

Kalangala gets speed boat to boost delivery of justice



The 10-seater vessel is expected to significantly enhance the movement of judicial officers across Kalangala District.
PHOTO/COURTESY/JUDICIARY

BY ANTHONY WESAKA

KALANGALA. Excitement swept through Kalangala District on Saturday as the Judiciary commissioned its first-ever speed boat to improve access to justice across the island district.

The 10-seater vessel is expected to significantly enhance the movement of judicial officers across Kalangala's 84 islands on Lake Victoria, where difficult water transport has long hindered court operations and delayed legal proceedings.

Speaking at the launch, Kalangala Chief Magistrate Gloria Hallelujah, said the district's geography had limited judicial outreach to only a few islands.

"The geographical location of this place had restricted our movements to only three islands that I have so far visited. We have been using open boats, which were risky as they could easily capsize, but God has been protecting

us," she said. "Now I am not going to fear water from today since we have a boat. I am now going to deliver justice to all corners of the district," she added.

Chief Justice Flavien Zeija, who presided

WHY IT IS NEEDED

Comprising 84 islands scattered across Lake Victoria, residents face high transport costs and dangerous water crossings just to reach courts on the main island.

Witnesses and litigants often spend up to Shs800,000 on private boats to attend hearings, a financial burden that delays cases or forces many to miss court altogether, contributing to a significant backlog of criminal and civil matters.

over the commissioning, described the initiative as more than a transport project.

"This is not just about commissioning a boat; it is about creating a floating bridge for justice for the people living on the islands of Lake Victoria," he said.

Justice Zeija highlighted the high cost and difficulty of accessing courts, noting that some litigants from remote islands such as Mazinga, near the Tanzania border, spend up to Shs800,000 to travel for cases, sometimes crossing Tanzanian waters before returning to Uganda.

He further revealed that the Judiciary had issued a legal instrument allowing judicial officers to hold court sessions outside traditional courtrooms, paving the way for mobile courts on the islands.

"The law now allows us to deliver justice beyond the courtroom. Our aim is to ensure that no one is denied justice simply because they are isolated by wa-

ter," he added.

However, local leaders expressed concerns about operational costs. Resident District Commissioner Fred Badda warned that the boat's 180-horsepower engine consumes about 300 litres of fuel per trip, stressing that without proper funding, previous boats had become redundant.

The district chairperson, Mr Rajab Ssemakula, echoed the concern, urging a proper fuel budget to avoid the vessel becoming a "white elephant" that sits idle.

Responding, Judiciary Permanent Secretary Pius Bigirimana assured stakeholders that operational costs would be fully catered for.

"Having a boat without fuel is like having a child without milk — it cannot grow. We shall ensure that fuel is budgeted for so that this boat remains operational at all times," he said.

Mr Bigirimana also pledged plans to acquire a larger vessel in the future to accommodate more passengers and further enhance service delivery to remote islands.

Masaka High Court Resident Judge Justice Victoria Nakintu, whose jurisdiction covers 11 districts with challenging terrains, expressed optimism that the boat would greatly improve access to justice in isolated areas.

Masaka Regional Police Commander East Gad Murungi added that the vessel would help apprehend suspected criminals hiding in remote islands, reducing impunity in the district.

Principal Judge Jane Frances Abdo emphasised that the arrival of the boat now calls for greater accountability from court staff, urging more court sessions, timely prosecutions, and sustained efforts to reduce the district's case backlog.