- Soil erosion and land degradation due to deforestation, overgrazing, and unsustainable farming practices on sloped land
- Encroachment on wetlands, riverbanks, and water catchment areas by farming and grazing activities
- Competing water use demands among domestic, agricultural, and industrial users, leading to potential conflicts
- Limited community awareness on environmental laws, water conservation, and climate adaptation practices
- Inadequate funding and technical support for environmental protection and ecosystem restoration initiatives

4.2 Existing Practices and Local Solutions Presented

- Tree planting, agroforestry, and bamboo planting along riverbanks to protect water sources and reduce soil erosion
- Construction of terraces, contour bunds, grass strips, and check dams to control runoff and land degradation
- Establishment of community water user committees and local bylaws to regulate water use and resolve conflicts
- Rainwater harvesting at household and institutional level to supplement water supply
- Promotion of climate-smart agriculture including drip irrigation, crop rotation, drought-tolerant seeds, and organic manure

- Protection and restoration of wetlands through buffer zones, restricted grazing, and native vegetation planting
- Alternative livelihoods such as beekeeping, eco-tourism, and energy-saving cookstoves to reduce pressure on natural resources

4.3 Key Crosscutting Issues

All three-country groups discussed largely similar challenges and proposed comparable solutions, underscoring the shared nature of the Kagera Basin's environmental pressures. Across all presentations, the following crosscutting issues emerged:

- **Gender and Youth Participation:** All groups acknowledged that women and youth remain underrepresented in water governance and decision-making and called for their deliberate inclusion in local committees and cross-border dialogue processes.
- **Community awareness and enforcement:** Remain critical gaps, with all three countries highlighting the need for stronger sensitization on environmental laws and water conservation
- **Climate Adaptation Priorities:** Communities across the three countries are already feeling the effects of climate change. Nature-based solutions including tree planting, terracing, and wetland protection are universally practiced and recognized as effective responses to land degradation and climate change
- **Governance and Policy:** A common concern was on the gap between existing environmental policies and their implementation at community level. All groups called for better dissemination of environmental laws, stronger enforcement of local bylaws, and increased government investment in grassroots environmental governance.
- **Opportunities for Cross-Border Collaboration:** All three groups expressed strong interest in deepening cooperation, identifying joint exchange visits, shared monitoring systems, and collaborative restoration initiatives as key opportunities. Participants agreed that platforms like this consultation are vital for building the trust needed for sustained transboundary cooperation.

5. Recommendations

- Strengthen community participation in natural resource management through inclusive local committees and decision-making processes
- Scale up environmental education and awareness programs through schools, community meetings, and local radio
- Increase government and donor budget allocation for environmental protection and ecosystem restoration
- Harmonize and widely disseminate environmental regulatory frameworks across the three countries, including harmonization of laws on buffer zones.

- Expand training and extension services on climate-smart agriculture, soil conservation, and efficient water use
- Establish and strengthen mixed/joint committees for cross-border natural resource management
- Promote digitalization and improved data collection systems for environmental monitoring and sharing

6. Way forward

Participants agreed on the following priority actions to sustain the momentum of the consultation and advance transboundary cooperation in the Kagera Basin:

- **Harmonize cross-border activities** across all Nile Basin countries, including the coordinated formation of buffer zones to protect shared water resources and ecosystems.
- **Prioritize key challenges at national level** and develop targeted advocacy actions to influence policies and decision-making in each country.
- **Establish a WhatsApp communication group** among participants to facilitate ongoing information sharing, updates, and continued engagement beyond the consultation.
- **Organize bi-annual meetings** both online and physically to provide a regular platform for participants to update one another on progress, challenges, and emerging priorities in the Basin.



The Nile Civil Society for Climate Resilience (NCSCR) Project

The Nile Civil Society for Climate Resilience (NCSCR) Project (2025 - 2027) is a regional initiative implemented by the Nile Basin Discourse (NBD) to strengthen civil society participation in the management and development of transboundary water resources across the Nile Basin. The project promotes stronger community involvement, climate resilience, and inclusive collaboration among stakeholders to support sustainable and cooperative water governance across the region.

The project supports citizen-led data collection and management, community engagement, stakeholder dialogue, and institutional capacity strengthening to improve local participation and inform decision-making. Communities contribute local data on water resources, climate hazards, and ecosystem health to strengthen planning and early warning systems. NCSCR also advances nature-based solutions through technical consultations and capacity-building activities in key transboundary ecosystems, including the Mara Wetlands, Sio-Siteko Wetlands, Sudd Wetlands, and the Kagera Basin.

Through NBD's National Discourse Forums, women and youth networks, and regional knowledge-sharing platforms, the project connects scientists, policymakers, civil society organizations, and local communities across borders. NCSCR addresses shared challenges including floods, droughts, wetland degradation, soil erosion, declining water quality, and gender disparities, while creating opportunities for women and youth to actively contribute to climate adaptation and regional cooperation.

The NCSCR Project is implemented across the ten Nile Basin states of Burundi, D.R. Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. The project is funded by World Bank's Cooperation in International Water in Africa (CIWA).



CONTACT US

The Nile Basin Discourse
Plot 2 Cemetery Lane, Entebbe. (Near UN Base)
PO Box 185, Entebbe Uganda
Tel: +256 414 322432
Email: info@nilebasindiscourse.org