

PRIORITIZING HEALTH NEEDS: INSTITUTIONALIZING INTEGRATION THROUGH POPULATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENT ADVOCACY IN EAST AFRICA

Communities in and around the Lake Victoria Basin experience a number of interconnected challenges. These challenges include dependence on diminishing natural resources, pervasive poverty, food insecurity, poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes, and inaccessible health services. At the same time, the ecosystem itself faces substantial degradation. To address these intertwined challenges and foster healthy and engaged communities, Pathfinder International has been advancing an integrated population, health, and environment (PHE) initiative called Health of People and Environment-Lake Victoria Basin (HoPE-LVB)¹ since 2011, in partnership with several environmental and health sector partners in Uganda, Kenya, and the US. Funded primarily by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, with technical support from the USAID-funded Evidence to Action (E2A) and Informing Decision-makers to Act (IDEA) projects, the HoPE-LVB project is implemented in a combination of island, lakeshore, and inland sites in Uganda and Kenya.



Beginning with the End in Mind & Advocacy Focused on Scale

It is Pathfinder's mission to ensure sustainable capacity to implement integrated PHE approaches, not only in project communities, but also nationally and regionally. To accomplish this, the HoPE-LVB project has been implemented uniquely through the use of ExpandNet/World Health Organization (WHO) systematic scaling-up approach of *Beginning with the End in Mind*.^{2,3} This has entailed the use of a strong advocacy component to ensure institutionalization and expansion of successfully tested approaches. Through this approach, the HoPE-LVB team has fostered innovative policies and guideline changes to accommodate integrated multi-sectoral policies and programming. The HoPE-LVB experience is different from other PHE efforts, which have not necessarily had an explicit focus on influencing regional policy.

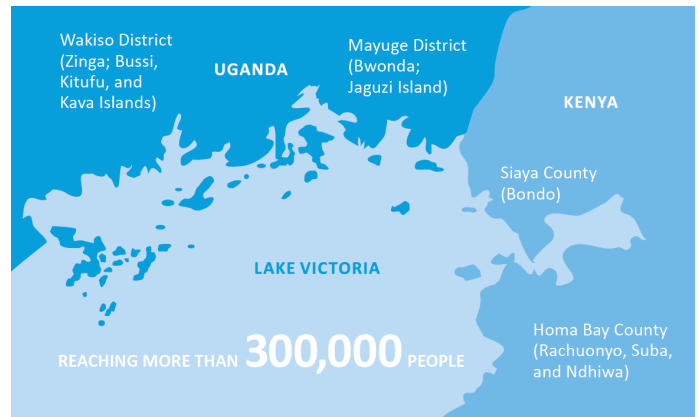
In 2011, the HoPE-LVB team launched the project with a clear vision: leverage project results to facilitate policy change and institutionalization. Two decades of integrated PHE projects concluded that leveraging these results was critical to sustaining results, yet this had not been achieved in Africa. The vision entailed utilizing the PHE platform to firmly embed family planning and related sexual and reproductive health activities into development efforts and policies, across sectors, and at multiple levels and scales. Ideally, the project would take the vision even further by utilizing this integrated approach to catalyze policymakers to make key structural and programmatic changes that would pave the way for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The HoPE-LVB team is currently working closely with Partner States of the East African Community (EAC), through the Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC),⁴ to ensure that the project's advocacy efforts are sustained by stakeholders and yield lasting changes. This brief discusses the project's experience with advocacy and offers lessons for other implementers on how family planning and sexual and reproductive health services can be strengthened and scaled up through the incorporation of PHE programming in regional, national, and sub-national policies. It describes how, in partnership with the EAC/LVBC and other institutions in the region, the HoPE-LVB project realized all aspects of the vision that it set out to achieve.

LVBC: A Non-Health Sector Institution Pioneers PHE Scale-Up

LVBC had the characteristics to make it a strong institutional partner and potential pioneer in PHE scale-up. It was established in 2005 as a specialized institution of the EAC, via Article 33 of the Protocol for Sustainable Development of Lake Victoria Basin, 2003. Its vision is to create: "a prosperous population living in a healthy and sustainably managed environment, providing equitable opportunities and benefits."

Figure 1. HoPE-LVB Project Sites



LVBC provides overall leadership in the promotion and coordination of activities of different actors for sustainable development and poverty eradication in the Lake Victoria Basin.

For the HoPE-LVB partners, LVBC was an ideal inter-governmental partner with a vision for sustainable development in the Lake Victoria Basin. The LVBC offered strong platforms of implementation learning, knowledge management, and convening power of cross-sectoral stakeholders to meet national and global sustainable development goals. Partnership with LVBC offered the project the ability to showcase the viability of scaling up a more comprehensive, yet targeted, development package that included family planning and broader sexual and reproductive health efforts through linking with the environment sector and other development partners in the future. The EAC has jurisdiction over six countries: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, and most recently, South Sudan. Thus, LVBC's experiences can inform the policies and practices of all of these countries.

In addition, LVBC is a transboundary entity defined by its mandate to manage the sustainable development of an entire "ecoregion" - the Lake Victoria Basin. The boundaries of any such ecoregion do not intersect neatly with administrative and political boundaries. This is one of the inherent challenges of undertaking cross-sectoral, integrated sustainable development work, including PHE. Therefore, if this project could successfully support LVBC in its mandate and resolve some of those challenges, then similar authorities and stakeholders across the entire region would have a learning platform for institutionalizing cross-sectoral initiatives that included reproductive and maternal and child health for more effective implementation of integrated sustainable development.

The timing of the partnership worked well for LVBC. When the project approached LVBC with the idea of collaboration, the institution indicated that it had been grappling with how to address health issues and population growth as part of its sustainable development mandate, but had not been approached by any group that had expertise in meeting family planning and broader maternal and child health needs. LVBC had launched a HIV/AIDS project funded by the Swedish

Table I. PHE Institutionalization Reflected in EAC Policies, Plans and Pledges*

Regional

- East African Community (EAC) Integrated Population, Health, and Environment (PHE) Strategic Plan (2016-2021)
- PHE Operational Plan (2015-2020) for the Lake Victoria Basin
- PHE Program Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework & Plan for the PHE Program in the Lake Victoria Basin (2015-2020)
- EAC/Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC) PHE Minimum Package of Services (2015)

National

Kenya

- Cabinet Memo and Paper (2017-2018). Being drafted by the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD)/Ministry of Devolution and Planning, Kenya as part of the National PHE Policy development process to start in FY 2017/18.
- National PHE Policy (2017-18) process initiated spearheaded by NCPD. PHE concept adopted in Kenya government's Mid Term Plan III (2018-2022) under the environment, water, and sanitation sector.
- Kenya Integrated PHE Minimum Package of Services (2016-2017). Adapted by Kenya Government from the regional LVBC Integrated PHE Minimum Package of Services of 2015. Approved for implementation by the Permanent Secretary, State Department for Planning and Statistics/Ministry of Devolution & Planning, Kenya, in June 2017
- Homa Bay County Integrated Development Plan (2013-2017)
- Siaya County Integrated Development Plan (2013-2017)
- Homa Bay County Environment Action Plan (2016-2017)
- Siaya County Environment Action Plan (2016-2017)
- NCPD PHE Annual Work Plan (2017-2018) (adopted) to be funded by LVBC

Uganda

- National Family Planning Costed Implementation Plan (adopted, released November 2014)
- National Climate Change Policy (2012)
- Cabinet Memo (2016-2017) (drafted, pending strategy approval)
- Uganda National PHE Strategy (2016-2020) (final, pending approval)

Tanzania

- National PHE Strategic Plan (under development)

Burundi

- FP2020 Commitment (version signed in country June 2014)

*These are all the policy documents that focus on PHE or include mention of PHE that HoPE-LVB directly contributed to or influenced.

government. However, LVBC was eager to learn more about how to undertake a comprehensive integrated approach, such as PHE, which could address broader maternal, child, and reproductive health issues, including the unmet need for contraception.

During this time, USAID was also supporting the national and regional PHE policy, advocacy, and communications work of the IDEA project, implemented by Population Reference Bureau (PRB) from 2010-2015. In key PHE countries, IDEA trained PHE champions, implementers, and members of the media to communicate effectively with decision-makers about complex PHE links and solutions, and supported these groups to expand the base of support for population and reproductive health policies outside of the health sector. By doing so, IDEA was instrumental in bridging the gaps between projects, country PHE networks, and policymakers, including LVBC.

After the HoPE-LVB activities were launched, USAID's East Africa Regional Office (EARO) also began to provide complementary funding directly to LVBC to support some of LVBC's regional PHE activities. The mutual engagement, with USAID EARO support and additional support from a few other bilateral donors, proved to be transformative in how the EAC now considers the roles of family planning, reproductive health, and maternal and child health as key elements of its approach to sustainable development. Table 1 illustrates how EAC governments have developed or are in the process of developing regional and national PHE strategies. These national strategies, guided by the regional PHE strategy, may prove to be a launching pad for how these governments seek to implement integrated sustainable development in the future.

HoPE-LVB, LVBC Collaborate to Expand PHE Integration

Today, HoPE-LVB has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with LVBC that serves as a platform for collaboration on PHE. However, within and well beyond this MoU, LVBC now plays a leading role in a wide range of PHE activities across the region. HoPE-LVB has provided key support to many of these PHE activities that are leading to policy development.

Official visits between Pathfinder International and LVBC began in 2012. Staff from Pathfinder International first engaged Dr. Ali-Said Matano, LVBC's then Programs Officer, now Executive Secretary, while the LVBC team was writing the project proposal. Pathfinder staff used PHE framing to cultivate appreciation for the role of family planning and reproductive health in a suite of integrated interventions aimed at sustainable development. Following these early dialogues, HoPE-LVB provided regular feedback to LVBC on project progress and other PHE work in the region, to provide evidence of how PHE issues could be addressed in the Basin.

In 2013, HoPE-LVB and technical partners from the IDEA project,



“Things will not go back to the way they were before the project. No, it can’t happen. The HoPE project gave us knowledge. It imparted knowledge into us. Now our role is to share this knowledge with all the generations—us to some people, those people to more people, and beyond.”

—Kobusingye Prudence, mother of three, sustainable farmer, and proud user of family planning, Bussi Island, Uganda

organized site visits to HoPE-LVB project areas to enable PHE leaders in the region, including government representatives from the EAC, LVBC, and USAID country missions from across Africa, to see PHE in action. IDEA worked closely with HoPE-LVB project staff to meet with district and national officials, community groups, and the media to build stakeholder support at multiple levels. IDEA also helped HoPE-LVB to strengthen communications capacity of staff, and provided data-collection assistance, enabling HoPE-LVB staff to communicate valuable results seen to date to policymakers and donors and build solid community support for the project. Inspired by the evidence and what they experienced during this visit, LVBC used HoPE-LVB as a learning platform for PHE work in Mt. Elgon,

in conjunction with LVBC's ongoing conservation program, on the border between Kenya and Uganda.

From 2013 to 2014, HoPE-LVB provided substantial technical assistance to LVBC to expand its efforts on PHE through: presentations on PHE, trainings for initiatives that LVBC was launching in other EAC countries, and collaboration on site visits to HoPE-LVB project sites where stakeholders learned about PHE in action. An important element in these activities was the inclusion of representatives from government and civil society, and from across sectors, including individuals working on health and others working on conservation issues.

An Individual PHE Champion at Scale

The relationship with LVBC not only highlights the importance of institutional partners, but also individuals who act as champions in the PHE scale-up process. Dr. Doreen Othero, Regional Program Coordinator for the PHE Program of LVBC, has been a leading champion. She played a key role in expanding and institutionalizing PHE across the region. To do so, Dr. Othero worked closely with EAC Partner States and HoPE-LVB staff to gather data for presentations introducing PHE in EAC countries, facilitating HoPE LVB, Tuungane,⁵ and civil society organization (CSO) staff participation in PHE regional technical working group meetings. The collaboration also helped EAC countries to report on the progress of PHE efforts, collect information on essential elements of PHE programming, assemble a PHE implementation manual, and provide the evidence base for expanding the approach and developing institutional mechanisms, such as PHE policies (Table 1) that are now supporting PHE across the region.

Policy Change from Above and Below

Linking PHE through Networks

PHE networks are institutional structures linking organizations interested in working on PHE. While the networks existed in several countries, at the time HoPE-LVB began, they were not yet very active and had not achieved notable institutional gains for PHE. Part of the vision for HoPE-LVB was to reinvigorate these efforts. PRB played a key role in helping to create the national networks and an East Africa PHE regional structure following the International Conference on Population, Health and the Environment, held in November 2007, in Addis Ababa. Those efforts were further strengthened by a global PHE conference, held in 2013, in Addis Ababa. When the HoPE-LVB project was proposed, the three donors ensured that PRB would be involved in the project due to PRB's role in supporting these regional networks.

Pathfinder worked closely with PRB and other partners to provide inputs to national PHE networks in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda,

and Burundi at key points of institutional development. LVBC now supports network development in all Lake Victoria Basin countries. The experiences of Pathfinder-led PHE projects in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania will provide important learning in this process. These networks will then be responsible for coordinating PHE implementers in-country, lobbying and advocating for PHE among different stakeholders in the countries, and building the PHE capacity of state and non-state actors.

Policy on the Ground

The project also relied on bottom-up advocacy wins to work in tandem with the higher-level gains. HoPE-LVB's community-level efforts were concentrated in just a few counties and districts of Kenya and Uganda respectively. This allowed the project to use these communities as locally accessible demonstration sites for PHE in action for stakeholders—such as local officials and governors interested in PHE. The focused grassroots efforts also allowed project partners to collaborate directly with local government representatives, CSOs, and other PHE stakeholders to explore what policies and changes were needed at higher levels to make integration possible at these decentralized levels of governance and management. With this knowledge, the project and its champions worked effectively at higher levels to advocate for the types of policies listed in Table 1.^{6,7}

In Kenya, PHE champions, communities, and project staff worked with county officials to form PHE steering committees, complete with terms of reference. These committees, now active in Homa Bay and Siaya counties, are tasked with promoting PHE to all stakeholders, including county government. Led by the county representative of the National Council on Population and Development (NCPD), under the Ministry of Devolution and Planning, and kept abreast of HoPE-LVB project data and results to use as evidence for advocacy efforts, the committee meets quarterly to review progress, share ideas, and set new targets. Building on the success of HoPE-LVB, the Homa Bay County Steering Committee approached the Governor to propose the creation of an office to oversee PHE activities in the county.

This support for PHE in Homa Bay County posed new questions, highlighting the need for both bottom-up and top-down advocacy. As the approach was not yet nationally recognized, there was no national guidance on where primary responsibility for PHE should sit within the county. A stand-alone department was appointed, but risked duplication of efforts. Thus, the Governor created a new position in his office, the County PHE Liaison Officer/CSO and Diaspora Coordinator, mandated to oversee CSO efforts within the county, with a special focus on PHE. The new office is funded under the Office of the Governor, and funding for PHE is now included in the Homa Bay County's Integrated Development Plan. Neighboring Siaya County, into which HoPE-LVB expanded in its fourth year, also created a PHE steering committee, which includes PHE activities within various county departments.

In Uganda, at the district level, staff worked with district champions to form coordination bodies. The PHE association in Mayuge, for example, worked to ensure that district workplans included PHE activities and

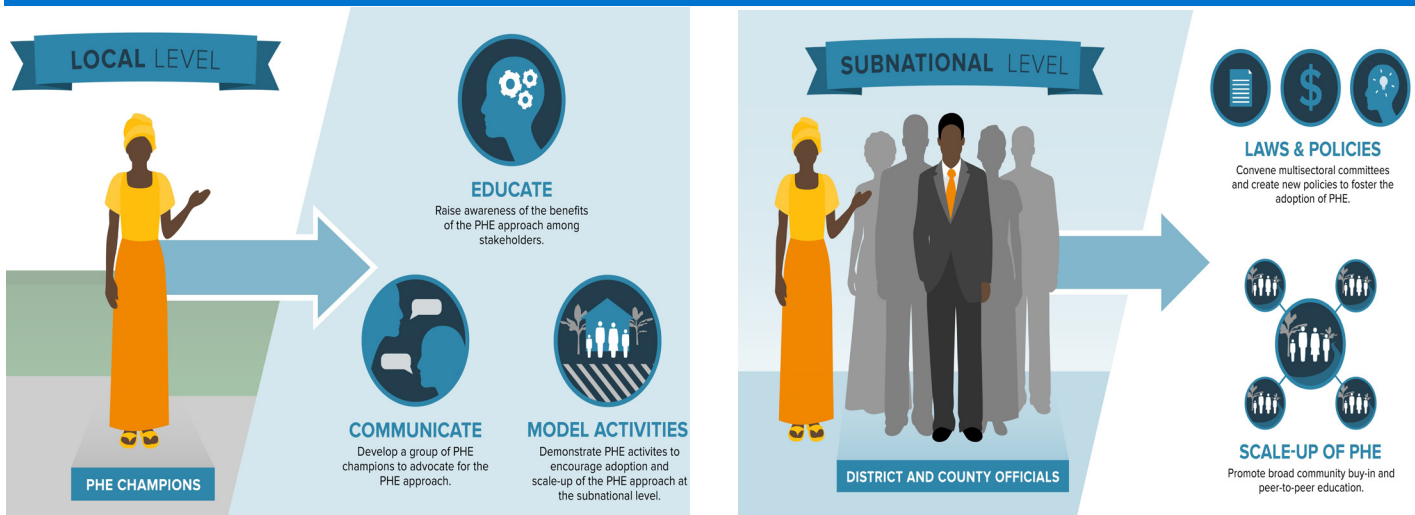
Defining a PHE Champion

PHE champions are an important feature of the HoPE-LVB project design. HoPE-LVB PHE champions are defined by the fact that they represent and can speak articulately about the linkages across family planning, maternal and child health, natural resources management, and the added value of integration for sustainable development. Since these linkages can be complex, HoPE-LVB invested significant time and energy at project inception into distilling these linkages into simple talking points. The process was made more efficient and successful through significant technical support from partners who had many years of PHE experience, such as the Population Reference Bureau, and the USAID-supported BALANCED Project partners (PATH Foundation Philippines Inc., Conservation International, and University of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Center).

The project then selected partners and individuals whose voices could help amplify the PHE messages—including family planning and reproductive health messages as a key part of PHE—beyond traditional target groups. To select institutional champions, the project identified entities that might work in the environment sector, for example, such as fisheries, forests or conservation, yet who had not worked on health issues before. To select individual champions, the project identified persons with multiple roles. For example, an individual might be a member of a group that did not normally engage on reproductive health issues (such as a mostly male fishing group), or a community leader, and he or she might have volunteered to serve as a model household under the project. The various roles played by these individuals were part of what made them ideal champions for integrated messaging.

HoPE-LVB relied on its PHE champions at all points in the policy development process to make change happen. Community-based PHE champions guided visitors through their model households. Environmental organization staff or government official “champions” invited visitors to their offices, and participated in site visits and trainings of newcomers to PHE. All of these champions served as PHE voices at community events and visited government officials at different scales to emphasize the importance of making changes.

(Graphics by Population Reference Bureau)





“In my conversations, there is nothing I talk about besides PHE and what I have learned. I have no time to waste. Right now, what I am seeing and what our future promises—it is so much better. It is like before I was asleep. Now we are awakened. I cannot go back to sleep.”

—Bavunaineki Wilber, sustainable fisher, farmer, and father of seven, who is now a proud user of family planning, Jaguzi Island, Uganda

were reflected in their budgets by allocating 7 million shillings for implementation of PHE activities in the district. The PHE association members who are part of the district technical and political teams took it upon themselves to monitor the implementation of PHE activities in the district.

PHE Vision for the EAC

As collaboration between HoPE-LVB and LVBC expanded, and other PHE implementing partners joined, PHE sub-national stakeholders recognized that integrated efforts for sustainable development, such as PHE, could only be successful if the appropriate institutional platforms were in place to support cross-sectoral implementation. These institutional platforms include national and regional policies and budgets. HoPE-LVB, therefore, used a multi-pronged approach to advocate for such policies and budget lines. It relied on LVBC as a sustainable, regional, African-led and managed PHE platform, while also using a wide range of networks, site visits, and champions, as well as participation in special events, to advocate for the development of PHE policies at the highest levels. Ultimately the EAC developed its own PHE strategy for the region. The EAC LVBC 2016-2021 Regional Strategic Plan explicitly includes PHE as a development strategy to be used and endorsed by the EAC. This was a major policy win achieved through bottom-up and top-down advocacy throughout the life of the HoPE-LVB project. It now serves as an example for promoting other policies and using PHE as a platform for ensuring reproductive health and family planning services are available in even the most remote and underserved communities.

Conclusions & Next Steps

The partnership between HoPE-LVB and LVBC demonstrates the power of scale-up when local partners work with cross-boundary institutions. Through the partnership with LVBC, HoPE-LVB impacted not only the local sites where the project was operating, but also the larger planning vision throughout the Basin. Combined with local advocacy, this “policy sandwich” approach (bottom-up and top-down policy change) resulted in true change on the ground. The approach catalyzed policymakers to make key structural changes that have started to pave the way for achieving the SDGs through application of integrated PHE approaches.

To continue this momentum, the PHE community must identify other national and cross-boundary, influential policy and governance institutions, to advocate for the inclusion of family planning and reproductive health through PHE as part of gender mainstreaming strategies, such as with the Lake Tanganyika Authority and the Nile Basin Initiative with ties also to the Kagera River Basin. Through partnerships with such institutions, local organizations can affect larger-scale change, and through policy advocacy, create long-term, sustainable change in the way we approach development.

Support to HoPE-LVB

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Evidence to Action Project

The Evidence to Action Project is USAID's global flagship for strengthening family planning and reproductive health service delivery. The E2A project aims to address the reproductive healthcare needs of girls, women, and underserved communities around the world by increasing support, building evidence, and facilitating the scale-up of best practices that improve family planning services. Awarded in September 2011, this project will continue for eight years, until September 2019. The project is led by Pathfinder International, in partnership with ExpandNet, IntraHealth International, Management Sciences for Health, and PATH.

Pathfinder International

Pathfinder International is driven by the conviction that all people, regardless of where they live, have the right to decide whether and when to have children, to exist free from fear and stigma, and to lead the lives they choose. Since 1957, we have partnered with local governments, communities, and health systems in developing countries to remove barriers to critical sexual and reproductive health services. Together, we expand access to contraception, promote healthy pregnancies, save women's lives, and stop the spread of new HIV infections, wherever the need is most urgent. Our work ensures millions of women, men, and young people are able to choose their own paths forward.

Endnotes

- ¹ Pathfinder International, "Sustaining Health, Rights, and the Environment in the Lake Victoria Basin," accessed March 2017, www.pathfinder.org/publications-tools/sustaining-health-rights-environment-lake-victoria-basin.html.
- ² Expandnet and World Health Organization, *Beginning with the End in Mind. Planning Pilot Projects and Other Programmatic Research for Successful Scaling Up* (World Health Organization, 2011).
- ³ Ghiron, L., et al., "Beginning with Sustainable Scale-Up in Mind: Initial Results from a Population, Health and Environment Project in East Africa," *Reproductive Health Matters* 22, No. 43 (2014): 84-92.
- ⁴ Lake Victoria Basin Commission is a specialized institution of the East African Community that is responsible for coordinating the sustainable development agenda of the Lake Victoria Basin. The establishment of the Commission is provided for under Article 114 of the Treaty for Establishment of the East African Community (1999) and specifically under Article 33 of the Protocol for Sustainable Development of the Lake Victoria Basin, 2003.
- ⁵ For more information on the Tuungane project, see <http://www.pathfinder.org/projects/tuungane/>.
- ⁶ Pathfinder International/E2A Project, "Bottom-Up Advocacy for Sustainability: Community-Led Changes in Local By-Laws on Bussi and Jaguzi Islands, Uganda," accessed March 2017, www.e2aproject.org/publication/bottom-up-advocacy-for-sustainability-community-led-changes-in-local-by-laws-on-bussi-and-jaguzi-islands-uganda/.
- ⁷ Pathfinder International/E2A Project, "Institutionalization of Integrated Programming into Government Systems: A View from Homa Bay County," accessed March 2017, www.e2aproject.org/publication/institutionalization-of-integrated-programming-into-government-systems-a-view-from-homa-bay-county/.

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