

Environmental Advocacy at Work:

Lessons Learnt from the Campaign to save Lake Natron from Plans to Build a Soda Ash Factory

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Recommended citation

BirdLife International (2012). Environmental Advocacy at Work: Lessons Learnt from the Campaign to Save Lake Natron from Plans to Build a Soda Ash Factory. BirdLife International, Africa Partnership Secretariat, Nairobi, Kenya.

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About BirdLife International

BirdLife International is a global partnership of non-governmental organisations striving to conserve birds, their habitats, and global biodiversity, working with people, towards sustainable use of natural resources. Currently, the partnership works in more than 116 countries through 117 national grassroot conservation NGO's. In Africa, the BirdLife Africa Partnership is a growing network of 23 such organisations plus one Country Programme, covering 24 countries, with a combined total of more than 300 staff and 30,000 members. Partners are involved in research, conservation action, environmental education and sustainable development through a broad agenda focusing not only on birds but also on other fauna and flora and social issues such as poverty alleviation.

The Lake Natron Consultative Group

The Lake Natron Consultative Group is an informal coalition of 56 organisations from across the globe formed to spearhead advocacy to save Lake Natron following the proposal to construct a soda ash plant. The Group's goal is to ensure that the integrity of Lake Natron is not compromised so that Lesser Flamingos can continue to find a haven for their breeding. The importance of the lake in supporting the lives and livelihoods of local communities must also be respected. The Group which is housed at the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat is committed to continue campaigning until the soda ash plan is shelved permanently.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. It is the largest wildlife conservation organisation in Europe with over one million members. RSPB's work is driven by a passionate belief that human beings have a responsibility to protect birds and the environment and bird populations reflect the health of the planet on which our future depends. RSPB supports conservation work in Africa and other parts of the world.

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ISBN No.: 978-9966-7191-5-7

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Foreword

The campaign to save Lake Natron against Tata's proposal to build a soda ash plant was unprecedented. It demonstrated that by working together, conservation groups can have a great impact against unfriendly environmental developments. Although the soda ash proposal came by surprise and the response, therefore, largely reactive, the whole campaign nevertheless proved a great success.

This work started while I was the CEO of the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania (BirdLife in Tanzania). I do remember that on many occasions, we worked tirelessly with the BirdLife International and Lake Natron Consultative Group team to provide input to project documents prepared by the investor. As the "Think Pink" Campaign gained momentum, it became clear to those interested in short-term gains that Lake Natron was truly a regional and international resource, as thousands joined in to apply pressure to bear from across the globe.

I am delighted to see this publication become a reality. It is an important learning tool as well as documentation of what happened. It is my hope that this work will benefit groups wishing to support advocacy for sites facing similar challenges. In particular, I hope that it will serve as an inspiration to others; that a lot can be done with minimal resources if actors work with united resolve.

This work has demonstrated that there is strength in numbers. The fact that many institutions decided to put aside their differences to work for a common cause was quite commendable. A lot was accomplished through team-work than would have been accomplished by a few institutions. That was the strength of the Lake Natron Consultative Group.

The Lake Natron story has also taught us to be more proactive in our site conservation approaches in future. Those who care about the environment should find a way to pre-empt and prevent potentially damaging developments at key sites. One way of doing this is to build the capacity of local communities and establishing alternative means of earning an income. Continuous engagement of governments so that such sites are legally protected and their importance recognised at national level should be an on-going process.

Finally, the withdrawal of Tata from Lake Natron is a good sign and provides a huge sigh of relief. However, as recent developments have shown, complacency is not an option. As long as the soda ash deposits remain at Lake Natron, it is likely that mining interests will persist. All concerned parties should take advantage of the constituency and goodwill generated during this campaign, and the subsequent project, to ensure that the future of Lake Natron, Local Communities and the Lesser Flamingos, are not jeopardised.

Lota Melamari

Former CEO, Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania



Acknowledgements

This work would have been impossible without the support received from various institutions and individuals. We appreciate the financial assistance provided at a critical time by the Horn of Africa Regional Environment Centre and Network (HOA-REC/N) at the University of Addis Ababa. Special mention goes to Ms Janny Poley (former First Secretary at the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) without whose intervention this work would have stalled in 2007. Indeed, it was during a discussion with Ms Poley that the idea of this book was born. Others are Dr Araya Asfaw, Director of HOA-REC/N; Dr Satishkumar Belliethathan and Dr Mekuria Argaw. We also thank the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation which provided funds to continue doing tangible work on the ground and for publishing this book.

The Lake Natron Consultative Group (The Group) would like to thank the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat for providing office space to The Group in 2007. We are grateful to Dr Hazell Thompson, Dr Julius Arinaitwe and the entire staff for providing a friendly working environment. Thanks, too, for the advice and support while compiling and publishing this book.

We appreciate Nature Kenya for hosting many of the Lake Natron strategy meetings and for providing space and financial resources. We thank the East African Wildlife Society and the Kenya Wetlands Forum in particular for the great role they played in kick starting the Lake Natron campaign.

Other institutions that provided invaluable advice, financial and/or moral support include the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB – BirdLife in UK); the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); Wetlands International; the Born Free Foundation and the Ramsar Secretariat. A number of government agencies in East Africa provided useful support, including the Wetlands Unit of the Government of Tanzania's Wildlife Division; the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS); the National Environment Management Council (NEMC) in Tanzania; the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) in Kenya; and the National Museums of Kenya (NMK). Special mention goes to Dr Julius Kipngetch of KWS; Eng. Bonventure Baya of NEMC Tanzania; Prof. James Ole Kiyiapi, the former Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Environment in Kenya; Mr Ali Mohamed, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Environment in Kenya, Dr Alice Kaudia, Dr Helida Oyieke and Dr Cecilia Gichuki of NMK.

Many individuals freely donated time and technical input to The Group. Serah Munguti and Paul Matiku (Nature Kenya); the late Peter Odhiambo (Kenya Wetlands Forum); Steve Itela (Youth for Conservation); the late Joseph Ole Saningo and Mike Ole Mokoro of Ilkisongo Pastoralist Initiatives (IPI), Tanzania; Hadley Becha (formerly of East African Wildlife Society); Salome Gathoni (formerly at the Centre for Minority Rights Development – CEMIRIDE); Dr Francis Mwaura (University of Nairobi), Dr Cecilia Gichuki and Ronald Mulwa (National Museums of Kenya, and Phoebe Munyoro (formerly of Youth for Conservation), deserve a very special mention.

Others who provided invaluable input to The Group¹ at various stages include Dr Chris Magin (RSPB); Dr Leon Bennun (BirdLife International); the Late Dr Brooks Childress (IUCN Flamingo Specialist Group); Lota Melamari (Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania – WCST, Tanzania); Nshalla Rugemeleza and Elias Mwashuuya (Lawyers Environmental Action Team, Tanzania); Deodatus Mfugale (Editor of *Guardian* and Chair, JET, Tanzania) and John Chikomo (Executive Director, Journalists Environmental Association of Tanzania, JET).

¹The Group refers specifically to the Lake Natron Consultative Group while The Team refers to a team drawn from BirdLife International and The Group and other organisations that led the campaign. It is difficult to pinpoint the members of The Team because it varied from time to time depending on the issue at hand. The terms 'conservation groups', 'concerned groups' and 'lobbyists' generally refers to all the groups involved in the campaign around the world, including BirdLife and The Group. The BirdLife Africa Secretariat hosted The Group and was also member.



We also wish to acknowledge the special role played by the former Environment Minister of Tanzania, Dr Batilda Buriani, who approached the issues raised by stakeholders in a very pragmatic way. During a meeting with Richard Grimmett and Ken Mwathe of BirdLife International, and Achilles Byaruhanga of Nature Uganda in South Korea on 4th November 2008, she pledged that she would ensure that the future of Lake Natron was not jeopardised by any decision by the Government of Tanzania.

Much appreciation goes to Mr Abdirahin Abdi, the former Speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly and Dr George Nangale, the Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture Natural Resources and Tourism for receiving our team in Nairobi and Arusha and for the role they played in the passing of the East African Transboundary Ecosystems Management Bill 2010.

We appreciate the media in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, London, Washington and Mumbai for their support. Various newspapers, radio and TV stations covered our work. While it is not possible to mention all, some played a crucial role. These are: *The Guardian*, *Daily News* and *Mwananchi*, (Tanzania); *NTV*, *Daily Nation*, *Business Daily*, *The People Daily* and *The EastAfrican* (Kenya); British Broadcasting Corporation, *The Telegraph*, *The Independent* and *The Observer* (UK); the Voice of America (USA) and *Hindustantimes* (India). A special mention goes to individual journalists who went beyond the call of duty, including: Deo Mfugale (*The Guardian*, Tanzania), Solomon Mburu (*Business Daily*, Kenya), Henry Wahinya (*The People Daily*, Kenya), the late Philemon Lusekelo (*The Guardian*, Tanzania), Patrick Rukwaro and Peninah Karibe (NTV Kenya), Anne Mawathe (BBC Nairobi Bureau), Steve Bloomfield (The Independent, UK) and Nick Wadhams (Voice of America).

Mr James Warwick graciously donated beautiful flamingos photos for use in the campaign and Mr Richard Brock gave us flamingo footage. We thank them. We thank the Publications Team at BirdLife Africa Partnership Nairobi which, in 2012, fast tracked the printing of this book among other publications. Members of the team not already mentioned were Paul Mugo, Venancia Wambua and Evelyn Runjugi. Last, but not least, we thank Kariuki Nding'ang'a, Maaikie Manten, Paul Mugo and Njagi Njeru for editing and refining the final draft of this book.

Dedication

This work is dedicated first to two departed colleagues who gave themselves whole-heartedly to the cause. These are the late **Mr Peter Odhiambo**, former Coordinator of Kenya Wetlands Forum at the East African Wildlife Society, and the late **Mr Joseph Ole Saningo**, former Director of Ilkisongo Pastoralist Initiatives based at Lake Natron, Tanzania.

These two individuals sacrificed their precious time to contribute ideas and perform specific tasks on behalf of the campaign team. They took part in strategy meetings, press conferences, field trips and defended The Team's position at various consultative fora. Having departed too soon, it was a great loss to the work and their presence and contribution will be missed. Let this work be an enduring memory of their contribution.

We also dedicate this work to the local community at Lake Natron and their leaders. It was principally as a result of their relentless, unshaken stand that efforts to construct a soda ash factory at Lake Natron did not succeed.

We salute the foresightedness of leaders like **Mr Christopher Ndurway** who fended off the soda ash push and chose to bequeath a secure future to generations to come.



List of Acronyms

ACC	African Conservation Centre
AEWA	African Eurasian Waterbirds Agreement
ANRT	Agriculture Natural Resources and Tourism Committee
AWF	African Wildlife Foundation
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBA	Cost Benefit Analysis
CBD	Convention of Biological Biodiversity
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species
COP	Conference of Parties
ELA	East African Legislative Assembly
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
EAWS	East African Wildlife Society
HNG	Hindustan National Glass and Industries
HOAREC/N	Horn of Africa Regional Environment Center and Network
IMP	Integrated Management Plan
IPi	Ilkisongo Pastoralist Initiatives
JET	Journalists Environmental Association of Tanzania
KBC	Kenya Broadcasting Corporation
KWF	Kenya Wetlands Forum
KWS	Kenya Wildlife Service
LNRL	Lake Natron Resources Ltd
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NEMA	National Environmental Management Authority (Kenya)
NEMC	National Environmental Management Council (Tanzania)
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NMK	National Museums of Kenya
PAOC	Pan African Ornithological Congress
RAM	Ramsar Advisory Mission
Ramsar	Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance
RSPB	The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SORALO	South Rift Association of Land Owners
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
TATO	Tanzania Association of Tourism Operators
TCL	Tata Chemicals Ltd
TIC	Tanzania Investment Centre
The Group	Lake Natron Consultative Group
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WCST	Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
WWN	World Wetlands Network

Introduction

How it all started

In the year 2006, Lake Natron Resources Limited, a company jointly owned by the Government of Tanzania and Tata Chemicals Limited of Mumbai, India, proposed to build a US\$ 450 million soda ash factory at Lake Natron (Figure 1) in Tanzania. The factory was meant to extract and process soda ash, otherwise known as sodium carbonate. Soda ash is a chemical that is widely used in the manufacture of automotive and container glass, pharmaceutical drugs, fertilisers, soft drinks and hardening of paper.

The proposed construction of the soda ash plant raised concerns from the conservation fraternity due to the potential damage that the facility and its operations would pose to biodiversity and especially the East African population of the Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*). There were concerns that the building of the plant would disrupt the breeding of these crimson and pink coloured birds, whose only breeding site in this part of the world is the salty Lake Natron.



Figure 1: Location of Lake Natron in Tanzania, near the Kenyan Border [Source: Google Maps]





The 1.5–2.5 million Lesser Flamingos found in East Africa constitute three quarters (75%) of the world population and most of them are hatched at Lake Natron. Sir David Attenborough once described the display of the flamingos in the East African lakes as the “greatest ornithological spectacle on earth.”

Conservation groups were also concerned about the plight of the local people, who are largely Maasai pastoralists. These people depend on the Lake Natron ecosystem for their livelihoods and it was feared that a huge factory would disrupt and interfere with the natural resources that they depend on for sustenance. Questions were asked on the real benefits that the factory would transfer to the local people as opposed to making millions in government taxes and corporate profits. The groups also pointed out the negative impacts on tourism, which is the fastest growing industry (UNWTO, 2011) worldwide and a major contributor to East Africa’s Gross Domestic Product².

The Precautionary Principle

Concerned groups argued that information on the breeding habits and requirements of Lesser Flamingos was not readily available. There was therefore a lot of uncertainty on what impacts the proposed development would have on the birds. In view of this the application of the “Precautionary Principle” enshrined in Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration³ was advocated. We argued that action should be taken to avert environmental disaster by not building the plant since there was limited knowledge of what the impacts would be (see Box 1).

BOX 1: The Rio Declaration Principle 15
In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities.
Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

This case study tells the story of a movement that came to be known as the **Lake Natron Consultative Group** (The Group). This movement started in East Africa to advocate for the maintenance of the integrity of Lake Natron as a breeding site for Lesser Flamingos. The case study describes the beginnings, and the support it drew from across Africa and the rest of the world. It also highlights the success of the “Think Pink” campaign launched by BirdLife International, to apply additional pressure and seek further international support.

²Globally, tourism contributed US\$ 919 billion in 2011 and continues to be the largest and fastest growing sector. According to the World Trade Organisation, tourism accounts for roughly 35% of exports of services and over 8% of exports of goods. In 2001, the International Labour Organisation estimated that 207 million jobs were attributed to tourism directly or indirectly. In East Africa, tourism contributes at least 12% of national GDPs. Tourism is clearly the industry of the future and countries with some potential should aggressively defend and develop it.

³The Rio Declaration was signed at the end of the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in January 1992. The Rio Declaration consists of 27 principles meant to guide future sustainable development around the world.



Lake Natron Consultative Group Institutions

The names of the institutions that constitute the Lake Natron Consultative Group are presented in Table 1. The Group grew from just 5 institutions in May 2007, to 23 in December 2007, to 32 in May 2008, to 49 in June 2009, and to 56 in August 2011.

Table 1: List of the Lake Natron Consultation Group

1	East African Wildlife Society (EAWLS) <i>KENYA</i>	20	Djibouti Nature <i>DJIBOUTI</i>	39	Sudanese Environmental Conservation Society (SECS) <i>SUDAN</i>
2	Nature Kenya, <i>KENYA</i>	21	The Heritage Society <i>USA</i>	40	Arsi Nature Conservation and Development Association <i>ETHIOPIA</i>
3	BirdLife International – Africa Partnership Secretariat <i>UK & KENYA</i>	22	Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania <i>TANZANIA</i>	41	Selam Environmental Development Association <i>ETHIOPIA</i>
4	African Conservation Centre (ACC) <i>KENYA</i>	23	Game Rangers Association of Africa <i>SOUTH AFRICA</i>	42	Nature Somaliland <i>SOMALILAND</i>
5	Youth For Conservation <i>KENYA</i>	24	Maa Civil Society Forum <i>KENYA</i>	43	SEO/BirdLife <i>SPAIN</i>
6	South Rift Association of Landowners (SORALO) <i>KENYA</i>	25	Lake Naivasha Riparian Association <i>KENYA</i>	44	Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action (MELCA) <i>ETHIOPIA</i>
7	Kenya Wetlands Forum (KWF) <i>KENYA</i>	26	American Council For Wildlife Preservation <i>USA</i>	45	Ecogeneration <i>KOREA</i>
8	Centre for Minority Rights Development (CEMIRIDE) <i>KENYA</i>	27	PIBI Biological Research Foundation <i>USA</i>	46	Korean Federation for Environmental Movements <i>KOREA</i>
9	Kenya Community Based Tourism Network (KECOBAT) <i>KENYA</i>	28	Kenya Alliance of Residents Association <i>KENYA</i>	47	Union de Ornithologos <i>COSTA RICA</i>
10	Environnemental Liaison Centre International (ELCI) <i>KENYA</i>	29	Kenya Water and Sanitation Network (KEWASNET) <i>KENYA</i>	48	The Ethiopian Heritage Trust <i>ETHIOPIA</i>
11	Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Law (CREEL) <i>KENYA</i>	30	Ecotourism Kenya <i>KENYA</i>	49	Stay Green Foundation <i>THE GAMBIA</i>
12	Wildlife Clubs of Kenya (WCK) <i>KENYA</i>	31	Ilkisongo Pastoralist Initiatives (IPI), Monduli & Longido <i>TANZANIA</i>	50	The PAMS Foundation <i>TANZANIA</i>
13	Ethiopia Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS) <i>ETHIOPIA</i>	32	Journalists Environmental Association of Tanzania (JET) <i>TANZANIA</i>	51	East African Environmental Network <i>KENYA</i>
14	The Born Free Foundation <i>UK & KENYA</i>	33	Miliru-Bushi Organization Kenya (MIBOK) <i>KENYA</i>	52	Wetlands International
15	Uganda Wildlife Society <i>UGANDA</i>	34	Wildlife for Sustainable Development <i>ETHIOPIA</i>	53	Ecolife Development Agency <i>KENYA</i>
16	Nature Uganda <i>UGANDA</i>	35	Wildlife Conservation Society <i>USA & TANZANIA</i>	54	Community Action for Nature Conservation <i>KENYA</i>
17	Lawyers Environmental Action Team (LEAT) <i>TANZANIA</i>	36	A Rocha Kenya <i>KENYA</i>	55	Watoto Pamoja Initiative <i>KENYA</i>
18	Forum for Environment <i>ETHIOPIA</i>	37	Rift Valley Explorations (University of Leicester) <i>UK</i>	56	The Serengeti Watch <i>TANZANIA</i>
19	Horn of Africa – Regional Environment Centre/Network, (AAU) <i>ETHIOPIA</i>	38	Environmental Defender Law Centre <i>USA</i>		



Purpose of this Case Study

The purpose of this case study is to share our experiences and lessons learnt. We have also attempted to provide a synopsis of some of the key strategies that we used in this advocacy campaign.

The global Millennium Ecosystem Assessment which assessed 24 ecosystem services concluded that only four have shown improvement over the last 50 years. Fifteen are in serious decline, and five are in a stable state overall, but under threat in some parts of the world (UNEP, 2005). This situation is no different in Africa.

Threats to Africa's biodiversity are rapidly escalating with expanding economies and increased interest from overseas developers, (especially from the extractive industries). Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) reached US\$ 38.8 billion in 2006, a 26.5% rise compared to the previous 12 months. Much of this investment is targeted at Africa's oil and mining industries. Critically, very little of this money is filtering through to improve the daily lives of Africa's poorest people and yet the poor are most dependent on natural resources for meeting their basic needs. Moreover, investors are awarded incentives including tax holidays, which further reduce revenues to governments that could be used to combat poverty.

It is worth noting that this book makes a deliberate attempt to tell the whole story. Every effort has been made to ensure the *why, what, when, who* and *where* questions are answered. We have also attempted to explain the *how* of the campaign.

We believe that there are lessons for all in this case study. Civil society groups, local communities, university lecturers and students, government agencies and policy and decision makers will find this case study useful. Our ultimate hope is that it will inspire many other people to take decisive and concerted action against misguided development likely to harm ecosystems, societies and sites. We also hope it will encourage investors to follow due processes in proposing development projects.

Lake Natron

Lake Natron⁴ lies in northern Tanzania, near the border with Kenya; it is barely 30 kilometres from Magadi town in Kenya and lies about 200 kilometres from Arusha town. The lake is squeezed between Monduli and Longido Districts to the east and Ngorongoro to the west. It neighbours Kajiado County in Kenya.

The single largest water catchment of Lake Natron is the River Ewaso Ngiro South in Kenya with a basin of 7,600 km². Originating from the Mau Escarpment in Kenya, the river reaches Lake Natron at its northern shore through a large swampy delta called Shompole. The lake is also fed by three other smaller rivers. The main one is Ngare Sero in the southwest, passing near a village by a similar name. Others are Moinik, draining most of the western area, and the Pinyinyi, which drains the north-western area.

⁴The name Natron is thought to be derived from "trona" the hard raw material from which soda ash is made. According to Wikipedia, the word "trona" comes to English by way of either Swedish (trona) or Spanish (trona), with both possible sources having the same meaning as in English. Both of these derive from the Arabic trōn which in turn derives from the Arabic Natron, and Hebrew נַטְרוֹן (natruna), which comes from ancient Greek νιτρον (nitron), derived ultimately from ancient Egyptian ntry (or nitry).



The scenic view of the volcanic peak of Ol Donyo Lengai: "The Mountain of God" © Tanzania Tourist Board

Lake Natron lies low in the Great Rift Valley surrounded by a landscape blotched with thorn trees and bush. Nearby is Africa's highest active volcano – Ol Donyo Lengai – known to the Maasai as "The Mountain of God." This mountain stands guard and occasionally belches lava rich in sodium carbonate that bolsters salt concentration in the lake. As water evaporates, the levels of salt rise, triggering the growth of *Spirulina*, a microscopic plant which thrives on the soda ash.

Lake Natron Flamingos

The harsh alkaline environment at Lake Natron is paradise for Lesser Flamingos. Lake Natron is the world's most important breeding site for the species which is classified as "Near Threatened" in IUCN's *red list*. The only four other places where Lesser Flamingos breed in the world are Makgadikgadi Pans in Botswana; Etosha Pan in Namibia and Zinzuwada and Purabcheria salt pans in India.

Major breeding sites near Bela in the Great Rann of Kachchh in India and at Aftout es Sâheli in Mauritania are suspected, but are not confirmed. Breeding occurred at Lake Abijatta in Ethiopia in 2005, producing approximately 3,000 chicks, and also occurred in 2008 on a new artificial breeding island at Kamfers Dam in Kimberley, South Africa, producing approximately 9,000 chicks. However, it is not yet known whether these sites will become regular breeding sites (Childress *et al.*, 2008).

Lesser Flamingos are opportunistic breeders and nest in huge colonies on soda flats; they build a conical-shaped mud mound where they lay eggs. The laying of eggs can occur at more or less any time of the year, but how breeding is correlated to environmental factors is still poorly known. When the young hatch, they move in huge congregations known as crèches, in search of fresh water, accompanied by some adults.

The Lesser Flamingo feeds mainly on *Spirulina platensis* commonly referred to as blue-green algae. These "algae" bloom at times in many of the alkaline lakes of Eastern and Southern Africa, allowing flamingos to congregate in spectacular assemblages so dense that they have to be seen to be believed. When food is at low densities, flamingos switch to feeding on other food items, such as diatoms, and they disperse over a wider area.



At Lake Natron, the majority of breeding occurs during the months of October–November, although breeding to a lesser degree of success can occur throughout the year. A Lesser Flamingo lays only one egg once every 3–5 years and even this is dependent on the right conditions. There are five clearly significant reasons why Lake Natron is preferred by this species:

Isolation of nesting sites: Sensitive nesting sites are isolated and therefore cannot be accessed by predators. Apart from protection from predators, isolation of sites gives the Lesser Flamingos the required privacy for them to breed. Documented evidence has suggested that a single episode of disturbance can cause a whole breeding colony to abandon the nest site. Lack of isolation, perhaps, explains why Lesser Flamingos have never bred at Lake Magadi, although Leslie Brown records a failed attempt in 1962.⁵

Availability of fresh water: Lake Natron enjoys a presence of freshwater springs throughout the year. The juvenile birds move towards fresh water in large groups not only to drink the water but also to wash their feathers.

Availability of food: Availability of food is a prerequisite for successful breeding of the flamingos. The alkaline nature of the water at Lake Natron makes it possible for flamingos' primary food (*Spirulina platensis*) to thrive at the lake. Without the concentrated water (brine), Lesser Flamingos would not find enough food to enable them remain at the lake for breeding.

Suitable substrate for nest construction: The preferred breeding sites are in areas where material for making the conical-shaped mud mound is available. During dry seasons the colonies can be more spread out and follow the cracks in the soda ash (trona) where suitable mud can be accessed.

Suitable areas for the young: Lake Natron has suitable and secure areas for the young or 'crèche' to move, feed and obtain fresh food and water.



Lesser Flamingoes at Lake Natron. Congregations of the species have been termed “the world’s greatest ornithological spectacle” © Francis Makari

⁵In his book *Mystery of the Flamingos*, Leslie Brown records that Lesser Flamingos attempted to breed at Lake Magadi in 1962. About 850,000 chicks were hatched and approximately 350–400,000 survived and flew away. However, this feat has never been repeated, perhaps because of increased human and predator activity and a changing environment at Lake Magadi. The soda ash has been operating at Magadi since the early 1900s.



The People

The communities that live around Lake Natron Basin are largely Maasai and Batemi (Sonjo). Smaller groups such as the Rangji, Chagga, Pare and Waarusha are also present. These communities live in villages such as Ngare Sero, Pinyinyi, Magadini, Gelai, Engaruka and Wosi (Lake Natron Resources Ltd., 2008).

The Maasai are a community known all over the world for their ability to conserve their cultural practices in a modern world. Their main economic activity is keeping cattle and as pastoralists, they move from place to place searching for pasture. To the Maasai, cattle are a significant part of life; they drink cow's milk and blood and use cow dung to cover and seal their houses. One of the most controversial belief and major source of conflict between the Maasai and other tribes is that they are the rightful owners of all cattle. The Maasai also traditionally extracted trona (hard raw material from which sodium carbonate is derived) from Lake Natron for sale and use by livestock. This is an activity carried out by women and provides significant input to the household income.

The Sonjo are mainly found in the villages of Ngare Sero, Pinyinyi with some at Engaruka. Like the Maasai, they are pastoralists and move their homes from time to time searching for green pastures and water for their animals. Apart from being cattle keepers, the Sonjo are also



Some community leaders stand watch at the Ngare Sero Cultural Boma. Their lives and livelihoods would suffer from damaging developments in the area © Ken Mwathe



farmers. At Pinyinyi village, where they are the dominant group, they use a primitive indigenous irrigation system using water from the western escarpment of the Rift Valley.

The smaller communities live in strategic places where they engage in economic activities like agriculture. Villages like Engaruka, where water is readily available, have attracted many immigrants to settle in the village permanently. It is also a prime watering area for herds during the dry season.

At Pinyinyi village, irrigation agriculture is done along the Pinyinyi River. Traditional irrigation canals are used during the dry season and crops cultivated include maize, sweet potatoes, cassava, bananas, tomatoes, finger millet, water melon, groundnuts, onions and rice.

The communities around Lake Natron also benefit from tourism. A good number of tourists visit Lake Natron. Main attractions for photographic and eco-tourism activities include climbing of Ol Donyo Lengai volcano, which is the highest active volcano in Africa; walks up the Ngare Sero River to the waterfalls; visits to archeological sites; cultural experiences and visits to the cultural village; a number of different walks from the escarpment to the lake, and bird-watching safaris.

The building of a soda ash plant on Lake Natron would deprive the local community of the benefits that accrue from ecotourism as taking out Lesser Flamingos from the equation leaves Lake Natron a poor destination choice for tourists.

National and international importance

Lake Natron is important for Tanzania, for the East African region, and globally.

First, Lake Natron is listed as a Ramsar Site under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (also known as the Ramsar Convention). The Ramsar Convention was signed in 1971 in Iran and seeks to promote national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Globally, the Convention has been accepted by 150 nations. As a way to enhance protection of wetlands, the Convention maintains a list of Wetlands of International Importance. Lake Natron was put on this list on 4th July 2001. By applying for Lake Natron to become a Ramsar Site, the Government of Tanzania accepted that the resource was important for the global community as well.

Secondly, Lake Natron is an Important Bird Area (IBA). BirdLife International designates IBAs using rigorous scientific criteria. They do one or more of three things: they hold significant numbers of one or more globally threatened species; are one of a set of sites that together hold a number of restricted-range species of birds; and/or have exceptionally large numbers of species that migrate or congregate. Lake Natron qualifies as an IBA on the basis of all three criteria.

Lake Natron is important for tourism in Tanzania and the East African region as a whole. Tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world and, for East Africa, it contributes between 12–16% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the national economies. For Tanzania, Lake Natron plays a pivotal role in supporting tourism in northern Tanzania. The Lesser Flamingo is considered



one of the reasons tourists visit Arusha National Park, Manyara National Park and Ngorongoro Conservation Area. All guidebooks for these parks include pictures of Lesser Flamingos. Tanzania's tourism earned the country US\$ 1 billion in 2009 with about 800,000 visitors.

The rest of the East African countries also benefit from tourism in general and flamingo tourism in particular. For example, tourism in Kenya at Lake Bogoria National Reserve and Lake Nakuru National Park is greatly dependent on Lesser Flamingos. Therefore, a crash in the Lesser Flamingo population would certainly affect tourist revenues. Kenya attracted a record 2 million visitors in 2009 and tourism earned US\$ 1 billion that year. Notably, most of the visitors who went to Kenya also visited the flamingo hotspots, especially Lake Nakuru and Lake Bogoria.

Lesser Flamingos are also a tourist attraction in the National Parks of Ethiopia. Up to 230,000 have been recorded at Abijatta-Shalla Lakes National Park, smaller numbers at Nechisar National Park and they draw many visitors at Lake Langano, a major leisure tourist destination. In Uganda, Queen Elizabeth National Park is estimated to have about 65,000 flamingos.

Lastly, the lake ecosystem is critically important for the local people on both sides of the international border. This dry country provides the local communities with their means of livelihoods. The Maasai in particular depend on the fresh water that flow into the lake to water their animals and they move from place to place in search of lush grass, sometimes crossing the border, during extreme situations. The Lake Natron ecosystem also supports the rich cultural beliefs of the local communities.

Biodiversity

Apart from flamingos, Lake Natron has many other forms of life. For example, it has one of the highest mammalian diversity on earth (*Institute of Applied Ecology, 1999*) with animals such as elephants, lions, buffalo, giraffe, zebra, and a wide variety of antelopes roaming freely.

The area is also famed for its bird diversity which include up to 30% of the global population of the threatened Chestnut-banded Plover (*Charadrius pallidus*), and important populations of Cape Teal (*Anas capensis*), Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*) and Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*). Other species of birds recorded at Lake Natron are White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), African Spoonbill (*Platalea alba*), Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), Blacksmith Plover (*Vanellus armatus*), Little Stint, Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*) and White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*).

To add to this diversity, the rivers and lakes in the area host a wide variety of fish, the most notable being a special tilapia fish (*Oreochromis alcalicus graham*) which survives in the scalding alkaline hot springs. When disturbed, these fish churn the hot waters into a fine spray, which is a beauty to behold.

The ecosystem also holds important populations of three scarce hoofed animals. These are the Fringe-eared Oryx (*Oryx gazella cullotis*), the Lesser Kudu (*Ammelaphus imberbis*) and the Gerenuk (*Litocranius walleri*).

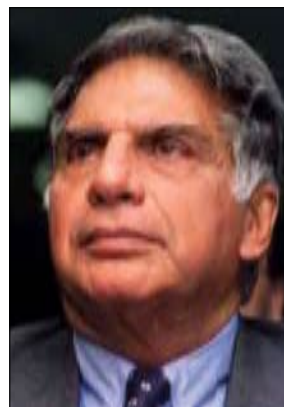
The Threat

Tata's Soda Ash Factory Plan at Lake Natron

Tata Chemicals Limited

Tata Chemicals Limited (TCL) is part of the Tata Group, whose Chairman, Mr Rattan Tata, is one of the most respected corporate chieftains in India. The Tata Group controls 96 companies worth US\$ 22 billion. The group is involved in the manufacture of a wide range of products—from automobiles, to watches, to steel, to fertilisers. In 2008, the Tata Group paid US\$ 2.3 billion to Ford Motors buying famous British car brands, Land Rover and Jaguar.

Established in 1939, Tata Chemicals Limited (TCL) is a global company with interests in chemicals, crop nutrition and consumer products. TCL manufactures among other products, soda ash (sodium carbonate), iodised salt and nitrogenous and phosphatic fertilisers. It is the world's second largest producer of soda ash,



Mr. Rattan Tata,
Chairman of Tata Group



Tata Chemicals Ltd's Magadi Soda ash plant in Kenya: Tata planned to build such a facility at Lake Natron © Ken Mwathe



producing around 5.5 million tonnes per annum, out of which 60 per cent capacity is from natural soda ash deposits at Wyoming, USA and Lake Magadi, Kenya. In early 2006, TCL completed the acquisition of UK-based Brunner Mond Group and its subsidiary, the Magadi Soda Company in Kenya⁶. The Magadi Soda Company in Kenya has been producing soda ash for more than 100 years and is located barely 30 kilometres from Lake Natron.

With a desire to extend its foothold in the soda ash business in East Africa, TCL approached the Government of Tanzania with a proposal to construct a soda ash plant at Lake Natron, a few kilometers away from its newly acquired Magadi Soda plant. The Government of Tanzania readily agreed, seeing that a whopping US\$ 400 million was to be invested in the country, notwithstanding the prospects of opening up the wilderness area of northern Tanzania, through road construction and other infrastructure. Through the National Development Corporation (NDC), the government agency mandated with the task of spearheading new development projects, the Government of Tanzania and TCL created a holding company and called it the Lake Natron Resources Ltd.

Lake Natron soda ash facility

The construction of the soda ash facility would involve the acquisition of approximately 2 square kilometres of land for the setting up of the factory itself, and a small town to host about 1,377 staff. Of these staff, 1,225 would be employed on a temporary, casual basis during factory construction, while only 152 staff would be employed on permanent basis. The soda ash factory would be designed to initially produce 500,000 tonnes of the product which would be upgraded to 1 million tonnes after an unspecified period of time.

The plant would require 11.5 megawatts of power to run and pump over 560 m³ of concentrated salty water (brine) per hour from the lake. To help in the soda extraction and purification process the factory would need 106,000 litres of fresh water per hour while an additional 23,000 litres of water would be used per hour for domestic needs. The factory would therefore remove 129,000 litres of fresh water *per hour* from arid surroundings to meet its needs.

The investor did not reveal where the power would come from. Tapping power from the national grid, use of diesel and use of coal remained possible options.

The process of soda ash extraction is quite complex. The brine would be pumped through a complex grid of pipes laid on the crusty surface. Within the factory, the raw material would go through a lengthy process of extraction and purification, thereby creating the final product: soda ash crystals. The soda ash would then be taken for storage and waste brine discharged into the lake. The basic information about the factory is provided in *Table 2*.

⁶After acquiring the Magadi Soda factory in Kenya in 2007, Tata Chemicals Ltd constructed a new US\$ 97 million plant through a credit facility from the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC). The acquisition was characterised by controversy, with the local community protesting the renewal of land lease without any reference to their long desire to acquire it back. The Environmental and Social Impact Assessment of the new factory was done in secret. By March 2009, the new factory was facing huge challenges including acute water shortages and increased competition from synthetic products from China. This forced Tata to temporarily close the Magadi factory for 3 months. China retailed 1 tonne of soda ash at US\$140 while Tata's soda ash was being sold for US\$ 180 per tonne. In current reality, even the future of the Magadi plant itself could be at risk.



The process of transporting the finished product was not clearly revealed by the investor. However, a number of options remained open. The first one would be to construct a seven-metre-wide tarmac road connecting Lake Natron through Mto wa Mbu to Arusha. The second option was to construct a railway line from Tanga Port connecting Lake Natron through Arusha. Indeed, we came to learn that the Government of Tanzania had elaborate plans to build a new port at Mwambani Bay⁷, just a few kilometres from Tanga Port, to handle the expected traffic as a result of the transportation of 1 million tonnes of soda ash from Lake Natron. As a matter of fact, Tata expected the railway line and other infrastructure to be in place before construction of the factory could commence.

Table 2: Basic information on the proposed soda ash plant	
Staffing	
Number of permanent staff:	152
Number of construction staff	1,225
Land Take	
Land required for plant and works	0.5 km ²
Land required for housing	1 km ²
Road requirements	7 m wide tar road
Resource requirements	
Fresh brine from Lake Natron	561m ³ /hour
Fresh water for plant operation	106 m ³ /hour
Fresh water for domestic use	23 m ³ /hour
Power required at plant	11.5 Megawatts
Coke, coal and limestone (Boilers)	21 Metric tonnes per hour
Sulphuric Acid	0.552 tonnes per day
Caustic Soda	0.1 metric tons per day
Lubricants	145 litres per month
Diesel (for water pumps)	9 kg/hour
Production	
Tons Soda Ash per hour/year produced on a 24-hour cycle	500,000 metric tonnes per annum
By products and pollutants	
Depleted brine returned to lake	476 MTPH
Mud slurry	93 MTPH
Fly ash from boilers	5 MTPH
SO ₂ emissions from power generation	Unknown
Sewerage water	10 m ³ per hour

Source: Lake Natron Resources Ltd

⁷The Tanzania Ports Authority planned to spend US\$ 1 billion to build a new port at Mwambani. However, this proposal was met with strong opposition from environmental groups protesting that the site is home to *Coelacanth*. *Coelacanth*s are ancient species of fish thought to have gone extinct but were re-discovered off the East African coast in 2003. Mwambani is one of the areas where the fish were discovered and it was declared a Marine Park by the government. See: http://www.tnrf.org/files/E_INFO_MWAMBANI_DOSSIER_November.pdf and <http://www.tnrf.org/node/10390>.



The four main concerns

In 2007, the Lake Natron Consultative Group, BirdLife International, the Royal Society for Protection of Birds and other groups raised four main concerns over the proposed Lake Natron soda ash project. These concerns were: disturbance to flamingo breeding; effects on local communities; disregard for international conventions and anxiety over the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) process.

Disturbance to breeding of Lesser Flamingos

Environmental groups argued that Lesser Flamingo breeding could not co-exist with a massive development such as the proposed one of soda ash plant. The construction and operation of the factory would produce so much commotion that it would be impossible for the birds to breed. The invasion of the areas with human beings, earth-movers, trucks and generators would further add to the disturbance. Lesser Flamingo breeding episodes are too infrequent to be disturbed in this manner.

Disturbance would also come from predators such as hyenas and marabou storks. Lake Natron is set in arid surroundings that offer limited food for bird predators. Predator populations are, therefore, low. The Lesser Flamingo breeding events are too infrequent and irregular to support a permanent population of predators relying on Lesser Flamingo eggs or chicks for their food. Very importantly, there are no major human settlements anywhere nearby that could support year-round populations of predatory and scavenging birds such as marabou storks. Building the factory would invariably provide suitable condition to attract these predators.

Another factor that would work against the success of Lesser Flamingo breeding is the change in the chemistry of the water. The highly saline water provides a perfect environment for the development of *Spirulina*, Lesser Flamingos' main diet. The waste water pumped back to the lake from the factory after extracting soda ash would not provide the right conditions for the *Spirulina* to grow. This would cut out the food supply for the breeding birds.

Apart from Lesser Flamingos, it was feared that the other special forms of biodiversity found in and around the lake would be disturbed.

A risk to local communities and regional economies

The negative effects on the flamingos would be felt in the economies of Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia because of lost tourism revenues. The big question here was: why start one industry only to kill an already existing one?

We argued that the proposed factory would put the livelihoods of local communities at risk. The lives of the local people at Lake Natron are inextricably linked to the ecosystem services provided by the lake and the surrounding ecosystem. Their livestock depend on the streams that flow into the lake for survival, they use the water to irrigate small farms and they receive tourism benefits using flamingos as part of the attraction.



Another point of contention was the amount of water the factory planned to use. In its letter to Tata in 2007, The Group argued that the 129,000 litres of fresh water required to run the plant in one hour was enough to meet the needs of 40,000 heads of cattle. The use of such a huge amount of fresh water in an extremely dry environment was considered unjustifiable and could deplete the resource from springs, rivers and wetlands in the area. “As things stand,” argued The Group, “there is not sufficient water supply to meet domestic, wildlife and livestock needs in the area and the proposed plant would completely destabilise any existing water balance.”

Perhaps the biggest question was what benefits the factory would bring to the local people. Tata and the Government of Tanzania indicated that only 152 permanent jobs would be created at the factory, with 1,225 employed as casuals during construction. The ESIA report was categorical that permanent jobs would be out of reach for local people since they were ‘illiterate.’ They would, however, benefit from employment as guards, the report said. The investor received massive criticism for this assertion. It was not difficult to see that the factory would take away nearly everything from the local communities, while giving them close to nothing in return.

Some of the communities that would lose much were those at Shompole and Olkiramatian across the Kenyan border. These two Maasai communities had invested heavily in ecotourism after setting aside 20,000 hectares of their land as conservation areas with the help of the African Conservation Centre (ACC) and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). The Shompole community had put up the Shompole Lodge, perched near the base of the Nguruman escarpment, kissing Lake Natron, while the Olkiramatian community had built the Sampu camp. These community initiatives brought employment for many youths as game scouts; provided water and health services; created dry season grass banks for livestock; and improved security in the area. These gains were going to be lost if a soda ash factory was built, as tourist numbers would diminish. We wondered why the government of Tanzania was not willing to replicate this success yet Lake Natron was more breath-taking.

Disregard for International Conventions

We argued that international conventions that govern the protection of natural resources and the environment had not been respected. These “Multilateral Environmental Agreements” bind signatory countries to stick to certain agreed principles with regard to the environment. An example was the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

Lake Natron being a Ramsar Site, the Government of Tanzania should have informed the Ramsar Secretariat that a big project was going to be put up in the area. The Ramsar Convention requires that a Party to the Convention (i.e. Government) should notify the Secretariat, if the ecological character of a Ramsar Site would be affected by planned development projects. That the Government of Tanzania did not bother to alert Ramsar was a big oversight on its part, which attracted much criticism.

Other conventions such as Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) require that if an activity is of a trans-boundary nature, all the countries likely to be negatively affected be involved in the ESIA process. Those opposed to



Tata's plans charged that none of the other countries in the region (e.g. Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia) had been consulted in the ESIA process, yet they had a big stake in the tourism industry which benefited from Flamingo conservation at Lake Natron.

The proposed project also negated the spirit of a new East African Community protocol for the Management of Environment and Trans-boundary resources⁸. This protocol required collaboration and consultation for projects likely to negatively affect member states.

Anxiety over the ESIA process

ESIA is a procedure which looks at positive and negative impacts of a proposed project in order to suggest measures to reduce or avoid negative impact. The anxiety over the ESIA process initiated by the investor was palpable among the environmental groups. We feared that the process was not going to be above board and expressed this firmly. It was felt that the process was likely to be stage-managed to favour Tata and the Government of Tanzania. A process that excluded some players would lose credibility and was likely to be vehemently opposed.

Past experiences with Kenya's Magadi Soda Company, which had been acquired by Tata Chemicals Ltd., did not help to instill confidence. We pointed out that Tata Chemicals Magadi had not made public the ESIA of the new plant that was built immediately after the acquisition. Indeed, the process was not made public and the document was not available even after searching the NEMA Kenya office.⁹ Furthermore, the Environmental Audit of the old plant could not be traced. This was not a good track record.

All these concerns were expressed in many different ways. In a letter which was published in the press raising these concerns, the Lake Natron Consultative Group called upon the Tanzania Government to "reconsider the project in view of the negative effects it would have on national economies, biodiversity conservation and local community livelihoods in the region." The Group's letter published in Kenya's *Daily Nation* on 12th July 2007 urged:

"...The East African Community to intervene and facilitate dialogue on this matter. It is in the interest of the Community to ensure that sufficient debate and dialogue is allowed by all member countries before any action is taken"

and

"...Tata Chemicals Ltd to look not only at the profits after project implementation but ask itself: 'at what cost?'"

⁸On 31st of January 2012, the East African Legislative Assembly sitting in Kampala, Uganda, approved the East African Trans-boundary Ecosystems Bill 2010 to replace the protocol. East Africa now has a legal instrument to streamline the management of and enforce environmental compliance in regard to trans-boundary projects. See: <http://www.eala.org/oldsite041111/media-centre/press-releases/312-eala-passes-bill-on-transboundary-ecosystems.htm>.

⁹Recent information shows that the Magadi Soda information could be kept in a secret file in a government agency office. Ordinarily, and according to the National Environment Management Act 1999, ESIA's are public documents. All ESIA's done in Kenya should be available upon payment of a fee of about US\$ 2. It is therefore intriguing and unlawful that Magadi Soda's 'assessment' is not publicly available.



BirdLife International sent out a strong statement expressing the concerns in a petition signed by 23 African Partner¹⁰ organisations on 15th October 2007. The petition read in part:

“We call upon all the governments, both in Africa and globally, all organisations concerned by this issue and all people of goodwill who care about biodiversity, environment and future generations to join hands and STAND UP! against the proposed development.”



The BirdLife Council for Africa Partnership Meeting in Nairobi: Partners made a strong call for Tanzania to stop the Lake Natron soda ash factory plans © *BirdLife International*

¹⁰BirdLife International is a network of Non-Governmental Organisations – known as Partners. BirdLife’s mission is to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. Globally, BirdLife has 117 partners in 117 countries and the BirdLife Africa Partnership is made up of 23 organisations in 24 countries.

The Gathering Storm

The beginnings of the Campaign

The beginnings of the campaign could be traced to an email expressing concern over Tata Chemicals' proposal. On 28th February 2007, Ken Mwathe who was then working for African Conservation Centre (ACC) wrote the following email to Dr David Western, his boss:

"The proposal to establish a second soda ash plant on the Tanzanian side of Lake Natron is a great assault against nature and biodiversity. The plant is proposed on the only site where Lesser Flamingos breed in the world.

In view of the above, I strongly suggest that we don't wait for the consultants to come around and ask whether we support the plant or not. We should send out a global petition to REJECT their proposal in toto. We must shout at this point in time and not later!"

At this point no one anticipated that the events that would follow would mark the beginning of a long and torturous journey in what would become an intense campaign, involving thousands of people across the globe, to save Lake Natron, the Lesser Flamingos and defend the future of the local communities.

Before the above email, Norken (Kenya) Ltd. had dispatched a consultant to various Kenyan institutions including ACC on a mission to discuss the Lake Natron soda ash mining proposal. Norken had been contracted by Norconsult, a Norwegian engineering company based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to carry out a scoping mission for the project's Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA). On its part, Norconsult had been contracted by Tata Chemicals Industries to carry out the ESIA. Norken consultants had also consulted with other institutions in Kenya including Nature Kenya and the East African Wildlife Society.

ESIA is a procedure which looks at positive and negative impacts of a proposed project in order to suggest measures to reduce or avoid negative impact. ESIA steps include screening, scoping and the ESIA study itself. During screening, experts identify whether a project requires an ESIA at all. Scoping is the process during which the geographical coverage and technical issues are identified. Consequently, a study is done and its findings submitted to government authorities for review. Upon review, a project can be approved or disapproved. A genuine ESIA process is underpinned by thorough involvement of the public: the so-called "interested and affected." In the Tanzanian case, recommendations of the fate of a project are forwarded to the Environmental Minister for a final decision.

In early February 2007 at a meeting with Norken, the ACC team (Ken Mwathe, James Ndungu and Shani Ole Petenya) expressed reservations over the soda ash factory plans. They pointed out the need for more information on the project and to tread carefully in order not to upset the biodiversity and livelihoods systems on both sides of the border. They asked the Norken consultant to come back for more in-depth consultations, to share the scoping report, as well





as the terms of reference for the ESIA study itself. It was evident during this meeting that Norken did not have sufficient documentation, including the project proposal which should have been the basis for the ESIA.

The fateful email of 28th March 2007 was raising the flag after Norken failed to provide feedback following the scoping exercise. We became suspicious and wanted to know the outcome of the exercise.

The response to the email raising the red flag was unanimous. Dr Western wrote back:

"I think we should start the action soon," adding, "when you consider the history of Magadi Soda and how it has ignored and sidelined the Maasai community and the impact the development could have on Natron, there is no reason to trust the transparency of this process more than the original."

All the other colleagues concurred. Consequently, an emergency meeting was called to deliberate over the issue. The meeting held at ACC on 2nd April 2007 brought together three members of staff and two community representatives. Those in attendance were Godfrey Masinde (ACC), Johnson Ole Sipitiek (ACC), Ken Mwathe (ACC), John Kamanga (South Rift Association of Land Owners) and John Munge (Shompole Group Ranch).

The meeting agreed to gather as much background information as possible. There was also need to identify and document tangible concerns regarding the soda ash mining proposal. Minutes from this meeting indicate its purpose was to "put together ideas and then bring on board other individuals and institutions to support this cause. This is not just a Shompole or Olkiramatian issue. It is a national, East African as well as a global issue."

Identifying allies and desperate information search

During the meeting of 2nd April 2007, it was agreed that the task ahead was monumental. A couple of steps were identified to be critical for success. Firstly, it was important to know what message needed to be sent out. This message had to be clearly defined. Secondly, there was need to devise a creative way of packaging the message so that it could appeal to all who received it. Finally, the meeting identified "primary stakeholders" and "secondary stakeholders." Primary stakeholders were those who would be closely involved in the campaign; secondary stakeholders were those whose voice was required but their day to day involvement not necessary. A follow up meeting would be held, bringing on board more people from different institutions. South Rift Association of Land Owners (SORALO) was identified as a key partner.

A coalition of 15 Maasai group ranches¹¹ located along the Kenya–Tanzania border, SORALO had been formed to revamp tourism in Kenya's southern tourist circuit. This circuit would connect Amboseli National Park and the world-famous Maasai Mara National Reserve. One of the

¹¹ A Group Ranch is a livestock production system or enterprise where a group of people jointly own freehold title to land, maintain agreed stocking levels and herd their livestock collectively which they own individually. It is noteworthy that selection of members to a particular group ranch was based on kinship and traditional land rights.



group ranches was Shompole, whose boundary touched the Kenyan section of Lake Natron. SORALO was a key stakeholder since they had much to lose if the soda ash plant proposal succeeded.

Following the meeting of 2nd April 2007, we visited a number of institutions to share these issues and seek support. Consultations were held with the East African Wildlife Society (EAWLS), Nature Kenya, Kenya Wetlands Forum (KWF), Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and National Museums of Kenya (NMK).

During these consultations it became apparent that a summary on the soda ash project was available. The late Peter Odhiambo, who was coordinating the Kenya Wetlands Forum at the East African Wildlife Society had obtained a six-page report titled “Lake Natron Environmental Brief”, by Norconsult. The brief had very sketchy data and information and was not sufficient to qualify as a project proposal, as it was largely lacking in detail such as bills of quantities and technical drawings.

At that time, contacts were made with BirdLife International and Wetlands International, whose regional offices were based in Nairobi. Oliver Nasirwa, who worked for Wetlands International, and was based at the BirdLife International Africa office, informed us that the ESIA process in Tanzania was nearing completion. He warned that by the time we came up with a strategy, the Natron soda ash plant could be up and running!

Upon further investigation, it was established that indeed, the ESIA process had been going on in Tanzania since 2006. The National Environment Management Council (NEMC) had placed a notice in the *Daily News* of November 2006 inviting the public to give comments on the soda ash project ESIA Scoping Report. At this point, loud alarm bells started ringing.

We wondered what else could have been going on behind the scenes and resolved that urgent action was needed to “shout” about these goings-on and bring them to the public arena. It then dawned on us that the February “scoping” mission carried out by Norken in Nairobi in February 2007 could have been a public relations exercise.

Lake Natron Consultative Group formed

By now, the need to “do something” had received resounding endorsement from a number of institutions. Another meeting, bringing together concerned institutions, was held at Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) on 8th May 2008. The meeting was attended by Fred Omengo (KWS), Peter Odhiambo (EAWLS), Godfrey Masinde (ACC), Stephen Katua (NEMA), Joel Siele (Nature Kenya), Ronald Mulwa (NMK), Joseph Munge (ACC), Jim Nyamu (ACC), Jane Wambugu (KWS), Johnson Ole Sipitiek (ACC) and Ken Mwathe (ACC).

A presentation was made outlining the events of the past few months and efforts that had been made to get hold of information on Tata’s plans. The presenter expressed frustrations encountered in attempting to obtain soda ash project details.



The participants concurred that as much information as possible was needed. It was also important to solicit support from Tanzanian institutions and individuals. There was also need to reach out to more institutions in Kenya and the East African region in general. To this end, a taskforce was formed to gather background information on Lake Natron, Lesser Flamingos and the soda ash proposal. The taskforce was required to produce a reference “dossier” and present it to the rest of the team.

The meeting at KWS on 8th May 2007 was significant in one other way: the meeting resolved to form an informal group to champion the issues that were being identified. Such a group would strengthen the mobilisation and sensitisation process and would attract support from other institutions and individuals. After some discussion, the name ‘**Lake Natron Consultative Group**’ was adopted.

Some colleagues were tasked to reach out to institutions in Tanzania while others were requested to write letters to various Kenyan institutions to seek further support. Someone was specifically assigned to talk to Tanzania’s Wildlife Division to find out more about the project.

Kicking off the Campaign

The campaign started in earnest when a set of letters were sent to key institutions in Kenya. These included permanent secretaries in various ministries and respective institutional directors. One challenge in sending out the letters was that Lake Natron Consultative Group was not a legal entity and did not have a letterhead. However, one of the institutions allowed the use of its letterhead with the director signing the letters on behalf of the others.

Letters were sent to the permanent secretaries responsible for environment, tourism and East African cooperation. Letters were also sent to the heads of KWS, NEMA, NMK, East African Wildlife Society, Nature Kenya, and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), among others. The response was good with some government officials responding by letters and others requesting for meetings to allow further discussion. Prof James Ole Kiyiapi, who was the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment (Kenya) and Julius Kipngetch, the Kenya Wildlife Service Director, later met our team. We also had audience with NEMA officials.

Around this time, we established communications with some contacts in Tanzania. It emerged that Tanzanians were aware about the soda ash proposal and some had been consulted at some point. These contacts revealed that people in Tanzania were talking in hushed tones because the soda ash mining project was viewed as a ‘government project.’ As a result of this perception, many people had reservations and were careful not to be seen to be opposing it. However, it was felt that voices from within Tanzania were needed to boost chances of success.

What followed were two months of intensive work trying to set up the campaign. In the beginning, no one viewed it as a ‘campaign’ but rather an effort to share information and mobilise support. It turned out the events of these months would lead to a grueling and drawn out engagement with Tata Group and the Tanzanian authorities involving tens of thousands of people across the globe.



Publicity galore

June 20th 2007 marked a watershed for the campaign in more than one way. On this day, the Late Peter Odhiambo (EAWLS), Steve Itela (Youth for Conservation) and Ken Mwathe (ACC), dispatched an unsolicited press statement on Lake Natron to thirteen media houses in Nairobi. Apart from highlighting the concerns the statement called upon Tata Chemicals to permanently shelve plans to put up a soda ash facility at Lake Natron. The statement also urged the Tanzania Government to “withdraw its support of the project and fulfill its obligations as a signatory to various international agreements, notably, the Convention on Biological Diversity.” Finally, the statement appealed to “local communities in the border area and all people of goodwill in the East African region and the world at large to join us as we raise out these serious concerns about the proposed project.”

A few media houses provided coverage but not as expected. However, this statement was later heavily referred to in various articles in the press when the media completely embraced the campaign.

On the same day, Lake Natron Consultative Group sent out its first Update Bulletin via email. Initially, the Update Bulletin was meant to inform those coordinating the campaign and the directors of various institutions. The bulletin was sent out from lakenatron@acc.or.ke. As the work grew, more and more people expressed interest and the mailing list continued to grow. At some point, it became necessary to protect the identities of those receiving the updates so we decided to hide the email addresses, but retained those of the directors. To date, the Bulletin is sent out to the institutional directors in the East African region and other continents with a blind copy to thousands across the globe.

The first Update Bulletins (*Figure 2*) focused on the need for further publicity by placing a paid advertisement in one of the newspapers.

In the evening of 20th June 2007, Steve Itela and Ken Mwathe were interviewed by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in Nairobi to talk about Lake Natron. The previous day, Steve had forwarded the group’s press statement to BBC. They invited us because they wanted the issue brought up on air. The interview was aired in the Swahili breakfast show, “*Amka na BBC*” on the morning of 21st June.

The publicity precipitated by the updates and the BBC report seemed to have landed home. It ruffled some feathers way up in the Tanzania Government hierarchy and, as expected, reactions came fast and furious. The then Tanzanian Prime Minister Hon Edward Lowassa, whose constituency bordered Lake Natron, dismissed The Group’s arguments and said Tanzania had a right to use its own Natural Resources, just as Kenya was doing at Magadi Soda. He was referring to the soda ash plant at Lake Magadi in Kenya, where processing of the mineral has been going on for over 100 years.

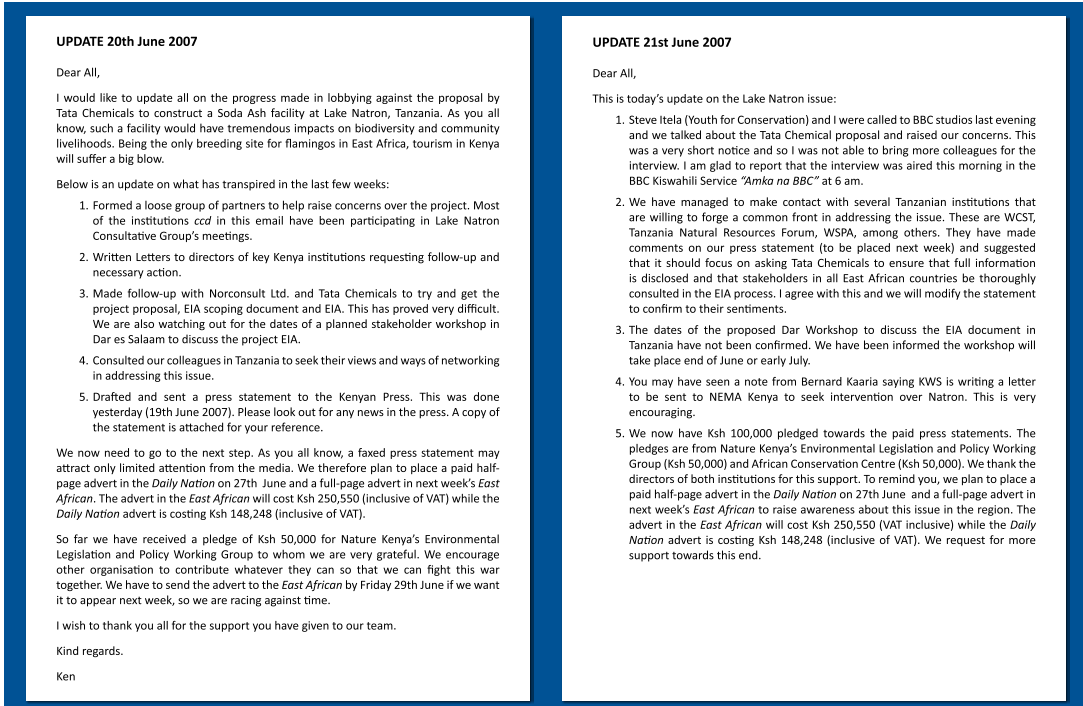


Figure 2. Lake Natron Consultative Group's first Update Bulletins on 20th and 21st June 2007

This is how The *EastAfrican* captured Hon. Lowassa's sentiments:

"An angry Mr Lowassa recently told Parliament, 'There have been comments heard on the British Broadcasting Corporation concerning Lake Natron, which is near the border of Tanzania and Kenya. On the Kenyan side, they have a soda ash plant on Lake Magadi, but when Tanzania starts discussing the construction of a similar plant, we are told we will destroy the environment'¹² "

Hon. Lowassa's statement was unnerving to say the least. It was realised that the soda ash project had deep support within government circles. But one question was the extent to which the President of Tanzania supported the project. So far, no public statement was associated with him. We took the view that the Prime Minister's position represented the government stand on the soda ash project. Mr Lowassa continued to vehemently oppose our efforts until he resigned in a financial scandal in 2008.

Following these events, further publicity was churned out and Lake Natron was getting noticed even by the international press. *The Independent* in the UK carried a story "Pollution in Paradise: Flamingo versus Factory"¹³. There were more stories in the *Telegraph*, the *Guardian*, and the *BBC*. Many websites and blog sites also participated in the debate. Locally (East Africa), local

¹²The *EastAfrican*, 23rd–29th July 2007.
¹³"Pollution in Paradise" by Steve Bloomfield: <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/pollution-in-paradise-flamingos-vs-the-factory-822172.html>.



newspapers in Tanzania and Kenya carried stories. In Tanzania stories were carried by *Daily News*, *The Guardian* and *The Citizen*. In Kenya, *The Daily Nation*, *The East African Standard*, *The Leader*, *The People Daily*, *Business Daily* and *The EastAfrican*. In fact, *Business Daily* wrote more than 10 articles. This publicity brought more institutions to join the Lake Natron Consultative Group.

The global petition against Tata's Plans

As the campaign gained momentum following increased publicity, The Group's meetings were integrated with the monthly meetings of the Kenya Wetlands Forum (KWF). The Kenya Wetlands Forum advocated for sustainable management and wise use of wetlands. To take advantage of quorum, we started holding the group's strategy meetings during KWF meetings to strategise on how to handle the Campaign.

In one such meeting, it was agreed that a petition be initiated to oppose the Lake Natron soda ash mining plan. Initially, the petition took the form of an email going round and asking people to sign their name and write a message to Tata and the Tanzanian government. The key message on the petition was "the environment is more precious than corporate profits and that community livelihoods were more critical than token jobs". However, email petition was soon found to be ineffective since tallying would be cumbersome.

In August 2007, Youth for Conservation, one of the first institutions to join The Group made available a petition page on their website: www.tempoweb.com/yfc. The web page made petitioning quite easy and people from all over the world could sign in and write a short message to Tata and the Government of Tanzania.

Petitions came in from Africa, Asia, America, Europe and Australia. The messages were as varied as the petitioners and some were simply furious. Some of the messages are showcased by petitioners here below:

Tanya Becker, from South Africa, wrote:

"Am strongly against the building of this plant. How can you even think of doing this? Has money become such a big thing? What about our nature and also your heritage and tourism? Please re-think this. Rather start to protect your natural resources and in this case the Flamingo's — if they gone they ARE GONE FOREVER!!!!!!!!!! AND YOU CANNOT BRING THEM BACK. STOP WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF ALL THAT IS PRECIOUS TO THE WORLD!"

Writing from the Netherlands, Patrick Willemsen posed:

"These companies are like locust. When all soda ash is extracted they will leave and the area is ruined forever. What will this company provide the local population in the long term? Eco tourism can!"



In his message Abdallah Ramadhani, of Tanzania, wrote:

"I strongly oppose the construction of Soda Ash plant. They should locate another area but not in such a highly important biodiversity spot. It is being ruthless and not concerned of the rights to other creatures."

From the United Kingdom, Dave Parmenter enquired:

"Would Tata be allowed to destroy Baratphur in its home country? No. Don't destroy other parts of the world."

And finally, Sanare Meto from the Maasai community in Kenya was furious. He wrote:

"May Tata sink under the lava of Oldoinyo le Nkai! May Tata die under thunder!"

The online petition helped in disseminating much awareness about Lake Natron. By the time it came to an end in September, over 2,000 petitioners spread across the globe had signed it. Consequently, numerous enquiries were received from many parts of the world and many institutions joined the campaign.

Growing local and international support

In July 2007, the Lake Natron Consultative Group had five member institutions but by the end of that year, they were 23. A series of events culminated into a strong campaign with not only local but also international support. The media (as discussed elsewhere) was a key ally in the growing support of the campaign.

One highlight of 2007, was the coming to the public domain of a statement by Wildfowl Wetlands Trust (WWT). The statement, signed by the chair, the late Dr. Brooks Childress, said there were grave concerns that the construction and operation of the proposed plant and infrastructure "will severely disrupt the breeding process. The proposed sub-surface extraction of fossil brines would open up large holes leading to the loss of tens of thousands of flightless young Lesser Flamingos." Brooks would later become a close ally of The Group.

At around this time, the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat in Nairobi contacted us offering some financial support. Jane Gaithuma, the Policy and Advocacy Manager, informed us that BirdLife was pleased with the campaign and it was not only joining The Group as a member but was also providing some finances to support the work. This was a very big boost to our morale.

We also came into contact with Dr Chris Magin who was the Africa Officer for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). Chris gave extremely useful hints and advice, as well as contacts. In one newspaper report later, Chris described the intention to build the soda ash factory as "bonkers."

Communication was also established with Wetlands International, with the Communications Officer, Alex Katt, providing valuable support and advice.



A turning point for the campaign came when BirdLife International held its Council for Africa Partnership meeting in Nairobi. At the October 2007 meeting, BirdLife partners resolved to initiate a complementary campaign – dubbed *Think Pink* – to apply additional pressure to Tata and the Tanzania Government (See Box 2).

BOX 2: BirdLife's Think Pink Campaign

In October 2007, BirdLife International initiated a global campaign to help save Lake Natron. Dubbed "Think Pink, Save Lesser Flamingos", the campaign was aimed at drawing the world's attention to the threat that the species faces if the soda ash plant is built.

As part of the Think Pink Campaign, conservation organisations, eminent conservationists, flamingo experts and concerned individuals from more than 80 countries across the world wrote to the Tanzanian government protesting at the project plans. BirdLife International released regular global press releases on the campaign and considerable media interest was generated. A special website was dedicated to the campaign <http://www.birdlife.org/flamingo/downloads.html>.

Since November 2007, BirdLife Africa office in Nairobi provided office space and secretariat services to the Lake Natron Consultative Group thus enabling the campaign to proceed smoothly.

In October 2007, during the Council of African Partnership held in Nairobi, BirdLife partners from 23 African countries signed a petition against the soda project. The petition was delivered to the Tanzanian Government putting a lot of pressure.

In January 2008, Lake Natron Consultative Group teamed up with the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania and Royal Society for Conservation of Birds to raise strong objections to the project at the public hearing in Dar es Salaam. Presentations were also made at the Ramsar Advisory Mission to Tanzania on Lake Natron in February 2008 (see report: http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/ram/ram_rpt_59e.pdf).

Another indication that the global community was taking notice of the situation was the mention of Lake Natron at various international meetings and the number of international organisations which were endorsing the campaign. The Ramsar Convention was one of those that noticed the work that was going on.

In July 2007, the Ramsar Secretariat sent a high profile letter to the Director of the Wildlife Division in Tanzania, copied to: the Permanent Mission of Tanzania to the United Nations in Geneva; the Permanent Mission of Kenya to the United Nations in Geneva, and Kenya Wildlife Service. In the letter, the Secretary General said: "The Ramsar Secretariat was recently approached with inquiries regarding concerns over the proposed development of a soda ash extraction facility at Lake Natron Basin, a Ramsar site... This industrial development activity, which would be carried out by Tata Chemicals, is expected to involve possible negative effects and implications for this Ramsar site and/or its environs..."

Around the same time the Lake Natron issue was raised at the 42nd Session on Human and People Rights held in Congo Brazzaville by Michael Tiampati, a Maasai journalist and human rights campaigner. At that meeting, delegates recommended that the Commission pushes for the deferment of the proposed soda ash project by Tanzania based on the principle of prior-informed consent. In addition, Greenpeace India expressed solidarity with our team and pledged to do what it could to pressure Tata.



In September 2008, the 12th Pan-Africa Ornithological Congress (PAOC) took place at Rawsonville near Cape Town in South Africa. PAOC is a meeting of bird lovers which takes place every three years. At that meeting, attended by over 250 scientists from across Africa and the rest of the world, a resolution was passed requiring the Government of Tanzania to take steps to protect Lake Natron and the flamingos. It was later revealed that this was the first time that a PAOC meeting had passed any resolution in its 50 year history. Clearly, the issue at hand was important to the scientific community.

Between 13th and 18th October 2008, Ken attended a meeting of the Horn of Africa Regional Environment Centre and Network in Djibouti. The meeting, attended by delegates from Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya and Djibouti, presented another opportunity to share the issue with more players in the region. Participants at the meeting were given a presentation titled: *“The role of advocacy in saving threatened ecosystems and species: the case of Lake Natron Flamingos.”* At the end of the forum, seven new institutions joined the Lake Natron Consultative Group raising the number to 41.

Another key milestone was the 10th Meeting of the Ramsar Convention (Ramsar COP10) held in Changwon, South Korea, between 28th October to 4th November 2008. Many significant developments related to Lake Natron took place, among them a statement by the Government of Tanzania highlighting the importance of the lake to the country’s economy. In the statement, Tanzania’s Minister for Environment, Dr Batilda Buriani, described Lake Natron as “Flamingos’ birthplace” and said the government would do anything to prevent damage to “this unique place.” South Korea’s Minister of Environment and Disneynature launched *The Crimsonwing*, a film on flamingo life-cycle from birth to maturity, filmed at Lake Natron. The two ministers also announced the formation of a special fund to help conserve the ecosystem¹⁴.



Kim Hong IL of *Ecogeneration* campaigns for flamingos in Korea during Ramsar COP 10 © Simba Chan

On the sidelines of the meeting, the BirdLife team [comprising of Dr. Richard Grimmett (BirdLife International); Mr. Achilles Byaruhanga (Nature Uganda) and Ken Mwathe (BirdLife/The Group)] had an opportunity to discuss Lake Natron with Dr Batilda Buriani, Tanzania’s Environment Minister. She assured our team that the government was committed to listening to and addressing concerns raised by stakeholders.

¹⁴Unfortunately, the Lake Natron Trust Fund never took off, as no organisation, including Disneynature was willing to come up and put money in it. So the “fund” died an un-natural death.



Delegates receive a 2008 October “flamingo talk” at the BirdLife booth during the Ramsar Convention in Changwon, South Korea

Lake Natron also featured prominently at the BirdLife booth during COP10. A beautiful flamingo poster based on *The Crimsonwing* film was on display, as well as other materials. A young boy named Kim IL Kim Hong, who edited *Eco-generation*, a children’s magazine, visited the BirdLife booth. Kim was so touched by the story of Natron flamingo story that he decided to mount his own mini-campaign within the COP corridors. He drew quite some attention with his small poster written “Save Natron flamingos.”

It is noteworthy that five more organisations joined Lake Natron Consultative Group in Korea, bringing the number to 46 up from 41.

The Environment and Social Impact Assessment saga

Investor plays hide-and-seek

Norconsult (AS) Ltd., a Norwegian consulting firm, was contracted by Tata Chemicals Ltd. to carry out the Environment and Social Impact Assessment for the Lake Natron project. It was evident that the process had been going on in Tanzania for quite some time, which culminated with a press advert by the National Environmental Management Council (NEMC) inviting members of the public to forward their concerns. The advert, published in Tanzania's *Daily News* of 1st November 2006, read in part:

"This notice is posted to solicit the concerns and seek advice and views of all interested and affected parties and the general public as input to the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment of the Lake Natron Soda Ash facility."

As mentioned earlier, Norken Ltd was contracted by Norconsult Ltd. to conduct a scoping exercise in Kenya. However, by May 2007, it had become clear that Norken was not interested in making public the outcome of the scoping mission, or the terms of reference for the study. The Lake Natron Consultative Group identified follow-up with Norconsult as a priority action.

On 24th May 2008, we wrote to Norken to find out the status of the ESIA study in Tanzania and Kenya and indeed any other country. We wanted to know when the full study was to be finalised and the proposed time-lines. More importantly, We asked Norken to avail the project document.

Norken replied that they were in communication with Norconsult and had requested for the documents and "we are also very keen on learning more about this project".

Norken's reply was rather surprising, since, as the Kenyan contact for Norconsult, they should have been in possession of the relevant documents. We wrote back:

"Our understanding is that you are the Kenyan counterpart for Norconsult (TZ). We, therefore, hope that you will expedite the process of obtaining all the information and respond to the enquiry comprehensively. We hope that that this is possible by mid-next week."

The situation was becoming difficult for Norken. After the exchange of a number of emails, Norken responded:

"I am now advised that all queries on this ESIA be forwarded to Norconsult TZ, to the attention of Dadamwema,¹⁵ of email address dadamwema@norconsult.co.tz because the process is now entirely being handled through Norconsult Tanzania."

¹⁵Real name hidden to protect privacy.



We got in touch with Dadamwema who informed us that Norconsult had submitted the ESIA to NEMC for comments *“and so is not a public document”*.

She wrote:

“We are, however, confident with the contents of the scoping report so have proceeded to undertake the baseline data collection and draft the impact assessment. You will be informed of the outcome of this process in due course.”

In June 2007, information filtered through that there were plans to hold a stakeholders meeting to discuss the draft ESIA report. This meant that both Norconsult and Norken were not telling the whole truth! On 26th June, a note was faxed to Norconsult seeking further details of the ESIA report and the rumours about a stakeholders meeting.

Norconsult sent a detailed reply, admitting for the first time that the ESIA report had been submitted to NEMC for review. It clarified that it was the prerogative of NEMC to open up the ESIA document to the public once the review process was completed. As a result, we wrote to NEMC requesting for a copy of the ESIA but without success. Efforts to get a copy through the Lawyers Environmental Action Team in Tanzania, failed too.

With regard to the stakeholders meeting, Norconsult wrote:

“Norconsult plans to present findings of the ESIA to selected stakeholders at a one-day workshop to be held in Dar es Salaam in July 2007. Should The Group require an invitation to the workshop, Norconsult would be happy to provide you with the details.”

What followed was one month of trying to ensure that we were represented at the Dar meeting. A number of institutions requested Norconsult to invite them to the July meeting. BirdLife International African Conservation Centre and the East African Wildlife Society received an invitation.

In his acceptance letter, to Norconsult, Dr Hazell Shokellu Thompson, BirdLife’s Regional Director for Africa, wrote:

“We welcome this stakeholders consultation and trust that enough time will be given to all concerned stakeholders to study the EIA documents and that another forum for consensus building on the way forward will be convened before the documents are presented for review.”

The next challenge was to find money to send at least two people to Dar es Salaam. We approached an inter-governmental organisation based in Nairobi, which provided some funds to support the participation of the late Peter Odhiambo of KWF and Shani Ole Petenya, a local community leader. In addition, the East African Society provided funds to support its Deputy



Director, Mr Hadley Becha, a staunch advocate of the environment and a key member of our team.

The stakeholder meeting of 12th July 2007 was held at Dar es Salaam Conference Centre and attended by close to 30 participants from various organisations. A number of international organisations, including BirdLife International, IUCN, Ramsar Convention, IUCN Flamingo Specialist Group and WWF were represented.

At the meeting, the National Development Corporation and Norconsult presented the main elements of the project and defended the soda ash project. However, participants only received an executive summary of the ESIA.

Participants pointed out the fact that there was a huge information gap. Areas where information gaps were evident were hydrological data, cost benefit analysis, and analysis of project alternatives.

Participants pointed out that the document did not properly identify the negative impacts and ways of addressing them. They decried inadequate involvement of the local community and poor handling of trans-border issues. Hadley Becha, Peter Odhiambo and Ole Petenya emphasised the fact that Lake Natron was not just a Tanzanian resource but a global one.

Expressing frustration at the missing information, Lota Melamari, the then CEO of the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania said:

"We feel more things are unknown than what we were expecting as participants. We cannot downplay the importance of data and information we need our contribution to be accurate. I would suggest that the consultants as stakeholders need to build their case stronger as we feel we are not adequately informed and can thus only contribute weakly"

Hadley Becha said:

"To effectively contribute to the assessment, data should be collected that will enable decision makers approve the project or not. This looks like an environmental evaluation and not an ESIA since the alternatives are not clearly outlined. It appears that there is a lot of government push in this project. Furthermore, if this is a political project is this meeting supposed to rubber-stamp the process?"

At the end of the workshop, the participants insisted that a more comprehensive consultative process be undertaken. They recommended that an open debate over Lake Natron involving the public and local community be facilitated. In addition, a management plan for the Ramsar site needed to be developed.



Norconsult indicated willingness to consult more stakeholders but also expressed urgency in terms of meeting certain deadlines imposed by the investor. Comments would be welcome until 27th July 2007, after which the document would be submitted to NEMC for further review.

The Dar meeting happened against a background of increased concerns and publicity over the soda ash project. On that day a number of stories appeared in the press. The Group placed a paid advert in the *Daily Nation* calling for greater dialogue on the project in the East African region. In UK the *Guardian* screamed: “Factory may destroy natural wonder” and quoted RSPB’s Chris Magin describing Tata Chemicals’ plans as “bonkers”. *The Scotsman*, the British Broadcasting Corporation and *The Daily Telegraph*, also did similar stories.

The Flamingo ‘Judgment Day’

Between July and October 2007, there was little activity with regard to the ESIA. Anxiety mounted as everyone awaited NEMC to make its recommendations to Tanzania’s Environment Minister after reviewing the document. The final decision on the project lay with the minister.

It was not clear whether Norconsult had submitted the report to NEMC in the first place. However, we learnt that the report had been submitted to NEMC in the first week of September 2007. What was intriguing was the fact that until that time, no one outside NDC, Norconsult and NEMC had seen the full ESIA document. We wanted to get access to the full ESIA report, but this proved to be a tall order.

Something else added to the drama; while everyone was waiting for NEMC’s decision, Tanzanian government authorities were claiming that the project had been given the go-ahead. For example, Prime Minister Edward Lowassa and his Press Secretary insisted that the government would “proceed with the project irrespective of what its detractors say”.

November 2nd 2007 was dubbed “Judgment Day for Africa’s Flamingos.”¹⁶ On this day, the Technical Advisory Committee was constituted by NEMC to provide a critique of the ESIA report to assist it in arriving at an objective decision. TAC was a closed forum and so participation was by invitation only. The Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania was invited and did present a detailed critique of ESIA prepared by a technical team pointing out the flaws in the report.

It was clear during the TAC meeting that Norconsult¹⁷ had done little to improve the report in spite of the comments to the document in July. Consequently, all the 14 members of TAC, including the European Union (which was representing the donors), said the development should be rejected. They pointed out that the risk of driving away the flamingos, harming other species and irreversibly damaging Lake Natron, remained.

Those who attended TAC said the conclusion of the ESIA report was puzzling and contradictory. It said:

¹⁶http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/11/Lake_Natron.html.

¹⁷In April 2008, Norconsult left Tanzania amidst claims of corruption, irregular payments and other forms of impropriety.



“From the present knowledge and understanding of the social and environmental conditions at Lake Natron, no single or likely cumulative impacts have been identified that would with certainty preclude project development providing there is complete adherence to strict environmental management safeguards and a stringent environmental monitoring regime. However, it must be recognised that the limited knowledge available on the functioning of the Lake Natron ecosystem as it relates to the Lesser Flamingo strongly suggests that the project will entail a significant degree of environmental risk for this species in the longer term that is not capable of direct mitigation. An enforceable link between environmental monitoring and continued project operation would need to be established as an essential means of offsetting this risk as far as possible.”

A day after the TAC meeting, the press was awash with reports related to the meeting. Some of the headlines screamed: “Flamingo threat put on temporary hold”; “Soda ash plant project thrown out for now”; “Lake Natron soda ash plans trashed.” A few said: “Temporary reprieve for Natron flamingos.” However, this overwhelming optimism in the press captured the mood and desire of the majority than what actually transpired at the meeting. At that point, the soda ash project had technically not been thrown out or trashed. But, while most TAC members expressed dissatisfaction with the report, the ultimate decision on the fate of soda ash mining at Natron lay with NEMC’s recommendation to the Minister. So, while the TAC proceedings provided a temporary reprieve, the real battle still lay ahead.

The Public Hearing

True to its word, NEMC placed an advert inviting those interested and affected to a public hearing in Dar es Salaam on 23rd January 2008. This was done in fulfillment of Section 90 of Environmental Management Act, 2004 and Regulation 27 of the EIA and Audit Regulations, 2005. The law mandated NEMC to conduct public hearings to give the public an opportunity to input during the review process. The proceedings from the forum would assist NEMC to advise the Minister.

The NEMC announcement sparked a lot of activity in preparation for the public hearing. Our team prepared itself by putting together a number of position statements.

The public hearing took place in the Karimnjee Hall within the lush Dar es Salaam City centre and attended by about 100 participants. People from all walks of life, including NGOs, the donor community, university professors, Tata Chemicals Industries, Tanzania National Development Corporation, Government officials and members of the local community at Lake Natron, came. Members of our team were: Lota Melamari, Chris Magin, Ken Mwathe and Phoebe Munyoro.

With Mrs Anna Maembe of NEMC moderating, the meeting started with a presentation by the National Development Corporation. NDC described in detail the soda ash extraction processes. NDC also informed the meeting that the investor had moved the soda ash factory site 32 kilometres away from the lake to reduce negative impacts on biodiversity. However, the



presenter did not talk about project impacts or means of reducing or avoiding them and did not mention the people!

After the presentation, there was uproar from the participants who felt that the investor had short-changed them by changing the site without informing NEMC and going through the necessary procedures. Speaker after speaker, the participants said if the site had been relocated there was need for a fresh ESIA. The majority felt that the information contained in the document submitted to NEMC was irrelevant and could not be discussed at the public hearing. The change of goal posts by the investor also meant that participants were not in a position to give informed views regarding the new site. The participants suggested that the public hearing be called off and the investor be given a chance to carry out a fresh ESIA.

Rising to give their views, the local community represented by the chairman, Christopher Ndurway, rejected the soda ash project, citing fear of loss of tourism revenue, livestock, water and pasture. Rising to support, an elderly traditional chief (*Leiguanani*) spoke in Maasai through an interpreter.

He said:

“Tourism and pastoralism are industries like any other. Why should they be uprooted to plant a soda ash factory? We will not accept a gift that will destroy us. Our lives will negatively be affected by this factory. It is like taking a fish out of the water and throwing it into the bush.”

Other organisations too gave their strong objections. The Tanzania Association of Tour Operators (TATO) said in their submission signed by Mustapha Akunaay, the Executive Secretary:

“The Association would like to strongly warn that implementation of the project will threaten flamingos into flight, making the country and the entire region to lose the world-renowned tourist attraction. Consequently, the country will lose in terms of taxes, employment and the economic trickledown effect; this is over and above the loss that the tour operators will suffer.”

The Journalists Environmental Association of Tanzania (JET) through their Chairman Deo Mfugale said:

“What is urgent is for the Government and other players to market the tourism at Lake Natron in order to increase local incomes. There are many legitimate ways to improve livelihoods instead of struggling to mine soda ash, an issue that is being strongly opposed globally.”

The atmosphere in the hall was electric as the local community spoke. The speaker who followed supported their position and said the local community should have the final word. At the end of



the meeting, more than 90 per cent of the participants who made their submissions rejected the project, thus saying an unequivocal “No” to Tata’s plan.

Tata’s withdrawal

Towards the end of April 2008, the World Bank organised a stakeholder meeting in Dar es Salaam to update them on the Lake Natron project. It was a meeting of technocrats from various sectors: government officials, NGO representatives, the press, donors and officials from Tata Chemicals Industries. The World Bank wanted stakeholders updated on the soda ash proposal, with a view to encouraging debate on the impacts likely to emerge from such an undertaking. Lota Melamari made a presentation titled *“Flamingos of Lake Natron, a Tanzanian treasure”*, while Mr Rahul Singh from Tata made a presentation on behalf of the investor.

Once again, those in attendance unanimously voiced their concern that the project had not addressed issues of environmental degradation and harm to the ecosystem convincingly. Ms Serena Shao, the Tourism Services Manager of the Tanzania Tourist Board, said that flamingos were a key attraction to tourists in Lake Natron. She revealed that Tanzania made \$746m from tourism in 2004. Ms Shao said that unless Lake Natron and other attractions were protected, the country could not achieve the dream of attracting one million tourists in future.

On 22nd May 2008, Tata Chemicals Ltd officially withdrew the soda ash project as originally conceptualised. This was contained in a statement released to the *Hindustan Times* of India. In withdrawing the project, the Tata Managing Director said: *“The Company is not in a position to take a view with regard to resumption ‘til it has a chance to examine the final approved Ramsar Management Plan currently under preparation for Lake Natron.”*

The *Hindustan Times* story titled *“Green Groups halt Tata Plant in Tanzania”* also quoted Mr Khusrokhan as saying:

“The original Environment and Social Impact Assessment should be treated as withdrawn.”

Tata’s withdrawal of the ESIA meant that the government could not go on with the review process. It meant that the project, as originally conceptualised, had been dropped but could be re-designed with new location or technology.

The withdrawal also brought in a “feel good” mood amongst us but it was clear that, perhaps, the greatest battle still lay ahead. We later learnt from our sources that Tata had succumbed to the intense publicity elicited by the Campaign. A source told us that Tata were “stunned by the negative publicity about the Lake Natron venture.” “The deal is now dead as far as they are concerned” the source said. Tata had taken up the project on invitation by the Tanzania Government and “would never have followed up had they known what sort of reaction it was going to create”.

Key Strategies and Impacts of the Campaign

What is advocacy?

This section reveals the strategies that were used in the campaign to save Lake Natron. We provide details of the methods used so that institutions and individuals wishing to carry out similar campaigns can find reference here. It is worth noting that advocacy campaign is a complex process and each campaign is unique in its own way. However, we provide herein the generic strategies and methodologies that are likely to cut across most environmental campaigns—citing from our own experience.

Environmental Advocacy involves “strategies devised, actions taken and solutions proposed to influence decision-making at the local and state level to create positive change for the people and the environment”. Here, the key element is *influence* to decision making. A lot of what was done in this campaign was ultimately intended to ensure that whatever decision was arrived at by the authorities favoured the long-term protection of Lake Natron, the flamingos and the local communities.

Assembling a core team

This campaign was helped by the assembling of core teams at regional and international levels. The core teams were basically the “think tanks” that set the campaign strategy and communicated and reviewed it on a regular basis. This may be termed the “engine” of the advocacy campaign.

At regional level (East Africa, Africa), various people played a key role in the core team. These were Lota Melamari, Serah Munguti (Nature Kenya), Steve Itela (Youth for Conservation), Salome Gathoni (Centre for Minority Rights Development), the late Peter Odhiambo (Kenya Wetlands Forum), Hadley Becha (East African Wildlife Society), Jane Gaithuma (BirdLife International) and Ken Mwathe (BirdLife/The Group). Others who played a crucial supporting role were Dr Francis Mwaura (University



Lake Natron Consultative Group at the May 2008 Press Conference in Nairobi: From Left: Steve Itela, Late Joseph Sainigo, Ken Mwathe, Paul Matiku and partly hidden Dr Cecilia Gichuki © Serah Munguti





of Nairobi), Paul Matiku (Nature Kenya), Fred Omengo (KWS), Dr Cecilia Gichuki and Ronald Mulwa (National Museums of Kenya). This core team was geographically based in Kenya, but it was supported by many others who participated in the online debate.

At the global level, BirdLife International formed a core team comprised of Michael Mckaine, Chris Magin, Lota Melamari, Leon Bennun, Dieter Hoffman, Hazell Shokellu Thompson and Ken Mwathe. This team played a crucial role in setting up the agenda at global level, communicating and creating synergies with the regional team for effective action.

Intensive awareness and publicity

Awareness-raising and publicity were key ingredients for the Lake Natron advocacy. Information was packaged and disseminated principally through email and institutional websites. The Group also established Update Bulletin as a major channel of communication. The bulletin, whose design progressively improved, was sent to institutions and individuals across the globe (Figure 5) through email. At the beginning of the campaign, this bulletin used to be sent daily because lots of information was being exchanged. With time, however, the frequency decreased progressively to twice a week, twice a month and, finally once a month. Later, information on the campaign was placed on the "Think Pink" page of BirdLife International website. Many other institutions also posted information on the campaign on their websites and blogsites.

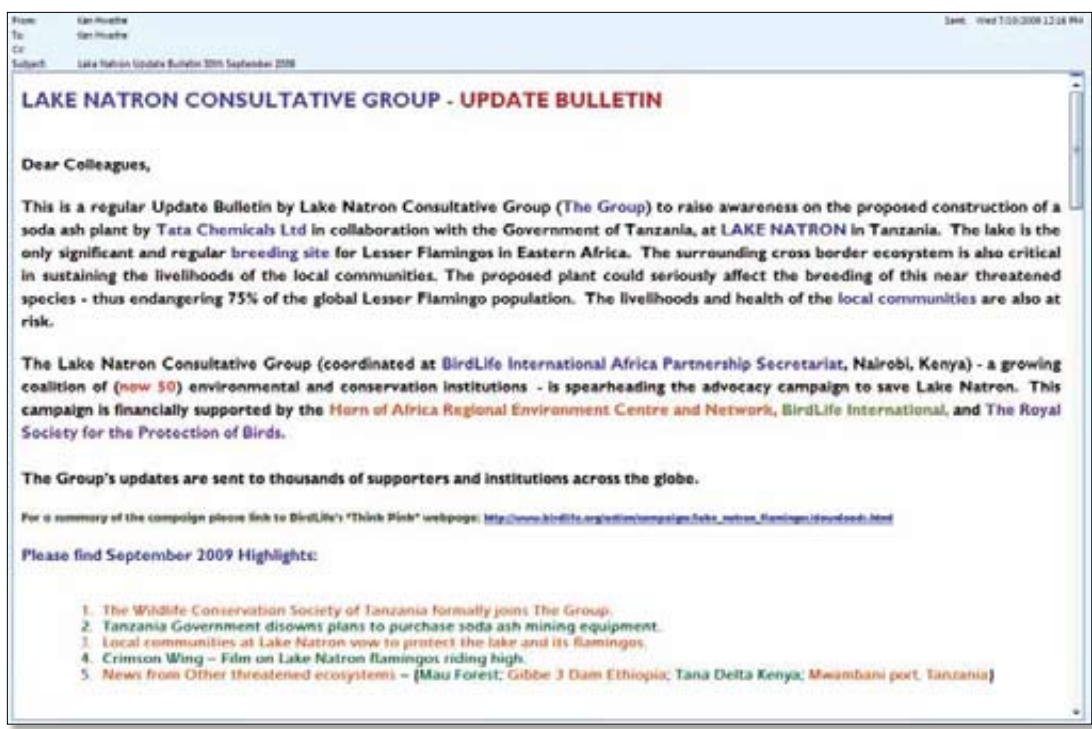
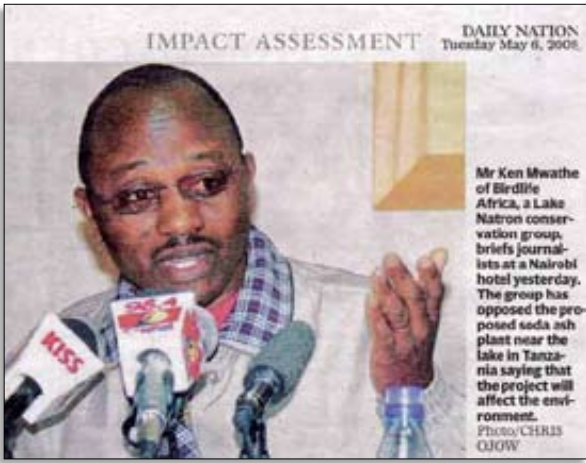


Figure 3. The improved Lake Natron Update Bulletin: Through the Bulletin many were reached across the globe



The media also played a key role in the campaign. Numerous press releases were sent out to the press with a good level of coverage being achieved. In May 2008, an international press conference was held in Nairobi. This press conference spurred unprecedented press coverage in East Africa and across the continents. *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Scotsman*, Reuters, British Broadcasting Corporation, Voice of America, Al Jazeera and NTV provided good coverage.



How the *Daily Nation* captured The Group's press conference of 5th May 2008

Information was also disseminated through the online petition that ran between August and November 2007. In addition, in October 2007, BirdLife partners from 23 African countries signed a petition against the soda ash project, which was delivered to the Tanzanian Minister of Environment.

We also made brochures and posters. There was a brochure titled: *Say 'Hush' to Soda Ash Mining* and a poster that was presented at the Ramsar Convention titled: *Lake Natron Ramsar Site: Will Lesser Flamingo Survive Soda ash mining?*

The impact of the publicity and awareness was immense (see Figure 4). For example, a quick analysis done in 2009 showed that 156 articles had been published in the media across the globe since 2007. The media reports were categorised either as 'positive' or 'negative', or as 'neutral.' Positive reports were those whose messages were generally supportive of the campaign while negative ones were those that were outrightly not supportive. The analysis showed that 82 per cent of the reports were supportive while 16 per cent were neutral. Only a minimal 2% of the press reports were outrightly negative to the campaign.



ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY AT WORK: Lessons Learnt from the Campaign to Save Lake Natron from Plans to Build a Soda Ash Factory

The EastAfrican
NEWS
NOVEMBER 5-12, 2007

Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia have protested that the venture will do serious damage to the lake's eco-system and the surrounding rangelands. A JOINT REPORT

Dar annoys neighbours over \$400m soda ash project

Signs of a potentially damaging rift between the Tanzania government and its Eastern African neighbours are evident after Dar es Salaam allowed the construction of a controversial multi-million dollar soda ash project at Lake Natron.

Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia have protested that the project will do serious damage to the lake's eco-system and the surrounding rangelands. The lake is also an important part of Kenya and Tanzania's northern border that cover the Maasai Maasai Development game reserves and Mt Kilimanjaro — the highest mountain in Africa.

The government is keen to let Lake Natron Resources Ltd, a joint venture company between Tata Chemicals Ltd of India and the Tanzania National Development Corporation (TNDP) establish a \$400 million soda ash extraction plant at Lake Natron.

Tanzania is apparently focusing on the economic benefits of the project, which it feels should supersede environmental concerns.

A visibly angry Tanzania Prime Minister, Edward Lowassa recently said the Parliament that the government will proceed with the project irrespective of what its detractors say. Mr Lowassa said Kenya has its own soda ash plant, which incidentally, was acquired by Tata Chemicals Ltd last year.

"But, when Tanzania starts discussing the construction of a similar plant in collaboration with Tata, we are told we are destroying the environment," he said.

He said the Press Secretary of Lake Natron Resources Ltd, said the plant, which has the capacity of mining 500,000 tonnes of soda ash each year will proceed as planned, he said.

Ngũgũ added that the PM's office was not aware of any changes to the Environmental Impact Assessment.

The Tanzania government says the deal for the construction requires the promoters to put up a new access road, power plant, rail-road, pipeline grid and later a pipeline for fresh water across the lake, houses for an estimated 125 construction workers and 102 permanent staff and their families.

But the Tanzania National Environment Council (NEMC) last Tuesday called for a urgent meeting between environmentalists from the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania (WCS), and the Wildlife International and Tata Chemicals to review the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the project.

Lito, Mwanza, co-ordinator of WCIW said the EastAfrican that presents the government was in the process of reviewing the assessment to determine whether the project should proceed. He said it risked driving the world's rarest bird — the lesser flamingo (*Phoenicopus minor*) — to extinction.

Even minute changes in the habitat could disrupt breeding by the flamingos which are 'extremely sensitive to disturbances', he said.

The Kenyan government is quietly opposing the plant saying Tanzania presented it from building a dam on the river Ewaso Nyiro, the main freshwater source for the lake.

Tanzania proposed to build in 2003 over the construction of a \$50 million Ewaso Nyiro water station to support more than 200,000 people through the Ewaso Nyiro North Development Authority (ENDA).

The project would have cut across several administrative units in four provinces and 12 districts. These were Nyiro, Inyanga, Mbarindi, Ndanda, Gwaha, Mandera, Waji, Mera Central, Mera North, Moyale, Nyandarua, Laikipia and Lorian.

But the Tanzania government would have none of it, saying it would have greatly damaged the lake's ecosystem.

Uganda and Ethiopia have also opposed the project, arguing that it has the potential of destroying the tourism industry in the entire region. For the wider region, Lake Natron region is surrounded by the presence of thousands of flamingos make it a key tourism attraction. It will also affect the region's indigenous Maasai community — a semi-nomadic people who freely travel over the Kenyan-Tanzanian border in search of pastures for their livestock.

It will also affect the region's indigenous Maasai community, who freely travel over the Kenyan-Tanzanian border in search of pastures for their livestock



Mr Lowassa



Dr Sika

Environmental conservation societies have filed a petition with the Tanzania government over the project. In a statement to *The EastAfrican* last week the environmentalists said that the EIA draft is inadequate and contains information that seems to be outdated on the proposed project.

Environmentalists see the economic thinking behind the shift from synthetic soda ash production to natural soda extraction, which is cheaper, but are worried of the cost at which it comes. Soda ash making process involves pumping brine from the lake to a plant and then returning the depleted water to the lake. This could upset the lake's chemical composition.

Norconsult A.S. Marway Ltd and Norconsult (Tanzania) Ltd were engaged by the Tanzania government to conduct an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) study and presented a draft report to stakeholders for comments. The report was presented in a workshop in July 2007 in Dar es Salaam and was subject of heated debates.

The lake spreads over 40,000 hectares on the floor of the Rift valley and has a shallow basin with no direct outlet, indicating that it could easily suffer accumulation of contaminants which will kill off the lesser flamingos, for which it is famed.

Conservationists say the mining process will disturb the lake's chemical composition and affect the sensitive ecosystem that has been protected as a Ramsar site since 2001.

But the Tanzania government seems to have made up its mind to go ahead with the project. On August 1, the country's National Development Corporation declared the project safe and said it will not have adverse impact on the lake and its environments.

In addition, the areas are part of a bigger shared ecosystem with links to key protected areas in both Kenya and Tanzania which include Anderson National Park and the Lofa Forest.

In a rare show of solidarity, Tanzania's Opposition also came out strongly in support of the government.

Chacha, the Member for Dombachwa's MP for Kariakoo constituency, Dr Wilfred Sika last July said *The EastAfrican* that the issue was of national significance and thus they backed the decision.

Dr Sika said that if the research done on the implications of building roads, an airport, hotels and the soda ash plant were correct, then the opposition parties fully supported the government.

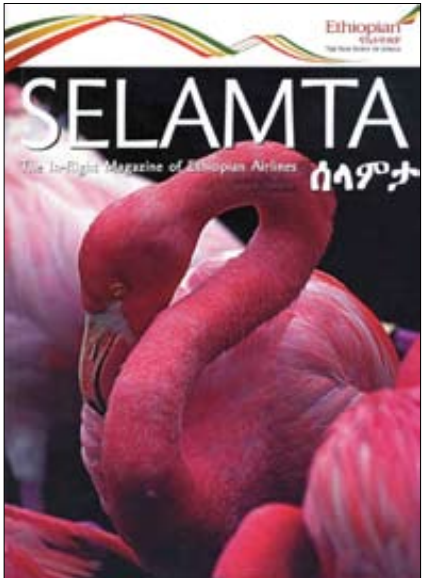
The countries, which have so far signed the petition include Burundi, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Malawi, Ivory Coast, Sao Tome and Monaco.

Approved by BELFORD EDWIN, JOSEPH MUMAMUNGE and NIKKI MANDE

Figure 4. A story appearing in *The EastAfrican*, a regional newspaper

The publicity was so intensive that Ethiopian Airlines and Tanzania's Precision Air took note and wrote articles on the threat to flamingos in their in-flight magazines. Ethiopian Airline's *Selamta* magazine placed a beautiful photo of the Lesser Flamingo on the cover page of their June 2008 issue. In an article, titled: "Pretty flamingo: but could this be the last dance for Africa's fabulous flame bird?" the writer had an encouraging message:

"Happily, a threat to this vital breeding area involving the building of a huge soda ash plant on the Tanzanian side of the lake (Natron) has now been put on hold, thanks to international protests. It would be a cruel thing if one of Africa's great treasures were to be endangered, simply because of the presence of low-value minerals such as soda ash which are so essential for their survival."



How Ethiopian Airline's In-flight magazine the *Selamta* captured the Lake Natron story



Lobbying of key entities

Lobbying refers to petitioning influential people or organisations in order to influence policy. In the case of the Lake Natron, lobbying was used as a tool to get decisions made in our favour. The campaign involved intensive lobbying of key entities in the region. The word ‘entity’ is used to refer to institutions, committees and individuals were perceived to be key in influencing the outcome of the soda ash mining proposal.

We used various ways to lobby the entities including letter advocacy online petitions and face-to-face meetings.

Letter advocacy

Letters were extensively used in the campaign to save Lake Natron. We wrote letters and appealed to supporters to write to the then Minister of Environment of Tanzania Mark Mwandosya, petitioning him not to approve the soda ash project. A total of 80 letters were sent to the Government of Tanzania from over 50 countries. Majority (39%) of them were sent out from Africa and 29% from Asia. A sizeable proportion (20%) came from individuals and institutions in Europe while some were from the Americas. Independently, a number of international NGOs such as WWF, IUCN and WCS sent out letters.

One such letter came from Alan Johnson, a renowned flamingo expert who wrote:

“Tanzania presently ranks among the world leaders in biodiversity conservation and I urge you not to tarnish this reputation by allowing this project to proceed, thus putting in peril the Lesser Flamingos of East Africa.”

In their letter to the then Minister of Environment, Ilkisongo Pastoralist Initiatives, a local community group at Lake Natron, posed in part:

“IPI is aware that the ESIA is awaiting approval by your office. In view of the issues raised in this letter we request that you reject the project in its totality. From a community perspective, the costs seem to immensely outweigh any perceived benefits...”

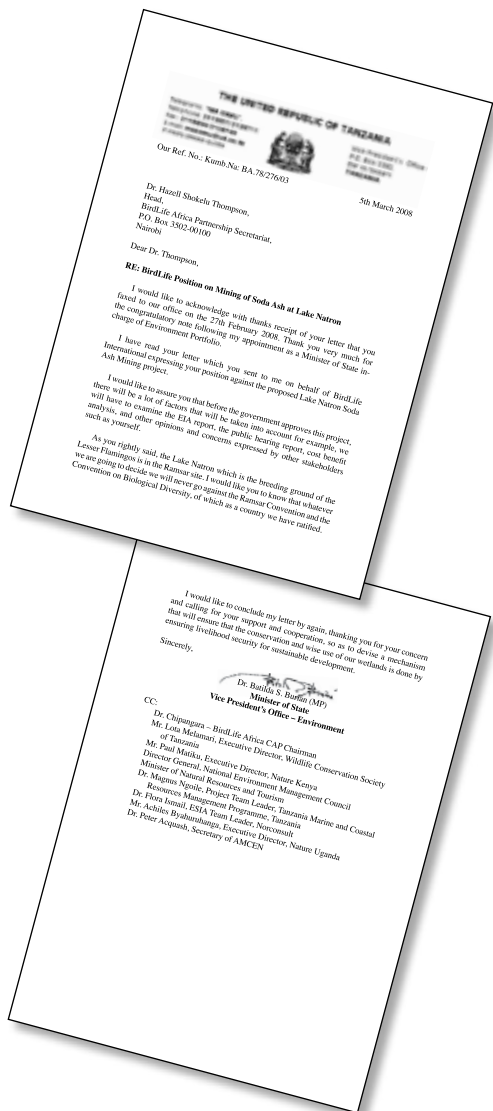


Figure 5. A response from Tanzania’s Environment Minister following concerns



In February 2008 BirdLife International Africa Partnership Secretariat wrote a letter to the new Tanzanian Environment Minister Dr Batilda Buriani reiterating the earlier position (Figure 5). A pleasant surprise came in on a two-page reply to the Regional Director saying in part:

“As you rightly said, the Lake Natron which is breeding ground of Lesser Flamingos is in the Ramsar Site. I would like you to know that whatever we are going to decide we will never go against the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity of which as a country we have ratified.”

Also notable is the fact that Tata Chemicals Ltd received many protest letters. At some point, the company seemed to have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of letters such that the Managing Director Mr Homi R. Khusrokhani wrote to say there was no need to write any more letters! He wrote in part:

“...As an organisation Tata has taken note of the concerns and would take appropriate action.”

It was rare to hear from Tata and it was gratifying to see that the multitude of letters had pressed them into action.

Signed petitions

As mentioned in Chapter 3, an online petition was launched to appeal against Tata's plans. The Lake Natron Consultative Group's petition between August and November 2007 attracted a total of 1,959 signatures against the project. The petitions were received from more than 70 countries covering all the five continents. Continent-wise, most of the petitions were received from Europe (76%) followed by Africa (11%). Petitions from North America constituted 9%. Country-wise, the highest number of petitions were received from United Kingdom (61%); United States of America (USA) 8%; Kenya 7%; Germany 4%; Netherlands 4%; Tanzania 2%; Switzerland 2%; Belgium 1%; Canada 1%, and Italy 1%.

On the other hand, the petition signed by the BirdLife Africa Partnership in Nairobi in October 2007 and delivered to the Tanzania Government sent a strong message that the world was watching.

The resolution signed by scientists attending the 12th Pan African Ornithological Congress (PAOC) meeting in Rawsonville, South Africa in September 2008, further added pressure on the government. The dossier signed by the PAOC Chair, Prof. Andrian Craig, noted that Lake Natron is uniquely suitable for Lesser Flamingo nesting because of the chemical composition of the water, the presence of a suitable substrate for nest construction, and very effective isolation from disturbance by humans and predators. The PAOC resolution affirmed “such a development could permanently perturb the conditions that make Lake Natron a suitable place for Lesser Flamingos to breed.”



On trans-boundary collaboration, the statement urged the Tanzanian government to:

“To initiate co-operation between Tanzania and Kenya, across whose joint border Lake Natron is situated, for the conservation and wise use of this site, following the principle of cross-border co-operation that is enshrined in several Multilateral Environmental Agreements (including the Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on Wetlands, Convention on Migratory Species and the Africa-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement) to which both states are party”

The resolution further asked the government to adopt the *Precautionary Principle* and rule out any developments that could potentially pose a risk to Lesser Flamingos and urged the Tanzania and Kenya governments to work together to conserve the lake ecosystem in perpetuity, and “use its resources in a manner that does not put biodiversity and people’s livelihoods at risk.” The press coverage that followed helped to spur further publicity.

High level meetings

Efforts were made to meet key high-level personalities in an effort to win their support. One high level meeting was between key conservation institutions and the management of Tata Chemical Industries Ltd. This meeting took place in Tata Chemicals’ headquarters in India on 13th August 2009. Ms. Aban Kabraji, Regional Director, IUCN Asia, and Dr Brooks Childress, Chair, IUCN-SSC/Wetlands International Flamingo Specialist Group met with Mr Homi Khusrokhan, Managing Director of Tata Chemicals Ltd (TCL) and his top managers.

During the meeting there was a presentation by TCL as well as from the visiting team. TCL spoke of their commitment to the environment and a desire to see that the flamingos were not harmed. The visiting team talked about the biology and ecology of Lake Natron and why it was special for flamingos. A discussion then ensued on how to “mitigate” the impacts of the soda ash plant, which might include locating the plant and the village for workers 35–40 kilometres away from the lake boundary. They also considered access to the plant from the Arusha-Nairobi road to the east, rather than the planned access from the south and using a single point entry into the lake as well as reducing the company’s presence at the lake to a minimum.

When our team received this report we raised concerns about the term “mitigation” and sought clarification. Those who had attended the meeting with Tata explained that “mitigation” did not mean giving a go-ahead to the project. They wanted to have a “Plan B” in case the government decided to have its way over the project. This explanation did not sit well with most of the team members. Gladly, the debate about a “Plan B” did not crop up again until during the Public Hearing (See Chapter 4).

There were other high-level meetings. For example, we met with the Speaker and Clerk of the East African Legislative Assembly in May 2008 and sought authority to give a presentation to the Agriculture and Natural Resources and Tourism committee (ANRT). On 19th June 2008,



we met with ANRT at the East African Community headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania. Our team comprised of Lota Melamari (WCST), Joseph Ole Saningo (Ilkisongo Pastoralist Initiatives), John Chikomo (Journalists Environmental Association of Tanzania), Steve Itela (Youth for Conservation), Sophie Masuka (WCST) and Ken Mwathe (BirdLife/The Group). The committee agreed to table the Lake Natron issue in parliament and to push for the passing of a law on management of natural resources in East Africa¹⁸. The bill was eventually passed in February 2012¹⁹.

A lot of effort went towards sensitising Tanzanian parliamentarians about the issue. For example, Lota Melamari and Matt Aeberhard screened *The Crimsonwing* a Disney nature film on flamingos to MPs sitting in Dodoma on 29th June 2009. The film, directed by Matt showed the life-cycle of a flamingo from chick to maturity, images never before captured on film. On an earlier occasion some members of our team made a presentation to the MPs sitting in Dar es Salaam. In April 2008, WCST organised a visit to Lake Natron for the Parliamentary Committee on Land, Natural Resources and Environment. The committee held a meeting attended by over 100 community members at the site. The local community explicitly told the MPs they were not supportive of the soda ash project since they feared loss of livelihood, especially tourism.

Input into key processes

Our team provided input into consultation processes relating to the proposed soda ash project aiming at influencing the ultimate decision on the project. One such critical process was the ESIA (details in Chapter Four). The campaign team gave comments to the ESIA documents and participated in various fora such as the stakeholder meeting held in Dar es Salaam in July 2007 (Odhiambo *et al.*, 2007), the Technical Advisory Committee meeting of 2nd November 2007 and the public hearing of January 2008 (Mwathe 2008).

In the course of time, Ramsar Convention Secretariat got to learn about the soda ash proposal and wrote a letter to the Government of Tanzania, urging that that no harm be inflicted on the Ramsar site. In response the Government of Tanzania invited Ramsar to send an Advisory mission on Lake Natron.

The Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) on Lake Natron took place in February 2008 and was a fact finding mission to meet with stakeholders and to gather concerns with a view to advising the government regarding the proposed soda ash development. We were well represented during the mission. During the consultations held at Protea Hotel, Dar es Salaam, verbal and written submissions were made. In its report (Mafabi *et al.*, 2008) the RAM recommended that the ESIA report be withdrawn and called for: strengthening of management systems; greater involvement of the local communities; application of Ramsar planning guidelines; and greater cross border collaboration between Tanzania and Kenya.

¹⁸The East African Community Trans-boundary Ecosystems Management Bill, 2010 was passed by the Fifth Session of the East African Legislative Assembly meeting in Kampala, Uganda in February 2012. Once ratified by the five East African Community member states, the Act will guide the management of trans-boundary resources and Environmental Impact Assessment for projects affecting member states.

¹⁹<http://www.birdlife.org/community/2012/02/birdlife-welcomes-passing-of-law-to-secure-transboundary-ecosystems-in-east-africa/>.



Reaching out to the local community

The first time for Tanzanian local communities to come to the forefront was in February 2007 when a Kiswahili newspaper *Sauti ya Watu Tanzania Daima* quoted a number of local leaders complaining about the soda ash proposal. Titled “*Flamingo Hatarini*” (Swahili for “Flamingos in Danger”) the article quoted Dr Mwache arguing that soda ash mining would chase away tourists who came to Lake Natron to see flamingos. He also pointed out that soda ash mining would put pressure on existing water resources upon which the local communities depended. The campaigners attempted to get the contacts of Dr Mwache but in vain.

Later, there were reports in the press that the Chairman of Ngare Sero village near the lake had raised similar sentiments. Mr Christopher Ndurway – whom we later came to meet and interact with – said that the livelihoods of the 4,000 residents of Ngare Sero village were in danger, if the Government allowed soda ash mining.

In 2008, the Dr Hazell Shokellu Thompson, BirdLife’s Regional Director for Africa made a visit to Lake Natron and made crucial contacts with local leaders and Community Based Organisations working there. Among these organisations was Ilkisongo Pastoralist Initiatives which showed considerable interest in taking advocacy work forward.



Mr Joseph Ole Saning'o of Ilkisongo Pastoralist Initiatives with community members at Lake Natron



The power of community participation best demonstrated during the Public Hearing described in Chapter Four. The outcome of the Public Hearing would have been less significant if the input of the local community was missing. The organizers had put the advertisement in the press, yet few newspapers reached Lake Natron. Nevertheless our determination made sure that the voice of the local community was heard by providing transport and other logistical support. This, seemingly insignificant action, worked wonders.

Reaching out to the international community

That the Lake Natron issue received international attention is not in doubt. The international community was vital as it added weight to voices coming from Africa and in particular Eastern Africa. One way used to bring the issue on the global platform was by attending various international meetings.

A case in point was the Ramsar Convention (Ramsar COP10) in South Korea in 2008, which could not have come at a better time. We took advantage of the presence of senior Tanzanian government officials and more than 2,000 delegates to hammer the point that Lake Natron needed to be conserved. But perhaps the most critical element of the COP was that concerns over Lake Natron were captured in the adoption of Resolution 13.

In Resolution 13 article 27 (vi) the meeting said the following in regard to sites whose ecological character are likely to change²⁰:

“that the Government of Tanzania provide the Secretary General with updated information in relation to the advice and recommendations of the Ramsar Advisory Mission to the Lake Natron Basin Ramsar site, in particular concerning the proposed development of soda ash facilities”

The campaign would have made slower progress were it not for active local participation with support—sometimes behind-the-scenes—from international organisations such as Wetlands International, Ramsar Convention, BirdLife International, Flamingo Working Group and IUCN.

Fundraising

Advocacy requires considerable amount of finances since a lot requires to be accomplished within short deadlines. This work started without much pre-meditation; by default rather than by design and without any funds in the kitty. In view of this, our team recognised the need to source for funds but also made a conscious effort to effectively utilise the little resources available. The initial strategy was to approach organisations with specific campaign budget-lines and ask for support. This largely worked initially although there were disappointments where promised support did not materialise.

²⁰The Ramsar Convention is concerned if the integrity of any of the Sites of International Importance is likely to change. During the meeting in Korea, The Team conferred with the Tanzania Government delegation to ensure that it was not opposed to this resolution as a party to the Convention. It was not. Granted that the resolution was passed, the Government is bound to ensure that the recommendations of the Ramsar Advisory Mission are fully implemented and a report submitted to the Secretary-General.



In the initial stages, small grants were received from various organisations, notably, Nature Kenya, Africa Conservation Centre, BirdLife International, the Born Free Foundation and an international organisation which was in Nairobi. This support went a long way in supporting initial publicity and organising and attending meetings.

As the work grew, it became clear that more funds would be needed if substantial progress was to be made. To facilitate this, a number of proposals were submitted to prospective donors.

A major breakthrough for the campaign came in November 2007 when the Horn of Africa Regional Environment Centre and Network (HOAREC/N), based at Addis Ababa University provided a substantial grant to support the work. HOA-REC/N was funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Ethiopia; its First Secretary at the time, Ms Janny Poley, played a major role in this. This funding helped in supporting coordinating mechanisms of the Lake Natron Consultative Group in the BirdLife office in Nairobi. This enabled the campaign work to continue seamlessly for the next three years (2008–2010).

In 2010, there was another breakthrough in fund-raising. The A.V Jensen Charity Foundation of Denmark provided another substantial grant to do some work at Lake Natron. The grant was to help secure the lake ecosystem by strengthening local support by setting up local Site Support Groups; putting in place some income-generating initiatives; support planning processes as well as use the lessons learnt from the Lake Natron campaign to secure other threatened sites in Africa. This financial support ran from 2010–2012.

Challenges and Lessons Learnt from the Lake Natron Advocacy

The success of the Lake Natron advocacy was described as a “great success” for many at local, national and international levels. However, the campaign also faced many challenges and in the process many lessons were learnt and these are shared in this chapter.

Some of the challenges the campaign faced are discussed below:

Challenges

Dealing with politicians

The campaign team often found itself standing on opposite sides with powerful politicians. In East Africa, as in other parts of Africa, politicians wield a lot of power and are used to having their way in whatever they do and getting away with it—hence the term “impunity”. It was therefore unusual for “nondescript” groups to stand up against a multi-million dollar project aimed at reducing poverty by creating “hundreds” of jobs. One such politician that groups had to contend with was the then powerful Tanzanian Prime Minister, Edward Lowassa—a ruling party supremo—who had vowed that nothing would stop the proposed project. To push his agenda home, he made the whole issue acquire a Tanzania vs Kenya angle, saying Kenya had developed its own soda ash resources and was preventing Tanzania from doing the same. He further said that Kenya had built many tourist lodges in the world-famous Maasai Mara but “the same Kenyans” were opposed to Tanzania’s intention to build similar facilities in the neighbouring Serengeti National Park.

Another aspect of dealing with politicians was bringing them to the table to discuss the issues at hand. A good example was a meeting that was to take place between our team and a parliamentary committee at a prominent city noted in one of the counties in the region. Despite confirmations in advance and detailed plans with the hotel to host the MPs, the meeting was cancelled at the last minute. Later, the committee Chair asked our team to meet his committee on the sidelines of another meeting that was taking place. However, after waiting for four hours he called us to say he was taking a flight at that moment. There was, however, a happy ending to this as we were eventually given an opportunity to meet the committee at a different venue two months later.

Earlier in the campaign, we received a hate message from a university professor from a university in East Africa. In reaction to our online petition, the professor wrote:

“The dodo was around and it disappeared and life continues. I don’t care if flamingos disappear too, in case they do, life will continue.”

We ignored the message and moved on. As much as it was shocking to receive a hate message from a person of high standing in society, it did little to dampen our morale.





Availability of information

The entire soda ash project proposal was covered in mystery. Initially, the Tanzanian Government and the investor released very little information on the project. Apart from the 'environmental brief' that came to light around March 2007, very little else was known about the proposed soda ash factory.

During the stakeholders meeting of July 2007 only the executive summary of the ESIA report was presented and those present made it very clear that this information was not enough.

The full ESIA report did not become available until November 2nd 2007 – “The Flamingo Judgment Day” when the Technical Advisory Committee, appointed by NEMC, met to review the ESIA report. However, this was a lot of information released within a very short time.

To demonstrate the frustration faced in obtaining information, BirdLife International's Regional Director for Africa Dr Hazell Shokellu Thompson wrote to NEMC upon invitation to the TAC: “Please note that we have received this document only in the past few days and have not had time to study it thoroughly” said the preamble, adding “Nonetheless, we believe there are several pertinent issues on which we might pass comment.” Pleasantly, the TAC was almost unanimous that the ESIA report was inadequate.

The Public Hearing is another event on which little information was available. The notice given by the council was published in the press with only two weeks to go. This provided little time for people who would be travelling from outside Tanzania to make any meaningful arrangements to participate. Nevertheless, as described in Chapter Four, there was sufficient representation lobbying at the Public Hearing which led to the total rejection of the project by the local community, donors, NGOs, academicians and people of all walks of life gathered in the Karimnjee Hall, in Dar es Salaam.

Apart from information on the soda ash project, information on Lesser Flamingos, their breeding habits and requirements was not readily available. There was a lot of uncertainty on what impacts the proposed development would have on the birds. Nevertheless, our team made use of expert advice and information available. And as mentioned in Chapter One, the “precautionary principle” came in handy. We argued that action should be taken to avert environmental disaster by not building the soda ash plant.

Mobilising support across many institutions

It was not an easy task bringing together all the individuals and institutions involved in the campaign. From the meeting held at KWS on 8th May 2007, it was clear that the task ahead was monumental. But if the advocacy work was to succeed, it was vital to rally all the organisations and individuals behind this one issue. Variation in how different organisations approached issues sometimes slowed down the work. While some organisations wanted the issues at hand addressed “head on”, others were more cautious and preferred quiet diplomacy. There were those who insisted that *all* the information must become available before any statement was



released. A lot of consensus-building was therefore required in that process. Documents were reviewed over and over again before they were finally released.

Then there was the issue of credit. Which organisation was going to receive credit for all that was happening? Some organisations were very particular on who got the credit and how it was presented. Others were more liberal and did not mind as long as the work was done and the credit went to “all of us.” In the end, what prevailed was the fact that this was not about any single organisation or individual but about the task ahead. If we all succeeded in averting the soda ash nightmare, future generations would be thankful that someone thought about their destiny and did something to secure it.

Conflicts at places of work

Some members of the campaign team had difficulties if their employers did not consider the Lake Natron work as part of their core work. Some members of the team initially had some challenges as a result of the time they were devoting strategy meetings or just volunteering to The Group.

The above challenges were overcome eventually when it became clear that the issue at hand was global in nature and most of the organisations involved were interested parties.

The need for funds

The need for funds to support advocacy work was great. Right from the beginning, the campaign team recognised the fact that funds would be needed to attend meetings, put out press releases and produce advocacy materials. The first financial challenge faced was to place a paid-up press statement which needed about US\$ 1,500. While institutions were willing to contribute ideas and the content of the advertisement, there was little coming in terms of funds. However, the power of pulling together was manifested when the institutions contributed small amounts to meet the target.

One thing that significantly helped the work was the fact that individuals and institutions volunteered to host meetings or met the cost of their staff to attend meetings. However, once in a while, some institutions would donate funds that went a long way in funding the activities. So it is true to say that the campaign cost a lot in terms of money but the actual cost may never be known as it is distributed in the books of accounts of various institutions. Eventually, significant support came from the Horn of Africa Regional Environment Centre and Network and the A.V. Jensen Charity Foundation.

Lessons Learnt

There is strength in numbers

More is accomplished through joint rather than individual effort. No single individual or institution could have achieved what was achieved jointly. Dealing with a sovereign government and a respected business outfit like the Tata Group was a tough job. From the initial interest stirred



by the email exchange of March 2007, it was clear that the success of the campaign required thousands, if not tens of thousands to join in.

The original number of institutions that initially formed the Lake Natron Consultative Group was five. This was the critical mass that helped spur interest at regional level (East Africa) and later other parts of the world. The evidence of acceptance of the message was not only the growth in the number of institutions joining The Group but also in the number of individuals saying “no” in the online petition that was launched in the initial stages of the advocacy. That The Group grew from the initial five in May 2007 to 23 in December; 32 in May 2008, 53 in December 2008 and 56 in August 2011; plus the joining in of the international community, is testimony to the commitment of all involved.

We also learnt that a campaign is as successful as its coordination team. The core team should help in putting together the advocacy strategy as well as raising funds (*Jenkins and Brulle 2003*). But even within a campaign team there must, of essence, be individuals with fire in their bellies who are willing to sacrifice and go ahead of the rest. A campaign is a sacrifice and cannot be limited to official working hours. Those who choose advocacy work must be willing to work long hours, including over the weekends, and sometimes, during public holidays. But the results of this sacrifice are quite fulfilling.

Decisions by companies and governments are not invincible

The Lake Natron work brought the lesson home that government decisions and corporate interests can be reversed. This is a lesson that has reverberated throughout history since Rachel Carson wrote the famous book *Silent Spring* in 1962 and through it gave birth to green consciousness in the United States and the rest of the world. When Rachel raised the flag that pesticide chemicals were harmful to birds, insects, the environment and people, critics, especially the chemical industry came up in arms. For many years, people had been made to accept the notion that chemical pesticides use was the savior for the modern world and the agricultural and health sectors could not survive without them. *Silent Spring* changed all this and showed that pesticides, especially Dichloro Diphenyl Trichloroethane (DDT), had detrimental effects on life. This eventually led to a ban on the use of DDT in the United States of America in 1972. Rachel’s book, and the environmental consciousness it generated, can be credited with the eventual promulgation of key environmental laws, particularly the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, in the United States.

It is unfortunate that five decades after the *Silent Spring* and the birth of the environmental movement, certain corporate entities continue to have their way with serious impacts on the environment. Here in Africa, we have seen sensitive ecosystems that are critical for provision of ecosystem services come under threat because of misguided development. As it was in 1962, in nearly all cases, the corporates pose as the ones to redeem Africa with promises of jobs and injection of cash into the economies of the nations concerned. Fortunately, cases such as the one for Lake Natron and many others across Africa and the world continue to demonstrate that corporate and governments are not invincible: that, it is possible to challenge and even reverse decisions that are taken without full consideration of the common good.



For maximum impact select one flagship issue

It helps to identify a flagship issue to drive a campaign. In the Natron case, Lesser Flamingos served to arouse intense interest at all levels – local, national and global levels. There were other pertinent issues such as loss of other forms of biodiversity. However, none had the capacity to unite the world against Tata Chemicals’ proposal like the issue of Lesser Flamingos. And as *Brooks and Goldberg (2004)* point out, the campaign stood for something; our team wanted Lake Natron preserved as a breeding site for Lesser Flamingo and alternative livelihoods for the local communities sought.

Well packaged and effectively communicated messages have great impact

There is no substitute to a well thought out and packaged message in advocacy. The information that is to be communicated must be easy to understand and it must be clear to the audience what is expected of them. As much as possible, it should be devoid of scientific jargon. Even scientific concepts should be communicated in “every day” language. The alternative is to place more scientific material in separate zones for those who are interested. This is what was done in the “Think Pink” web page where the call for action was placed.

In using communication tools such as the Lake Natron Update Bulletin, it is important to ensure there is an introductory paragraph that summarises what the key issues are for the benefit of those seeing the information for the first time. The rest of the information should be highly summarised and preferably in point form so that people do not tire of reading. In today’s technologically-savvy world, it is critical to provide web links from which readers can access more detailed information.

Another key element is to ensure that all the institutions involved in the campaign are acknowledged and listed appropriately. In this case, the list of the Lake Natron Consultative Group member institutions accompanied every Update Bulletin and the list grew as more institutions joined.

The voice of the local community is like the voice of God

The local community should of essence be part of the advocacy work right from the beginning. They stand to lose the most if potentially damaging developments get the green light. It is important for the local people to clearly understand what they are likely to gain or lose if such developments go ahead. In the case of Lake Natron, we explained these issues to our initial contacts within the local community and later the entire community.

One thing that was close to the heart of the local community was water since most were pastoralists. The soda ash factory would use huge amounts of water from the ecosystem thus putting their main livelihood source at risk. Another loophole that was used was the issue of employment. The project documents made it clear that few members, if any, of the local community would benefit from jobs created by the factory. The fact that only casual jobs – such as watchmen – would be available for them, made them oppose the idea even more.



Armed with clear points of arguments, the local people were given an opportunity to present their views during the Public Hearing held in Dar es Salaam on 23rd January 2008. As explained in Chapter Four, the presentation by the local community brought the debate at the Public Hearing to an end. Many who spoke afterwards questioned the assertion by the investor and the Government that the project was of benefit to the local people. If that was the case, why would the local community be opposed to the plans?

Get input from experts; there is no substitute for good science

Environmental Advocacy is not and cannot be a one-man show. Early on in the work, we learnt the value of tapping into the expertise available both locally and internationally. We sought to ensure that our arguments were backed up by credible scientific information.

It is critical for the advocacy team to identify reliable experts who identify with their cause and make them part of the core team. It is unlikely that the advocacy team would be in a position to pay these experts but the issue at hand could be so important that these experts will contribute their time. It is also important to find experts who can provide materials that could support the campaign.

We discovered that with a bit of searching and networking, it is possible to find experts willing to provide photos, films, maps and other background documents. An advocacy team should in particular treasure contacts that are able and other to access information which is not easily accessible, say from the government or investor.

We had the advantage of having an array of such experts and volunteers. We treasured the gift of high resolution photographs provided free by James Warwick a UK-based professional photographer. A short film titled: *A very special flamingo*, was provided free of charge by Richard Brock, a professional wildlife film-maker in the UK. We also got information provided by a volcanologist on the volcanic activities of Ol Donyo Lengai plus much more behind the scenes support by many other experts.

To protect ecosystems under threat, assess their economic value

One of the often asked questions during the campaign was: “What would be lost if Lesser Flamingos’ breeding site at Lake Natron was destroyed?” Was it possible to estimate what this loss would be in economic terms?

Establishing the true value of ecosystems and the species in them makes it easier to protect them. It helps to lay bare what is at stake, making advocacy a lot easier since politicians and decision-makers understand economic language. However, it is not always easy to estimate the economic value of natural systems, the simple reason being that some of the elements do not have a market value.

Estimating the economic value may therefore involve creating hypothetical markets and assessing “willingness to pay” to access the resources or “willingness to accept” compensation for the loss of these resources. These are not easy concepts either.



Another related issue is the need to compare the costs and benefits of the proposed project with the costs and benefits of the protecting the natural system. This is referred to as cost benefit analysis (CBA). Ensure that a credible team is put in place for this work. The investor would like to show that his project has more benefits and is likely to “hide” some of the costs. The only way to counter these investor arguments is to have expert economic analysis and input.

The case of Mabira Forest in Uganda helps to demonstrate the above. In 2007 the Uganda government planned to give away 7,186 hectares of the forest to the Sugar Corporation of Uganda Ltd. (SCOUL), associated with the Mehta Group, to plant sugarcane to address the issue of sugar shortages in the country. The plan was intensely opposed, with public demonstrations that left three people dead. A Cost Benefit Analysis of the project was done which showed that the Ugandan tax-payer stood to lose US\$ 980 million if Mabira was annexed. Further, the study showed that if SCOUL applied more efficiency to match other factories at Kakira and Kinyara, as well as increasing production of sugarcane per hectare, the need for land would decrease by 5,038 ha. This would leave an outstanding need of only 2,148 ha, which can be obtained elsewhere (Nature Uganda, 2011)²¹.

When the value of the ecosystem services was added to that of standing timber, conserving Mabira registered a net present value (a tool used to determine if a long-term venture is profitable or not) of US\$ 45 million as compared to that of sugarcane growing which was US\$ 30 million. This meant that converting Mabira for sugarcane growing would lead to a net loss of US\$ 15 million to the Ugandan tax-payer.

Over and above these figures, the evaluation team argued that SCOUL was the least qualified, effectiveness and all other factors considered. Needless to say, the report played a major role in halting the Mabira give-away.

This book’s post-script presents the results of a Cost Benefit Analysis study carried out for Lake Natron.

Court the media: it’s a powerful ally

There is no substitute to good media coverage. However, it does not come easily. Initial attempts to get your story to get noticed by the media can be quite frustrating, or downright daunting. One approach that worked was use of experienced public relations firms to get stories out. Through one such firm, our team got good advice on when to send out press releases or hold press conferences.

The success of the international press conference in May 2008 was premised on the fact that it was done on a Monday morning. Media houses in Nairobi tended to be news-hungry on Monday mornings after covering the activities of politicians during the weekends. It therefore followed that a press conference on a Monday morning in a well-chosen location would often attract good coverage. And it worked! Our press conference at Hotel Intercontinental on a Monday morning was a great success. The advocacy team, however, needs to identify what works in the particular circumstances, i.e. must identify a suitable location, time and of course, message.

²¹This meant that converting Mabira for sugarcane growing would lead to a net loss of \$15 million to the Ugandan tax-payer



It is also important to identify key media contacts to whom stories can be sent at a short notice. It is vital to keep a list of these contacts including their telephone numbers and email addresses. We learnt that the ability of a campaign team to penetrate a particular media house is often as strong as the contact there.

If you believe it is important, solicit international support

Nothing could have substituted the international goodwill and support that the campaign work gained, invariably, from the start. It is accurate to say that nothing much could have been achieved if local dialogues and perspectives were maintained from the beginning to the 'end.'

While national and regional beginnings were important, it was only logical that the international community would come on board to add weight to the messages. For some reason, decision-makers in this part of the world tend to take sentiments expressed at global level more seriously than those at regional or national level and much less, local level. At the end of the day, it was a combination of messages and strategies coming from all these levels that won the day.

The fact that ecosystems have some form of protection does not isolate them from development-related threats

When development pressures come calling, decision-makers, who are usually politicians, find it hard to resist in spite of the protection status of the areas involved. The fact that Lake Natron was a Ramsar Site and an Important Bird Area was not disincentive enough to keep Tata and the government away. Investors find it easier to explain away the negative effects of development projects by displaying expected benefits such as jobs and increased government revenues.

Since Lake Natron, other valuable ecosystems in the region have come under similar pressure. In Kenya, the 130,000 hectare Tana Delta is important for tourism conservation and serves as a crucial dry-season grazing refuge for local communities. In spite of this, Tana Delta has been a target of various investments, including plantation of sugarcane, maize, rice and biofuel crops—especially *Jatropha curcus*.

The companies, which could grab over 100,000 hectares of the delta are G4 Industries (UK), Bedford Biofuels (Canada), Matt International, Mumias Sugar Company (Kenya), and Tana and Athi Rivers Development Authority (TARDA, Kenya). Oil exploration by Flow Energy Ltd is also underway. In addition, the Qatar government has requested for a large portion of the delta to grow food crops for its citizens back home in exchange for assistance to the Kenya government to build a new port in Lamu. These investments have been challenged by conservation organisations, with Nature Kenya taking a leading role²².

Another recent saga involved the proposed construction of a highway through the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania, one of the most famous protected areas in the world. The Tanzania government planned to construct a 53-kilometre US\$ 480 million highway through the park. The highway was intended to connect the northern part of the country, which is less developed,

²²See <http://www.tanariverdelta.org/tana/g1/projects.html> and <http://www.naturekenya.org/Conservation/Advocacy/Tana%20Delta>



with the south and it would pass through the wilderness area of the park. Serengeti National Park is a World Heritage Site.²³

The plans to build a road through Serengeti, a World Heritage Site, was immensely opposed by conservation organisations, among them The Serengeti Watch²⁴, the Frankfurt Zoological Society and Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania. They argued that a road through the park would bisect the path of the world famous annual wildebeest and zebra migration comprised of nearly two million animals²⁵.

The opposition to the Serengeti Highway was taken to the World Heritage Committee meeting in June 2011 and the Government was compelled to scale down the project, saying the section of the road through Serengeti will not be tarmacked²⁶.

These latest developments, coupled with the Lake Natron issue, provide an ever-present reminder that the level of protection of the sites does not insulate it against misguided development.



Tana Delta in Kenya: Massive biofuel developments threaten the beautiful tourism hotspot © Nature Kenya

²³The World Heritage Sites are areas of outstanding universal value that are listed under the UNESCO's World Heritage Convention. For more see: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>

²⁴A coalition of organisations that stood for the integrity of Serengeti. See: <http://www.savetheserengeti.org/#axzz1W2bbWU9u>

²⁵For more on the Serengeti Campaign see: <http://www.savetheserengeti.org/issues/stop-the-serengeti-highway/#axzz1YkZi35zD>

²⁶See: <http://www.birdlife.org/community/2011/07/what-does-the-serengeti-highway-decision-mean-for-lake-natron/>

Keeping the Fire Burning – The Next Steps

Back to the start?

After a blissful two years since the withdrawal of Tata Chemicals Industries from the scene in 2008, the campaign team was jolted into action in April 2011. On 31st March 2011, the President of Tanzania made a startling, but not totally unexpected announcement: “the Lake Natron soda ash factory plans must be fast-tracked.”²⁷

The President, who was visiting the Ministry of Industry and Trade in Dar es Salaam, said, Tanzania, as a country, should not continue reeling in poverty “while our minerals are lying untapped” adding, “with harvesting at Lake Natron, we will not be the first to do so, because our neighbours, Kenya, are doing the same on the other side of the lake.” He said there was no need for further delay since “experience has it that excavation can continue without any disruptions to the ecosystem.”

The President advised that the proposed soda ash plant be located “a few kilometres away” to reduce any negative impacts on Lesser Flamingos. He described those opposed to the project as “unpatriotic and agents of people we don’t know.” At that meeting, the Minister for Industry and Trade, Dr Cyril Chami, told the president that a feasibility study for the Lake Natron project would be completed by the end of April 2011 and that the ministry was committed to ensure that the project takes off. This was in a bigger effort to ensure that Tanzania achieved a 15 per cent industrial growth as opposed to the current eight per cent.

Not yet safe

These recent developments clearly illustrate the fact that in spite of the advocacy work, Lake Natron Lesser Flamingos and the future of the local communities are not safe yet. Despite the dramatic withdrawal of Tata from the soda ash project, our team was under no illusion that the war was won. It was clear that the National Development Corporation maintained a close interest in the soda ash proposal and it was not lost on our team that NDC could take the earliest opportunity to try and revive the project.

NDC’s mandate is to initiate, develop and guide the implementation of economically viable projects in partnership with the private sector. In mid-2009, another Government institution, Tanzania Investment Centre, had put up an advert looking for bids for the supply of soda ash mining equipment for Lake Natron soda ash. The Tanzania Investment Centre asked interested parties to quote for: “the supply of machinery and equipment, as well as trucks in a soda ash processing plant”. The advert caused a furor which prompted TIC to beat a hasty retreat and disown the advert. TIC also denied that the Vice President’s office, the parent ministry, had given the go-ahead for the soda ash mining.

²⁷Daily News: <http://in2eastfrica.net/kikwete-urges-fast-track-on-soda-ash-harvesting-at-lake-natron> and The Citizen: <http://www.thecitizen.co.tz/simday-citizen/41-sunday-citizen-business/9593-kikwete-approves-soda-ash-mining-at-lake-natron.html>.





In the July 2009 Update Bulletin, the Lake Natron Consultative Group said: “This assurance puts to rest recent anxiety and speculation that the government may already have cleared the soda ash mining project.”

Which way ahead?

When Tata withdrew their intention to mine soda ash at Lake Natron in 2008, there were calls from all over to pop the champagne and celebrate. It was truly great victory! But our team said: “It would be great to hang our gloves, pop the champagne and celebrate, but the threat to Lake Natron remains until the Government itself withdraws its intentions.” This statement remains true, several years down the line.

Given the above state of affairs, what should be the way ahead? Here are a few suggestions:

Maintain vigilance

In May 2011, an Indian Company, Hindustan National Glass and Industries, enquired from one of our close contacts seeking advice “regarding ways to avoid disturbing the breeding Flamingos and still put up the plant, and how soda ash can be mined at Lake Natron.” In its enquiry HNG revealed it was interested in approaching the Tanzania Government for a soda ash extraction license. HNG confessed that the main raw material in its glass manufacture is actually soda ash. HNG was a medium sized company based in Kolkota in Eastern India and commanded 55 per cent of the market share of container glass market in India.

In a letter to HNG, the BirdLife International CEO Dr. Marco Lambertini wrote “The risks are so serious that it remains BirdLife International’s view that a soda ash extraction plant must not be built. Any industrial-scale extraction of soda ash from Lake Natron poses serious risks that cannot be mitigated. There is a very high likelihood that this will still be the case even with improved understanding and project design.” He added “We are concerned about HNG’s plans. While we would be very happy to meet with you to discuss our position in more detail, we must stress that we do not believe that a soda plant can be constructed in this location without severe impacts on the Lesser Flamingos and therefore we remain opposed in principle to such a project.” Hindustan National Glass and Industries never responded and has never been heard from since.

We also became aware of efforts by the National Development Corporation to conduct studies to plug the gaps identified in the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment. In September 2010, NDC commissioned the consultancy bureau of a prominent university in the region to undertake the assignment. In the introductory letter, the leader of the team said the assessment was meant to find out what has been “documented and what gaps exist that need to be filled before further work is done. It is not about ESIA or any assessment related to the soda ash project.” This letter was meant to lower suspicion but it only succeeded in fuelling it.

From that point, getting hold of the report from the consultancy team would be crucial as further steps relating to the to the soda ash project were going to be based on that report. The latest



enquiry from NDC revealed the report was completed but can only be availed by the Managing Director. Certain sources believe that the report was not supportive of NDC's objectives.

Build a local constituency and explore alternative, sustainable, livelihoods

As mentioned earlier, this work was recognised by A.V Jensen Charity Foundation in 2010 that provided a grant to implement a project which, among other things, aims to strengthen the local constituency for protecting Lake Natron. The implementation of Lake Natron Conservation Project is being led by the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania with technical support from the BirdLife Africa Partnership secretariat in Nairobi. So far, a cultural *boma* has been built at Ngare Sero village to host tourists; water has been provided at Magadini, a village without a single drop of fresh water; and irrigation canals have been rehabilitated at Pinyinyi village.

The future of the lake can only be assured if there is strong local ownership and support. This has already been demonstrated by the community's stand against Tata. However, this is not sufficient.

First, this local support and goodwill must be organised into a grassroots movement. In BirdLife terminology, Site Support Groups would be formed in all the villages to own and continue the work. These groups should then undergo training in group dynamics, book-keeping, conflict resolution, policy and advocacy and running of income-generating activities. Luckily, the Lake Natron Conservation Project incorporates all these aspects. Already, the project mentioned



The Cultural Boma at Ngare Sero Village © Francis Makari



above has established Site Support Groups in three villages with a total of 260 members, including 110 Maasai women at Ngare Sero village who are charged with the responsibility of managing the Cultural *boma*.

Secondly, the local constituency should be strengthened by providing alternative sources of livelihood for the local communities. For example, the local people live near a global jewel – the most important breeding site for Lesser Flamingos in the world – but they remain poor. They also sit at the base of one of the few active volcanoes in Africa and globally. There must be a way income from tourism can be channeled so that it benefits the local people. Under the Lake Natron Conservation Project, there is an opportunity to do exactly this by adding value to existing eco-tourism activities and establishing new ones. For example, the now completed cultural *boma* at Ngare Sero is providing tourism income to the local community. Local Maasai women now have a base for selling their beautiful beads to tourists who visit to experience undiluted nature and culture. A campsite will be established at Pinyinyi village and the Tanzania Tourism Board is helping in marketing and providing valuable advice.

Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Northern Transport Corridor

Tanzania should undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the massive infrastructural plan for Northern Transport Corridor which is likely to have significant impacts on Lake Natron. This proposal is consistent with the recommendations of the Ramsar Advisory Mission (see Chapter Five) in its report of 2008.

In mid-2011 the Tanzania and Uganda governments signed a contract for the construction of a US\$ 3 billion railway line connecting the two countries. The proposed railway line will run from Tanga, through Arusha (with a connecting line to Lake Natron) to Musoma. Kampala will be connected to Musoma via a rail ferry across Lake Victoria. The project, which will be implemented by a special Joint Task Force, will spend US\$ 1.9 billion on the railway project; US\$ 695.5 million on Mwambani port and US\$ 320 million on Kampala Port.

Earlier in the year (2011) the Government of Tanzania announced plans to build a US\$ 5.1 billion standard gauge railway line between Kigali (Rwanda) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). The railway line would serve as an outlet to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi and Western Uganda. At the same time, Tanzania and Uganda governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the development of a new transport route between Kampala and the Port of Tanga – mainly to transport newly discovered oil from Uganda.

Then there is also the plan to construct a highway through the world-famous Serengeti National Park, enroute to Musoma. The planned road would take a right turn at Mto wa Mbu, leading along the escarpment, passing Mt. Ol Donyo Lengai, and then pass near Lake Natron (see Chapter 6).

Seeing that the infrastructural plan for northern Tanzania is so massive, it is only prudent that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)²⁸ be undertaken. Strategic Environmental Assessment is defined as:

²⁸See: http://sea.unu.edu/course/?page_id=90



“A systematic and comprehensive process of evaluating the environmental effects of a policy, plan or programme and its alternatives, including the preparation of a written report on the findings of that evaluation, and using the findings in publicly accountable decision-making” (Sadler and Verheem 1996)²⁹.

The major difference between ESIA and SEA is that the former focuses on a project and the latter looks at policies, plans or programmes in the relevant sector. A SEA will ensure that impacts and benefits are identified in a strategic and holistic manner and not just in a project context. It will also be possible to identify cumulative, indirect, secondary and induced impacts, which are difficult to pin down in an ordinary project ESIA.

Emphasis on long-term planning

In its report, the Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) of February 2008, made a number of recommendations which are important for the future of Lake Natron. First, the mission requested Tanzania to submit updated information (Ramsar Information Sheet) and map of Lake Natron, including an accurate definition of the boundaries of the Ramsar Site. This is important because it will be clear to all where the boundaries lie.

Related to this, the RAM recommended that the Government should give priority to the “development of relevant planning measures at the local and district levels, including a Ramsar Site Management Plan (or at least, in the short term, a statement of management objectives).” An integrated plan is important because it will set out what developments may or may not be undertaken within the ecosystem.

The Wetlands Unit of the Wildlife Division in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism has been leading in the development of an Integrated Management Plan and has on several occasions invited stakeholders for discussion. However, the process has been largely unclear and ambiguous as few people seem to know where it starts and ends. It is understood that the process is led by District teams but we have not met any person who has been involved. It is therefore critical that the Wetlands Unit brings this process to light and make it more inclusive. The development of a ‘statement of management objectives’ as recommended by the Ramsar Mission would be a welcome starting point.

Another element is the Lesser Flamingo Action Plan. This is a document that identifies threats to the species and prioritises action to alleviate these threats while identifying the resources that are required. This Government-led process largely went very well, with massive involvement of stakeholders, notably the March 2012 document finalisation workshop at Lake Manyara National Park. The Tanzania’s Lesser Flamingo Action Plan was modelled on the International Lesser Flamingo Action Plan (Childress *et al.*, 2008) and Kenya’s Single Species Action Plan (Ndang’ang’a *et al.*, 2008). It is delightful that the Wetlands Unit had published and started distributing the Lesser Flamingo Action Plan by the time this book went to the press (Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, 2012).

²⁹See also Therivel, R. 2004. *Strategic Environmental Assessment in Action*, Earthscan, London.



Finally, RAM recommended the creation of Wildlife Management Areas in the existing Game Controlled Areas around Lake Natron for the purpose of enhancing community involvement in the management of the Lake Natron and its environment and to ensure that local communities derive benefits from tourism-related activities. This having started, to some extent, the process needs to be fast-tracked, the local communities sensitised on the benefits of WMAs, as well as the benefits they stand to gain. The process in Longido District is being led by African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) but there is little funding to undertake the process in Ngorongoro District and communities there need further awareness. Once again, Tanzania's Wildlife Division should provide clear leadership in this process.

Explore higher protection status for Lake Natron

One of the questions that need to be answered is if there is necessary to confer a higher protection status to Lake Natron and what benefits this would bring. Lake Natron is listed internationally as a Ramsar Site, but it not under any other legal protection nationally (e.g. national park or game reserve), except for the ongoing WMA formation process.

Conventional wisdom suggests that the higher the status, the safer an area is. For example, we expect national parks which are under strict protection regimes to be generally better protected and susceptible to fewer development threats. However, this argument falls flat from recent government plans of constructing a road through Serengeti. Similarly, the government recently made a proposal to start uranium mining in part of Selous Game Reserve in central Tanzania. If this can happen to national parks, would higher protection necessarily secure Lake Natron?

One of the suggested options is to place Lake Natron on the World Heritage List. The World Heritage List includes 936 properties forming part of the cultural and natural heritage which the World Heritage Committee (a committee consisting of representatives from 21 of the state parties to the World Heritage Convention and meets once a year) considers as having outstanding universal value.

There is general concurrence within the Tanzania Government and stakeholders that placing Lake Natron on the World Heritage List would be beneficial and this proposal was included in the Lesser Flamingo Action Plan. Indeed, there was a suggestion to include the lake in the process which inscribed the Kenya Lake System in the Rift Valley (Lake Bogoria, Lake Nakuru and Lake Elementaita)³⁰ on the World Heritage List in June 2011. However, there wasn't sufficient time to initiate consultations within Tanzania for this process to go ahead.

We recommend that this discussion be kept alive and follow-up be made with relevant Government agencies with a view to initiating the World Heritage inscription for not only Lake Natron, but also other related lakes such as: Manyara, Eyasi, Momella, Balangida Lalu, and Empakai which are critical for Lesser Flamingo survival.

Fundraising to support long-term protection of Lake Natron

There is need to think of innovative fundraising methods to continue supporting work at Lake Natron. Funds to support advocacy are not easy to come by as many donors do not fund

³⁰See: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1060>



campaigns directly. One way to ensure there are funds for the work is to include advocacy elements in all new proposals.

Another way to ensure funds are available for the work is to seek more funds to do more “tangible” things on the ground. Such funds would go towards supporting more community activities in order to build their capacity as well as improve their livelihood status. At the same time, these proposals should include elements of advocacy at local, national, regional and international levels – as this will always be necessary.

In the recent past, online fund-raising has become popular but this needs to be approached carefully. One popular portal that can be used for this is Wildlife Direct which has proved very useful for reaching individual donors willing to give small donations. Over a long period, income from these individual donors can support a project component. The advantage with this type of fund-raising is the availability of un-restricted funds which gives flexibility and allows a campaign team to put money where the need is greatest.

Finally, organisations concerned with the plight of ecosystems in light of emerging threats should consider establishing a trust fund. Such a trust fund could be put in an interest-bearing account and the interest used over the long-term to secure the future of these ecosystems.

Conclusion

This case study has attempted to bring out the successes, challenges and lessons from the advocacy campaign for Lake Natron and its flamingos. It is clear that the campaign succeeded in bringing together tens of thousands of individuals and local communities and institutions across the globe around a common cause.

This issue brings to the fore the conflict that occurs between the push for development and the need to ensure that the resources of the earth and ecological processes thereof are not harmed. Renowned documents like *Caring for the Earth* (IUCN/UNEP/WWF, 1991) and *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987)³¹, and the Brundtland Commission, espouse the need to embrace development that meets the needs of the present generation without jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. This is not achievable if human beings are not mindful of the earth’s carrying capacity.

Future generations will judge us harshly if development projects like the proposed Lake Natron soda ash mining are allowed to proceed, since they damage sensitive ecological processes as well as people’s sources of livelihoods. We must continue advocating for the application of the Precautionary Principle since anticipated damage is not likely to be mitigated.

³¹The World Commission on Environment and Development produced *Our Common Future* following concerns over worrying trends in environmental degradation. Chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway, the commission said in pursuing development, human beings must recognise the earth’s limitations. Over-exploitation leads to degradation. Environmental protection and economic development are therefore not mutually exclusive. The Brundtland Commission defined Sustainable Development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”



The fact that the soda ash push came up again in 2011 and 2012 is testimony enough that the forces out to utilise natural resources in these ecologically sensitive areas have not gone to sleep. We must remain vigilant and expect more pressure in future but also celebrate the fact that we have kept them out, so far.



Magadini School children fetch salty water that is used for preparing their lunch. They do this every morning before attending classes as there is no fresh water in the vicinity © Ken Mwathe



A team on top of Ngelai Hills surveying the water supply route to Magadini Village. Project financed by A.V Jensen Charity Foundation through BirdLife © Francis Makari

Cost Benefit Analysis Study reveals Soda ash mining not economically viable!

Between August 2011 and May 2012, BirdLife International commissioned a Cost Benefit Analysis study to compare the costs/benefits of mining soda ash at Lake Natron with the costs/benefits of sustainably using the resources to support livelihoods. The study team was led by Dr Reuben Kadigi of Sokoine University of Agriculture in Morogoro, Tanzania. The study benefitted from a desk survey—formal interviews involving 175 households in eight villages around Lake Natron and with tourists visiting various camp sites at Lake Natron. Informal interviews were also held with many stakeholders in Tanzania, Kenya and UK – which included Tata and National Development Officials.

The results showed that soda ash mining would be a loss making business over a period of 50 years. The return on investment was estimated to be a **loss** of between US\$ 44,354,728 and US\$ 492,142,797. At the same time, the study showed that Tanzanian citizens would receive a net **benefit** of US\$ 1.28 and 1.57 billion in 50 years if the Government of Tanzania invested in tourism, improvement of livelihoods and ecosystem conservation. The report further showed that Tanzania would still reap more benefits if the government continued investing at the current levels in protecting the environment than from a soda ash plant³².

A stakeholder meeting to disseminate the CBA report was held in Dar es Salaam in August 2012 where the report received immense support.

Tata Denies renewed involvement with the Tanzania Government

The Tata Group finally confirmed that they were no longer interested in mining soda ash at Lake Natron. In March 2012, Tanzania's Minister of Trade and Industry, Mr Cyril Chami, had said that the government was in talks with Tata Chemicals Ltd to set up a US\$ 450 million soda ash factory at Engaruka area, which is part of the Lake Natron basin. The *EastAfrican*³³ newspaper quoted the minister saying that 460 billion cubic litres of soda ash had been discovered at Engaruka and if the Tata deal went through, the Government of Tanzania would hold 46 percent shares through the National Development Corporation.

Further press reports³⁴ around the same time quoted the Regional Commissioner for Arusha Mr. Magesa Mulongo saying the Government of Tanzania was keen to push ahead with the soda ash project, saying it would create jobs and boost the economy.

³²See: BirdLife community: <http://www.birdlife.org/community/2012/08/soda-ash-mining-at-lake-natron-is-not-economically-viable/> and <http://www.birdlife.org/community/2012/09/stakeholders-happy-with-new-lake-natron-cost-benefit-analysis-report/> Daily News: <http://dailynews.co.tz/index.php/features/popular-features/9351-lake-natron-residents-prefer-flamingos-to-soda-ash-plant>, The East African: <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/-/2558/1500306/-/m02wctz/-/index.html>.

³³The East African of 31st March 2012: <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Dar+insists+on+soda+ash+factory+on+Lake+Natron+/-/2560/1377288/-/nqywpd/-/index.html>.

³⁴The Guardian of Tanzania of 19th May 2012: <http://www.ippmedia.com/frontend/index.php?l=41713>





Following our enquiry on this matter, Tata wrote to the President of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS, BirdLife in India), Mr. Homi Khusrookhan. The letter dated 27th July 2012 read in full:

Dear Homi,

This has reference to your letter dated 26th July 2012 and our conversation w.r.t Lake Natron. I would like to reiterate that as an outcome of a detailed business review, Tata Chemicals formally exited the Lake Natron Development on 29th January 2009 and all relevant stakeholders were appropriately informed. Tata Chemicals has not been involved with the Lake Natron since that time and we are unaware of any current developments.

With kind regards,

R. Mukundan

Managing Director, Tata Chemicals Industries

This definitive letter puts to rest any speculation that Tata might consider reviving its interests regarding Lake Natron. We can only salute the Tata Group for this bold move and urge the Tanzania Government to follow suit by withdrawing the soda ash proposal altogether.

Lake Natron wins the WWN Blue Globe Award

Something significant happened in October 2010 that went almost unnoticed. The World Wetlands Network (WWN) recognised the work done regarding Lake Natron and conferred the Blue Globe Award³⁵. The prestigious award was conferred at a ceremony held during the 10th Meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP 10) meeting in Nagoya, Japan³⁶.

In his citation WWN Chair, Mr Chris Rostron said his organisation “recognised recent efforts to improve management at Lake Natron, among other things; posting of a Ramsar Site Manager by the Wetlands Unit; posting of a Site Conservation Manager by Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania (WCST-BirdLife in Tanzania); the development of an Integrated Management Plan and completion of a Single Species Action Plan.” In many ways, these efforts could be traced to the campaign waged by BirdLife and the Lake Natron Consultative Group to save Lake Natron.

Before the Nagoya event, we were requested to receive the award on behalf of BirdLife and the Lake Natron Consultative Group. But we declined saying the efforts to save Lake Natron were not yet complete. Moreover the soda ash mining threat remained as long as the Government of Tanzania, through the National Development Corporation, had not explicitly withdraw its interest. In declining we proposed that the Tanzania Government was best placed to receive the award.

³⁵The World Wetlands Network WWN is a network of 500 Wetland NGOs globally. The Blue Globe, the highest award, is given for best practices in wetland management; Green Globe for restored wetlands and Grey Globe for wetlands in danger.

³⁶See story on BirdLife Community: <http://www.birdlife.org/community/2010/11/lake-natron-scoops-top-award/>



Eng Bonventure Baya, Director General of NEMC, Tanzania (left), Baboucarr Mbye (centre) and Ken Mwathe at the WWN Blue Globe Award presentation ceremony in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010 © Simba Chan

In Nagoya, the Blue Globe Award and the accompanying certificate were received by Eng Bonventure Baya on behalf of the Government of Tanzania. Eng. Baya was the Director-General of Tanzania's National Environmental Management Authority. Mrs Monica A. Kagya, the Assistant Director in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, who was not able to attend the event, held discussions with the organisers and expressed satisfaction with the move to award Lake Natron.

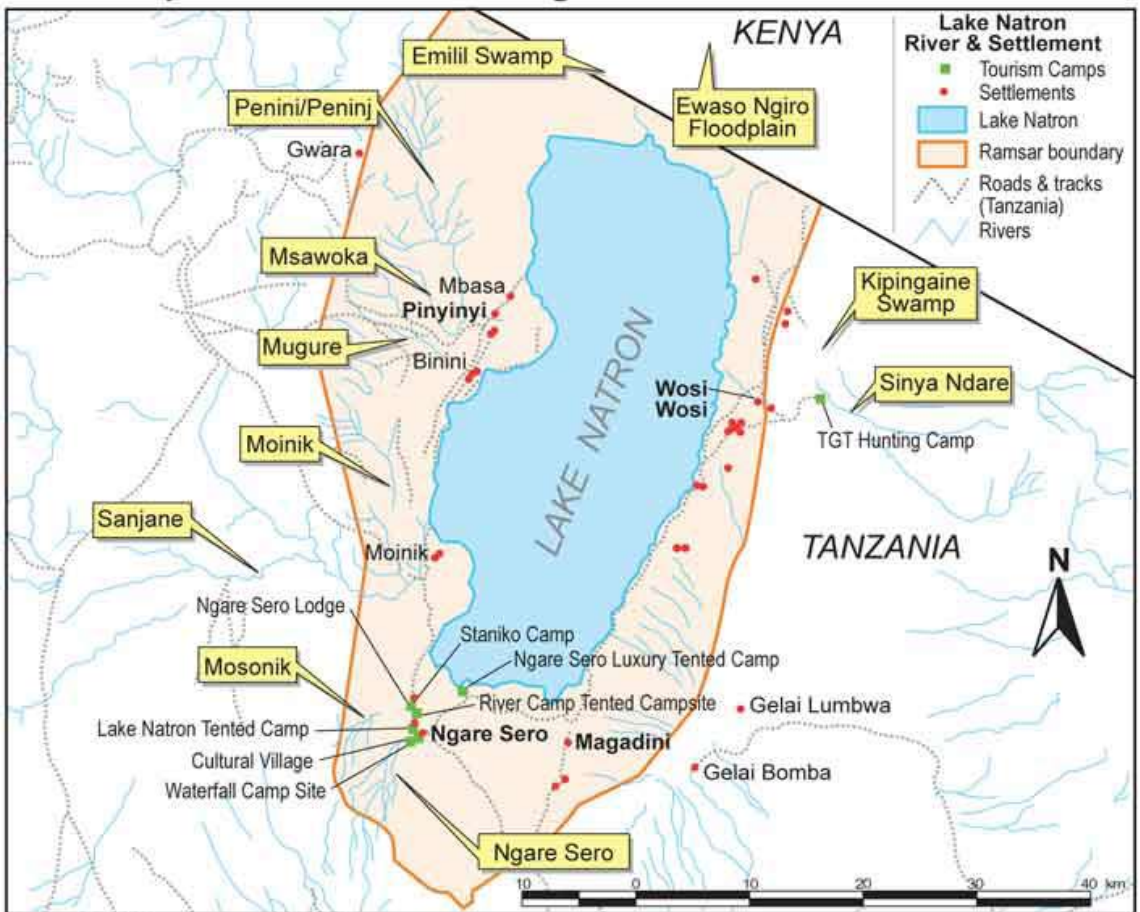
Speaking on behalf of the Tanzania Government after receiving the award, Eng. Baya said the award was a great honour for the country. It was also a challenge for the government "to ensure we continue protecting and conserving Lake Natron".

Speaking on behalf of BirdLife International and the Lake Natron Consultative Group, Ken Mwathe noted: "More than ever before, there is need for stakeholders to ensure that the integrity of Lake Natron and the honour from the new award are maintained."

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Map of Lake Natron showing main settlements and rivers



Source: Lake Natron Resources Ltd, 2007

The BirdLife International Africa Partnership



Botswana



Burkina Faso



Burundi



Cameroon



Côte d'Ivoire



Djibouti



Egypt



Ethiopia



Ghana



Nature Kenya



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Madagascar



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ISBN No.: 978-9966-7191-5-7