

## Flood Management, Climate Change and the Community

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### Flood Management and Climate Change: The Community-Based Approach

In the northwestern part of the country, the Nandi Hills give way to the Nyando escarpment that plunges down to the vast expanse of the Kano plains lying below. This flat region is home to people who for years have been tormented by the perennial flooding of the big Nyando River. The course of this river cuts and meanders across the plains finally emptying its waters into the fresh water Lake Victoria, source of the Nile and the second largest fresh water lake in the world.

At Rae Kanyaika Primary School in Nyando District, young girls come wearing sisal skirts, happily singing and dancing to a lively Luo tune followed by a group of boys gleefully croaking like frogs. The combination of sounds reverberates in the room creating a mood of jubilation and heightened anticipation of things to come. The scene has been set by the narrator of the story on how "once upon a time in the land of Kano Plains in the days of our grandfathers, there was a great year that the people of Kano Plains had never witnessed before."

This is not a drama class but teacher Sila Onyango's English lesson. Since flood management cannot be allocated a slot in the packed curriculum, it is incorporated within existing lessons. In this particular one, pupils sharpen their English speaking skills by taking turns to narrate the sad story of the anticipated bumper harvest in Kano following the declaration of Uhuru (Kenya's independence). Unfortunately, the crops were washed away by the historic floods that came to be known as Kodh Uhuru. The story and its enactment captures the children's imagination and interest. Teacher Onyango thereafter asks them

questions to test their comprehension and ability to spell disaster and flood related words. From the story, they also learn traditionally known flood early warning signs such as the appearance of strange birds like 'okok' and 'wiwi', the thunderous croaking of frogs and rising river levels.

*The lesson taught at Rae Kanyaika is an activity under the Project for Building of Communities' Capacity in Flood Disaster Management whose focus is non-structural measures such as producing a flood disaster management textbook to teach primary school pupils on the nature of flood disaster and its management, the effects of floods, and the role of the community. This is one of the two Projects under the Program for Community-Based Flood Disaster Management to Adapt to Climate Change in the Nyando River Basin that is supporting 24 communities in the area. The other one is the Project for Construction of Evacuation Places and Routes that covers structural measures such as construction of evacuation centres, boreholes, stores, culverts, toilets and a weir.*

*In Nyando, year after year, floods alternate with drought and both ways the residents lose not only their crops and livestock hence threatening their livelihood, but at times even their lives. With the increased focus on integrated water resources management, this was bound to change, at least in Nyando. JICA's Development Study on Integrated Flood Management in the Nyando River Basin (2006 - 2008) concentrated on community-based flood management using both structural and non-structural measures. This approach and the pilot projects implemented became the model for additional interventions through the ongoing Program that is being implemented under the Program Grant Aid for Environment and Climate Change.*