

## A Freshwater Treasure

Less than 100 kilometres from Addis Ababa in Ethiopia lies Lake Koka - an expanse of freshwater that supports the lives of over 15,000 people. For centuries it has provided Ethiopian families with a source of clean drinking water, freshwater fish, and water for irrigation. Now this precious commodity is under irreversible pressure from economic development.

## A New Pace of Development

Once the famine stricken country of East Africa, Ethiopia has shrugged off this image with unprecedented economic development and diversification. Economic policies have promoted enormous hydroelectric dam projects and incentives for flower farms, tanneries, and the traditional coffee industry. But this economic expansion is placing new demands on the country's ecology.



Satellite image of Lake Koka.  
(Photo: Google Maps)

## Lives under threat

These days the water lapping at the lake's shores is green with thick blooms of algae from agricultural runoff and industrial effluent. Ethiopia's environmental legislation is designed to protect the environment from harmful chemical discharges and negligent companies but lacks adequate enforcement. The channels local people can use to raise their concerns with local government are weak and the opportunity for redress small.



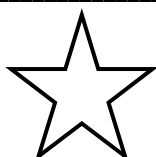
The algae clogged waters of Lake Koka  
(Photo: Al Jazeera)

Lives have already been lost to illnesses linked to the poor water of Lake Koka – this represents a real and tangible loss to the country. But the continued focus of the Ethiopian government on providing support for economic development, regardless of its environmental costs, is likely to come at a price for future generations of Ethiopians.

## Is there a future for Lake Koka?

If nothing is done soon to clean the water of Lake Koka, Ethiopia will lose one of its most important sources of drinking water - water that is increasingly needed to service its growing urban population. Ethiopia risks a troubled future if it does not respect the people and resources that are making its development

possible and sustainable. The failure to listen to the concerns and complaints of Ethiopians affected by Lake Koka's polluted waters is a sign of flaws in the governance of Ethiopia at the national and local levels. The international community must also support Ethiopian civil society and the government in its efforts at national environmental protection.



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