



PRESS RELEASE

WWF ZAMBIA'S RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSED LUAPULA RIVER TO KAFUE RIVER INTERBASIN TRANSFER (IBT) AS A SOLUTION TO TACKLE ZAMBIA'S DROUGHT SITUATION FOR FOOD AND ENERGY SECURITY

- **WWF Zambia recognises the tough decisions the Government of the Republic of Zambia has to make in response to the current drought, future projected climatic change impacts on Zambia's major rivers and in the interests of our communities and the economy.**
- **Interbasin Water Transfers are not a short term solution to water scarcity, although they can potentially play a role in tackling water challenges in the longer term.**
- **WWF Zambia calls for wider consultation and a full social, economic and environmental impact assessment of the proposed development.**
- **WWF Zambia calls for urgent investment now, in restoring and protecting rivers and wetlands, including the headwaters such as the Kafue River, to enhance water flows and climate resilience.**

Lusaka, 11th September, 2024: WWF Zambia acknowledges the efforts the Government of the Republic of Zambia is taking and planning to undertake in response to the current energy and food crises created by the drought, and longer term water availability challenges in the Kafue due to climate change. Addressing issues such as compromised hydro electricity generation capacity which has led to prolonged power outages, water scarcity, and poor agricultural yields requires a multifaceted approach. It involves not only immediate relief measures but also long-term strategies to improve infrastructure, resource management, and emergency preparedness. Thus, WWF Zambia affirms that healthy, naturally free flowing rivers are central to enhancing water and food security, reversing nature loss, adapting to the worsening impacts of climate change and driving sustainable development.

The Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC, released in 2021, highlighted significant climate change impacts on major African watercourses, including the Zambezi and its largest tributary, the Kafue River. The report's predictions, which are already manifesting, indicate a trend towards hotter and drier conditions, with substantial increases in temperature and evaporation, coupled with decreases in rainfall and runoff by 2050. The Kafue River Basin, which is central to Zambia's water resources, has been significantly affected, exacerbating food insecurity and energy

shortages across the country. Thus, the pressing challenge of balancing the needs of our growing population and economy with the sustainable management of freshwater ecosystems and their essential services.

WWF Zambia acknowledges that Inter-basin transfer (IBT) schemes can serve a purpose in certain situations, such as providing water to hydropower stations in recipient river basins. However, when systematic research and meticulous procedures are not followed, IBTs may cause a disproportionate amount of damage to freshwater ecosystems in relation to the schemes' envisioned benefits, thus leading to significant losses of ecosystem goods and services, and unacceptable social and economic impacts both in the donor and recipient basins. Therefore, as the energy deficit is one of the main reasons for the IBT, the government should consider accelerating investment in other renewable energy sources - such as solar and wind - which can be developed quickly and will help to reduce the dependence on hydropower. In addition, while the government has to act to tackle the drought, it has also signed up to a number of global conventions whose targets the proposed IBT might make challenging to achieve i.e Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Paris Agreement on Climate Change, SDGs, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

WWF Zambia Country Director, Nalucha Nganga Ziba, said, While IBTs may seem to be a potentially effective medium and long term solution to Zambia's water and energy crisis, the knock-on impacts and complex trade-offs that accompany them cannot be ignored. Large scale IBT plans such as the proposed Luapula-Kafue water transfer may be risky in economic terms and come with significant social and environmental costs, like the infringement of local community rights, and the high cost of the construction of hydraulic water infrastructure, such as canals. This could add significant amounts to Zambia's current debt burden. Another potential risk is increased flooding in wet years, hence the need for an in-depth and all-encompassing environmental, social, and economic impact assessment with clear remedies for any potential negative impacts."

The **Zambian Water Resources Management Act No. 21 of 2011**, emphasises the importance of an integrated approach to water resource management. This law mandates the involvement of various stakeholders, ensuring that decisions such as the transfer of water from one river basin to another are made with a comprehensive understanding of the ecological, social, and economic impacts. It is a progressive framework that seeks to balance the needs of the environment with those of the communities, promoting sustainable development and equitable access to water resources. Therefore, a transparent and inclusive process with all relevant stakeholders, such as local communities, environmental groups, academia, regional partners, and riparian states (in this case, the Democratic Republic of Congo), is required to ensure that the project is implemented in a manner that minimises environmental and economic impacts, and maximises benefits for all involved stakeholders.

Our Call for Action:

- WWF Zambia calls for wider consultation by the government on the proposed plans given that this is expected to be capital intensive, permanent undertaking drawing water from one major basin inhabited by a significant number of the Zambian population to another equally important significantly populated river basin.
- WWF Zambia appeals to the government for a more coordinated approach to this proposed development by first finalising and implementing the Catchment Management Plan for the Kafue that was drafted, and additionally developing one for the Luapula River basin as prescribed by the Water Resources Management Act No. 21 of 2011 before the implementation of the IBT.
- WWF Zambia advocates for the legal protection of major headwater resources such as the headwater of the Zambezi, Kafue, and Chambeshi-Luapula Rivers as prescribed in Section 29 of the Water Resources Management Act No. 21 of 2011, in order to ensure the water resources in the River basin adequately meet the demands in the basin both for now and for the future.
- In the short term, WWF Zambia is also calling upon the Government of the Republic of Zambia to allocate more funds to the restoration of degraded water bodies such as wetlands, rivers, and streams, as well as to actively stop or prevent the encroachment of water recharge areas and water bodies that compromise water security at community, district, and national level as first steps.

We are therefore committed to working with the Government of the Republic Zambia to provide technical support through an integrated planning process towards exploring other alternatives, such as creation of Water Resources Protected Areas and their effective management, reducing water demands, recycling waste water, assessing, and promoting sustainable land use management, or industrial development alternatives as well as development of renewable energy sources.

For further information, please contact:

Moses Nyirenda

WWF Chief Conservation Officer

Tel: +260966400567

Email: mnyirenda@wwfzam.org

About the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

The Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) is the world's leading independent conservation organisation with a global network in over 100 countries. Our mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature. We have been working in Zambia since 1962, organising our efforts across Freshwater, Wildlife, Forests and People.