

WATER TRANSPORT SAFETY TO BE ENHANCED

BY SAMUEL BALAGADDE

With about 5,000 people losing their lives on Lake Victoria annually, the East African states that share Lake Victoria have intervened to mitigate the situation.

Most of the casualties are fishermen, mainly killed by water waves during strong winds. Many would-be survivors cannot be rescued due to lack of effective communication.

Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania have formed a Lake Victoria maritime communication and transport project to reduce accidents and piracy on the lake. This is done through installation on aids to navigation devices.

Bernard Khabakha, a senior inspector of vessels in the of transport ministry, said the project is also designed to improve navigation on lakes Victoria, Albert and Kyoga.

He said lack of safety infrastructure on inland waterways has discouraged investment and rendered this form of transport dangerous.

The project, designed by Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC) and the three partner states is also to promote regional integration by easing movement and monitoring of passengers and cargo among the three partner states.

People will be trained in boat building and handling, to do away with substandard boats and water vessel operators will be able to communicate for rescue in cases of any breakdown, accidents and piracy.

Monica Ntege Azuba, the transport minister, said water transport will reduce the stress on roads and open up remote islands to development. The multiplier effect is positive towards socio-economic transformation, she said.

Ferries have an average loading capacity of 100 tonnes, meaning that each can carry an equivalent of about 12 fully loaded trucks and 100 passengers.

Safety

Maritime experts say water transport on



An overloaded boat with none of the passengers wearing a life jacket at Ggaba landing site on Lake Victoria. In addition to installing navigation communication devices, the standard of water vessels will be checked to ensure safety and rescue in case of accidents.

good vessels is less risky, compared to road transport.

This entails that boats, ships or ferries must be inspected and proved to conform to seaworthiness requirements.

Bernard Khabakha, a senior inspector of vessels in the transport ministry, says a number of water vessels operate illegally.

"Just like vehicles on the road, ferries on the water are also abused by overloading, which compromises the safety of passengers," Khabakha said.

Most Ugandan ferries take short distances, like that of Kayunga to Kamuli that spends about five minutes to cross the Nile. The one from Panyamur in Nebbi to Wanseko in

Hoima takes about three hours to cross Lake Albert.

The early ferries that were designed with less passenger safety features are being replaced with modern ones that are faster, have comfortable passenger seats, a shelter and standby rescue boats.

John Opiro, the managing director of Kalangala Infrastructure Services, said modern vessels replaced the old ones, which were slow and had less safety features.

Currently, Uganda National Roads Authority is operating and managing nine ferries on different navigable waters, while the transport ministry is operating the Kalangala ship whose services are paid for.

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