

## Existence versus Extinction. Hippo-human conflicts in Lake Victoria Area, Kenya.

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### Problem definition

Human-hippo conflicts are increasing due to anthropogenic factors. This study goes beyond human-hippo conflicts as land-use related clashes between people and hippos by taking the human dimension of these conflicts into account. Hence it focusses on actors' perceptions and practices regarding hippos and their habitats. By making the underlying principles, values and images explicit, a realistic notion arises of the constraints and opportunities related to dealing with human-hippo conflicts, hence facilitating conflict resolution.

### Research Question

How can human-hippo conflicts in Lake Victoria Area, Kenya, best be understood and dealt with?

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework comprises of three strands of scholarly literature: (1) Literature on wildlife conservation, human-wildlife conflicts, and wildlife damage management; (2) interactive governance theory, including the norms and principles (meta-governance or 3<sup>rd</sup> order governance), institutions (2<sup>nd</sup> order) that guide and shape day-to-day management (1<sup>st</sup> order); and (3) political ecology, which pays attention to unequal access to natural resources, power differences in wildlife conservation, and the

way in which knowledge and discourses are used to retain these power differences and inequalities. The response of people to conflicts and their attitude (avoidance or conflict resolution oriented) determines the course of human-hippo conflicts and ultimately their outcome.

### Methodology

The "hippo monitoring project" involved year-round monitoring of human-hippo conflicts and damage assessment in villages bordering Winam Gulf, Lake Victoria. Data collection included a questionnaire survey, which covered three time periods. Focus groups and awareness creation meetings with communities and the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) covered the more action-oriented part of the study.

### Expected Results

The perceptions of actors in wildlife governance have come to the fore. The study underlined the need to improve the relationship between residents and KWS. Suggestions are made for co-governance arrangements to sustain the formation of local hippo lobby groups and the creation of 'hippo conservancies' as an answer to the ever increasing conflicts.

### Expected Graduation

October 2017