

HIGH WATER LEVELS: GOVT ISSUES ALERT, SPILLING STARTS

By David Lumu

Easter holiday beach picnics, fishing, tourism and farming are some of the key activities that will be disrupted as the Government embarks on the spilling of water to save Nalubaale and Kiira hydropower dams from the rising level of Lake Victoria.

According to officials from Eskom Uganda Ltd, the spilling will be done at the rate 2,200 cubic metres per second, making it very difficult for 25% of the surrounding population to carry out fishing and other businesses.

The spilling is being done to tame the rising waters of Lake Victoria, which experts say are now at 13.19 metres.

Lake Victoria has Africa's largest inland fishery, which accounts for about one million fish annually. Other activities on the lake include beach camping, water rafting, drifting, bungee jumping and skiing; all of which attract tourists and revellers, especially during holiday periods such as Easter.

"Spilling is intended to avoid the extreme rise in water which can negatively impact on the safety of the dam. The lake's level currently stands at 13.19 metres," Eskom officials said in a statement issued yesterday.

"Close monitoring confirms that the level of the lake's water has been rising and is expected to peak during the main rainy season between March and May. We are currently spilling 2,200 cubic metres per second," the statement noted.

In his paper titled "Interventions for rising lake levels upstream of the Nile – A case of Lake Victoria outflow",



Spilling of water at Nalubaale and Kiira hydropower stations is still ongoing with the level of water in Lake Victoria at 13.19 metres. Eskom Uganda is currently spilling at 2,200 meters per second

Eng. Wilberforce Manirakiza, argues that: "Initially we thought Kiira and Owen Falls dams were there for electricity generation but have learnt that they are also good for flood control."

Manirakiza, who works for Eskom, notes that if the dam is poorly maintained and monitored, there is a high chance of failure.

Last year in April, a floating island near Nalubaale dam caused quite a



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stir following expert alerts that it had potential to block, chock inlet screens at the dam in Jinja and affect power generation capacity.

To clear the floating island, the country suffered power blackouts, as a combined team of engineers from the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) and Eskom worked around the clock to tame the threatening island.

So, as the water spilling takes shape, the spokesperson of the UPDF, Lt. Col.

Deo Akiiki, said yesterday that UPDF engineers are on standby to offer any required intervention.

Lake Victoria's water line has continued to rise since last year and it is now approaching the highest ever level recorded over 50 years ago.

The rise in the level of Lake Victoria started in October 2019 and has risen from 12.00 metres to the current level of 13.32 metres as of April 30, 2020. This is a rise of 1.32 metres attained in only six months and the level is only 0.08 metres away from the highest ever on record.

Lake Victoria is the largest lake in Africa and the second largest freshwater lake in the world. It has a surface area of around 69,000km². The lake is shared by Kenya (6%), Uganda (43%) and Tanzania (51%). Burundi and Rwanda are also part of its catchment area which covers 184,000km²

Early this year, Government took steps to get more water out of Lake Victoria through its increased release at Jinja. An inter-ministerial committee under the chairmanship of Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda comprising 14 ministries and seven agencies was also set up last year to implement government response to the swelling of Lake Victoria and related disasters.

Ensuring safety of the hydropower dams, protection of lives and property and monitoring and surveillance of water resources and floating islands, were the other key responsibilities of the Rugunda committee.

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