

*People living around water bodies rely on fishing for their livelihoods but do the fishing activities illegally.*

*Photo Credit: Noel Iyombwa*

# Illegal fishing threatens Zambia fish stocks, biodiversity

By Noel Iyombwa

**E**VERY first day of December, the Zambian government, through the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, imposes a fishing ban on some of the major water bodies in the country.

The fishing ban, which runs for a period of three months to the last day of February, is meant to allow different fish species to reproduce during this peak breeding season.

However, the ban has been largely defied by people living around these water bodies, many of whom rely on fishing for their livelihoods.

In most cases, the use of illegal fishing methods and gear such as insecticide-treated mosquito nets and poisonous substances.

Small-scale Farmers Development Agency (SAFADA), a union for smallholder farmers in Zambia, has expressed concern at the rate at which fish is depleting in major water bodies in the country.

SAFADA director and founder Boyd Moobwe observed that if nothing is done, the country risks losing some fish species.

Mr Moobwe, who is also an environmentalist, said the authorities should act to eradicate illegal methods of fishing.

In addition to the annual fish ban, he said, there was need to strengthen rules and regulations to curb illegal methods of fishing.

He noted that the use of some of the traditional methods of fishing were depleting the fish stocks at a faster rate than breeding.

The SAFADA director called for stricter measures that will ensure that no the fish ban is effective.

He called on the Ministry of Agriculture to sensitise people living near water bodies about other economic activities and empower small-scale farmers in rural areas to reduce overreliance on fishing.

“People need to be told that at one point there will be no fish so they need to learn other economic activities rather than just depending on fishing. It’s unfortunate that despite some non-governmental organisations in the past coming up with projects such as rice growing in some parts of the country,

local people have failed to diversify but instead stuck to fishing as a source of income and for food. They used bad methods such as mosquito nets, meaning that even the smallest fish is caught and, in some cases, even the eggs,” he said.

Recently the country’s Fisheries and Livestock Minister Makoto Chikote warned that anyone found defying the fishing ban and engaging in illegal fishing methods would face the full force of the law.

According to the Zambian Fisheries Act, fishing activities are prohibited in selected areas.

Save the Environment and People’s Agency (SEPA) executive director Mailes Muke observed that illegal fishing methods were also a threat to biodiversity.

Ms Muke said the use of illegal fishing such as poisonous substances do not only kill fish but other living organisms in the rivers.

“These illegal fishing practices also pollute the environment. The fisheries department should be given more officers and vehicles to patrol water bodies,” she said.