



Passengers disembark the Masindi Port Ferry, stepping onto the banks of the Nile as traders, travellers, and goods move steadily between Akokoro and surrounding markets. PHOTO/GEOFFREY OYET OKWERA

New ferry finally connects Akokoro Town to markets

A new ferry crossing at Masindi Port has transformed access to Akokoro Town Council, cutting travel time and reducing transport costs for traders who previously relied on long, expensive detours... through Lira.

BY GEOFFREY O OKWERA

Before dawn breaks over the River Nile at Masindi Port, movement has already begun. Boda bodas line up in anticipation, traders offload sacks of produce, and passengers wait patiently for the ferry that will carry them across the water. Engines rumble, voices overlap, and then, slowly, the vessel edges away from the bank, cutting through the misty river as Akokoro begins to open up on the other side.

For Akokoro Town Council in Apac District, this daily crossing is more than routine transport. It is a lifeline that has quietly rewritten the area's economic story.

Not long ago, reaching Akokoro from Kampala or other major trading centres was an

exhausting ordeal.

Travellers would head north through Lira, then detour through Aduku before finally connecting to the rural township. For traders transporting goods, the journey was long, expensive, and unpredictable, often discouraging investment and slowing local development.

Today, that narrative has changed dramatically with the operational ferry at Masindi Port.

Travellers from Kampala now branch off at Rwekunya in Kiryandongo District, proceed along the short but busy road to Masindi Port, locally known as Milo Nya or "four miles", and cross the Nile to Waitumba before completing the final leg into Akokoro.

What once felt remote is now

significantly more accessible.

A town awakened

James Ogwal, a resident of Akokoro, says the difference is visible in everyday life.

"Before the ferry, bringing goods here was very expensive. People avoided this place because transport was difficult," he says. "Some even chose to settle in Lira instead of coming back home."

For years, Akokoro's isolation shaped its economic pace. Traders faced high fuel costs, delayed deliveries, and limited market access. But the introduction of the Masindi Port-Waitumba ferry crossing changed the equation.

Travel time dropped. Transport costs reduced and gradually, commercial activity began to return.

"The moment the ferry started operating, things changed," Ogwal adds.

"Goods started coming in more regularly, and people came back to invest."

The Rwekunya-Masindi Port corridor

The current route begins at Rwekunya, where travellers

leave the Kampala-Gulu highway and turn onto a feeder

AKOKORO-MASINDI PORT FERRY ROUTE AT A GLANCE

- Crossing point: Masindi Port (Nile River) to Waitumba.
- Ferry capacity: About 8 vehicles plus motorcycles and passengers.
- Crossing time: Approximately 20 minutes.
- Key towns connected: Rwekunya - Masindi Port - Waitumba - Akokoro
- Main highway link: Kampala-Gulu highway via Rwekunya turn-off.
- Approximate travel time from Kampala: About 4-5 hours (depending on traffic and road conditions)

road leading to Masindi Port. From Kampala, the journey to Rwekunya takes roughly four hours, depending on traffic and road conditions.

From there, the stretch to Masindi Port is short but critical. The road cuts through rural landscapes and small trading points before reaching the riverbank.

Along this corridor, boda bodas dominate transport. Their flexibility makes them ideal for both passengers and light cargo, especially where road conditions vary. For many residents, they are not just a convenience but the backbone of daily movement.

At Masindi Port, the ferry, capable of carrying about eight vehicles alongside motorcycles and passengers, crosses the Nile in roughly 20 minutes. On the opposite bank lies Waitumba, the entry point into Akokoro's wider network of communities.

From Waitumba, the road continues inland to Akokoro, completing a route that has become a vital artery for trade and mobility.

Trade returning to life

The impact of improved access is most visible in commerce. Traders now move goods more frequently between Kampala, Lira, and Akokoro, reducing stock shortages and improving market stability.

Simon Odoch, a trader in Akokoro, says the change has reshaped settlement patterns and business confidence.

"People are now more interested in coming here. Even

those who left are thinking of returning because access is no longer a problem," he says.

Small businesses that had stagnated are gradually recovering.

Shops are reopening, transport services are increasing, and new investments are beginning to emerge in the town council.

Life along the Nile

At Waitumba, Akokoro's connection to the Nile defines daily life. Fishing dominates the local economy, with residents heading to the water from early morning until sunset.

Generations of families depend on the river.

Some focus on catching fish, while others handle drying, smoking, and selling to traders who transport the produce to Lira and surrounding districts. This forms a small but active value chain that supports households across the area.

Young people have also diversified into boat transport, operating wooden and motorised vessels that ferry passengers and goods across the river.

For many, it is both livelihood and service, keeping the river corridor active and connected.

Families reunited

For residents such as Sarah Amal, a trader from Waitumba, the ferry has done more than improve trade; it has reconnected families.

"Before, crossing the river was difficult and uncertain. Now movement is easier and safer," she says.

"We can visit relatives more often, and trade is no longer interrupted."

Beyond economics, the improved crossing strengthened social ties between communities that were once separated by distance and poor infrastructure.

Quiet transformation

While Akokoro still carries deep historical significance as the home and burial place of former President Apollo Milton Obote, its present identity is increasingly shaped by movement, trade, and connectivity.

Some travellers now deliberately take the route not only for business but also for curiosity, exploring the growing corridor between Rwekunya and the Nile crossing. Local leaders believe this presents an opportunity for modest tourism development, especially if accommodation and services improve.

Masindi Port is no longer just a river crossing point. It has become a connector of economies, families, and opportunity.

As ferry traffic increases and trade deepens along the corridor, Akokoro Town Council is steadily shifting from an isolated rural settlement into a growing node of commerce.

In many ways, the Nile no longer separates Akokoro from progress; it now carries it.

editorial@ug.nationmedia.com