

Project Update: January 2012

The sampling programs on the *Labeobarbus* spp. of Lake Tana that migrate to Gilgel Abay River and its tributaries (namely, Koga, Jema, Ashar, Kilty, and Zabzi Rivers) have been successfully completed. The data will be analyzed and a final report will be presented soon.

An awareness creation workshop was held in Merawi town (district town) close to the main Gilgel Abay River on 30 December 2011. Thirty participants have attended the workshop and were drawn from the nearby villages (fishermen and part-time fishermen), development workers, fishery experts from research institutions, Bahir Dar University, Addis Ababa University and officials from the district (District administrator and Head of District Agriculture Office).

Presentations were made by different experts in fisheries and conservation of aquatic resources. The following table shows the titles of presentations, the presenters and their institutional affiliation:

Title	Presenter	Institutional affiliation of presenter
Background to workshop and fish and fisheries of Ethiopia	Dr. Abebe Getahun	Addis Ababa University
Conservation of fishes of Lake Tana	Dr. Eshete Dejen	FAO East African Regional Office
Spawning migration of fishes from Lake Tana to tributary rivers	Mr. Wassie Anteneh	Bahir Dar University, PhD student at Addis Ababa University
Fishes of Gilgel Abay River and its tributaries	Mr. Dagneu Mequanint	Bahir Dar University, MSc student
Legislations pertinent to fish and fisheries and their implementations	Mr. Chalachew Aragaw	Senior Fishery expert, Bureau of Agriculture, Amhara Region

All the presentations emphasized that the water and fish resources of the country are limited resources and they could be depleted as witnessed in different parts of the world, in Africa and in some parts of Ethiopia (e. g. Lake Haramaya that has recently vanished). It has also been emphasized that the *Labeobarbus* spp. of Lake Tana are unique group of cyprinid species flock that are only found in Lake Tana. Recently, the other related group (cyprinid species flock) in Lake Lanao, Philippines, has become extinct due to overexploitation of the resources. Moreover, these unique fish species are migrating to tributary rivers of Lake Tana to breed that made them susceptible to destruction as they are trapped in mass on their route of migration.

Discussions were made on the issues raised, especially on the status of fish and fisheries in Lake Tana, Gilgel Abay River and its tributaries. A number of concerns were raised, the most prominent of which is the use of illegal poisons for fishing in the rivers, especially during the breeding months of the migratory fishes.

The fishermen and local development workers equally admitted that poisons of plant origin, i.e. crushed seeds of Birbira tree (*Milletia ferruginia*) as well as Malathion chemical have been used by some fishermen in stunning and killing the migratory fishes. There is also fencing activity in the rivers to block and catch the migratory fishes in mass before they release their gametes.

Through the discussions the fishermen and all participants agreed that catching this spawning migratory fishes is like killing “pregnant women”, and hence it is killing generations that would ultimately deplete the fish stock from the rivers as well as from Lake Tana.

The fishermen, development workers and officials of the district all regretted for the on-going negative actions and vow to protect the aquatic environment and the fishes from such damaging and unsustainable acts of fishing. They greatly acknowledged the understanding they gained from the workshop and thanked all who were involved in making the workshop a reality including the funding agency, Rufford Foundation.

Pictures showing Gilgel Abay Rivers and some of its tributaries, some of the fishes caught and the workshop activities are attached to this report.



Labeobarbus spp. from Gilgel Abay River (three cat fish specimens included)



Net setting at one of the tributary rivers of Gilgel Abay



One of the tributary rivers during flooding time (last rainy season-August 2011).



Ripe female gonads dissected from one of the migratory fishes.



Ripe Male gonad dissected from one of the migratory *Labeobarbus* spp.



Specimens of *Labeobarbus* spp. collected from one sampling site.



An MSc student, working in the project, taking physico-chemical data at one of the sampling sites.



Banner of the workshop on Conservation of fishes of Gilgel Abay River and its tributaries.



Some pictures on workshop activities