

Ten Frequently Asked Questions about the Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve



*Lake Tana is Ethiopia's largest lake with its surface area of 3,673km². The lake and its surroundings harbor a rich biodiversity. 21 of its fish species are endemic. It is home to globally threatened bird species such as the Wattled Crane (*Grus carunculatus*) and Rouget's Rail (*Rougetius rougetti*). It is also a site of global importance for migrating birds, including tens of thousands of Common Cranes (*Grus grus*) gathering here every year. Mammals of the area include the characteristic Hippopotamus.*



Native forest patches around Lake Tana support many species of *indigenous woody plants* and important medicinal plants. The wetlands of the lake are dominated by *Papyrus and other reeds*, and provide invaluable habitat, flood protection and water purification functions.

37 islands with *19 ancient churches and monasteries* located on the islands, make the area even more attractive. This entire cultural and natural heritage predestined

Tana to be registered as UNESCO biosphere reserve with a total area of *almost 700, 000 hectares*. It includes the whole lake and its shores. It stretches through three administrative zones (North Gondar, South Gondar, West Gojam), nine woredas (Bahir Dar City, Bahir Dar Zuria, Dera, Fogera, Libokemkem, Gondar Zuria, Dembia, Alefa, Taqusa, North Achefer) and 137 kebeles.

1. Why, when and by whom was Lake Tana established as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve?

In September 2014 the federal government applied with UNESCO for a biosphere reserve status, which was *granted in June 2015*. Registration requirements were met by joint efforts of the *ANRS regional government*, supported by the German Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (*NABU*) in cooperation with Michael Succow Foundation and many local stakeholders.

Historical churches and monasteries, traditional forest conservation methods around the churches, biodiversity, endemic fish species, community living and their culture make this area unique, but are endangered due to unsustainable human activities. *Protecting and preserving* them was one of the main motives for establishing a biosphere reserve.

2. What and where are core / buffer / development zones of Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve?

Biosphere reserves typically consist of one or several *core zone(s) of strictly protected ecosystems* (only scientific research allowed), a *buffer zone where limited human activity* in such a way that it supports protection in the core zones is permitted (eco-tourism, agriculture, fishing), and a *development zone where greater activity is allowed* as long as it uses resources in a sustainable manner. Zones may be used in a variety of ways in order to support local needs and conditions.

At Lake Tana, 78 core zones were demarcated, which are mainly found along the lakeshore. Almost 300 individual buffer zones are identified, from individual Church Forests to large aquatic areas. The remaining area is designated development zone. In total, core zones occupy around 3%, buffer zones 27% and transition zones 70% of the Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve.

3. Whom shall I contact about Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve issues?

Pursuant to the regulation no. 125/2014, a regulation provided for Administration of Biosphere Reserves of Lake Tana issued at 'Zikre Hig' Publication, the *Amhara Region Culture, Tourism and Parks Development Bureau* is mandated to administer the biosphere reserve.

It is known that the Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve was demarcated with the participation of members of the zonation committees, representing each and every *kebele administration* as well as other local groups. Additionally, *woreda experts*, including those of EPLAU and CT, carry out important implementation and information dissemination roles for the biosphere reserve. These offices can be contacted for biosphere reserve related issues.



4. What benefit do I get from living in the Biosphere Reserve area?

The biosphere reserve status usually draws *national and international attention* to a certain area leading to more investment and projects towards sustainable development. To name some which are already set in motion and which can benefit you directly:

- *Income and job generating activities*: e.g. support to eco-tourism, production of animal forage, pilot projects for alternative income activities.
- *Support to businesses*: promotion of Lake Tana as touristic site, umbrella brand for regional natural products, and support to community ventures.
- *Establishment of local resource management schemes*, e.g. wetland management committees, designation and management of Area Closures, indigenous seedling propagation and planting, cut-and-carry systems.

- Trainings in relation to *increasing productivity and protection of natural resources* by joint efforts of the local and international NGOs, universities and research institutions, government and the society;
- Ultimately, you and your family will also benefit from a **safer environment** and from the long-term maintenance of key natural resources, such as water and soil fertility, for your lives.

5. Will there be any resettlement of people and our land will be taken for the Biosphere Reserve?

No one shall face threat of being displaced from his or her legitimately owned plot. Biosphere Reserves aim at improving human livelihoods and sharing of benefits, as well as to protect nature and ecosystems; thus promoting innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate, and environmentally sustainable. It is creating balance between nature and human activities thereby enabling them to live without one harming the other. Therefore, **inhabitants should properly and sustainably use** the natural resources available in the reserve area.



6. Is it forbidden to use fertilizer in the area?

It is common that fertilizer should be used for enhanced productivity. Therefore, there is **nobody who prohibits** one from using fertilizer in the Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve site. However, for the wellbeing of the lake, use of **organic** fertilizer is highly recommended in the area. Artificial fertilizers have the potential for polluting the lake. Some nutrients are washed away to the lake by leaching. Hence, **farmers are advised to use compost or organic fertilizer instead**. Trainings for soil-and environmentally friendly farming techniques will be offered at various sites from time to time.

7. Will all fishing activities be prohibited in the Lake Tana/ Biosphere Reserve area?

Usually, any fisherman can catch fish in all areas of the lake. **Fishing from places which are marked as core zones places is exceptionally prohibited**, in order to facilitate fish reproduction. Fishing from these locations disturbs and damages the future source of fish. As these places are quite small, the prohibition is not believed to cause scarcity on the source of fish for fisheries. Instead, **protecting such places ensure sustainability of fish catching** all across the lake. Furthermore, all fishing activity naturally has to comply with the rule and regulation of fish resource proclamation of the region. This includes attention to seasonal closures and the correct fishing gear.

8. How can we discharge waste (solid and liquid) without polluting Lake Tana?

Any waste matter released to the lake affects the functionality of the lake ecosystem and the services it provides to humans and wildlife. Individuals and organizations shall **purify waste matters before letting it go** into the lake. The society has to develop the habit of putting solid wastes into dustbins rather than randomly throwing them all around the lake and of not using the lakeside and rivers as car wash sites. Hotels and other organizations have to **treat liquid waste** before releasing to the environment. The concept of sustainable waste management should be enhanced by the city administration and other partners.

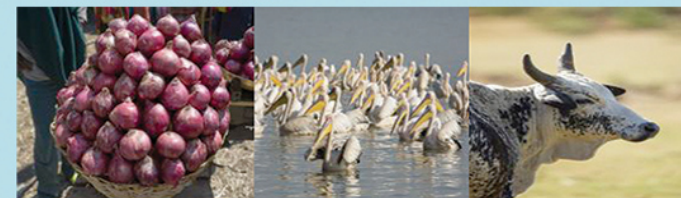
9. Who is responsible in protecting and guarding the resources of the Biosphere Reserve?

A Biosphere Reserves is a unique form of protected area due to the fact that it is **owned and protected by the local community**. Biosphere Reserve sites are not fenced or protected by rangers; they are simply protected by local communities and the interest of the society who make use of them. If the local people are well aware of its benefits, they have no difficulty protecting its wellbeing. It is the **responsibility of the community** to protect and use the resources in a sustainable way, supported by the designated local and regional committees.

10. How can I contribute to maintain our resources for our children and grandchildren?

The size and composition of fauna and flora living in and around the lake has been progressively decreasing. For instance, the ample fish resource which we had 20 years back is facing much scarcity currently. The kind of fish which is customarily called Bezo is currently non-existent. Papyrus and other wetland species are decreasing. Currently most of them are limited to the western parts of the Lake. It is feared that we are going to be left with only memories of how beautiful the lake once was. To truly **preserve its uniqueness for the coming generations** each and every inhabitant of the Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve should engage in sustainable practices both in their work as in their private life. For example:

- Discuss environmental observations and issues with your friends, family and neighbors;
- Take part in trainings that are offered;
- Improve your own homestead and farmland by planting indigenous or multi-purpose trees;
- Increase cut-and-carry feeding of your livestock;
- Care for waste disposal in and around your own home and business.



For more information contact:

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