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“Development on the margin”

## Contested Riparian Land at Lake Naivasha – A Historical Perspective

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### Abstract

The riparian zone of water bodies – ecologically the zone between the high and low water mark and the terrestrial land which is strongly influenced by water availability – is considered to be an area of unique biodiversity which delivers manifold ecosystem services. The management and protection of this zone in Kenya falls within the jurisdiction of various government bodies. At Lake Naivasha the riparian zone is highly contested as it serves as a resource for various stakeholders, such as land owners, horticultural industries, small scale farmers, pastoralists, national and international conservationists, tourist sector and the general public. With the recent launch of the “Imarisha Naivasha Programme”, which is headed by the Prime Minister's Office and supported by the International Sustainability Unit of the Prince's Charities, the controversial questions of demarcation, access and use of the riparian zone are back on the agenda.

A distinctive feature in the management of the riparian zone at Lake Naivasha is an agreement that was drawn during colonial times between the Kenyan Colonial Government and the Lake Naivasha Riparian Land Owner Association (LNROA). This agreement stipulated in 1932 how land below the 1906 water level should be managed and used. Based on the analysis of documents and maps from the Kenyan National Archive in Nairobi, this paper seeks to show how riparian land was managed and used during the colonial era, how the agreement between white settlers and the colonial government was negotiated. The historical perspective tries to enhance the understanding of current conflicts around the riparian zone.

**Keywords:** Historical Perspective, lake Naivasha, Riparian Land