

Promise Tracker

New special report: The **Promise Tracker** is Daily Monitor's weekly special feature that will track the promises made by leaders of all categories as well as public agencies to the people. The aim is to cause accountability, show status and analyse whether it was realistic, unrealistic or empty promise.



Some state. A section of the Jinja Pier on Lake Victoria. Government promised to redevelop the existing lakeports and deploying more vessels on Lake Victoria to enhance water transport. PHOTOS BY RACHEL MUKALA

Ugandans still waiting for NRM's three ships on L. Victoria waters

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THE PROMISE:

One of the promises that the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) committed itself to in the period between 2016 and 2021, was the improvement of infrastructure and facilities under the water transport sector.

According to the party's 2016-2021 manifesto, which was released under the theme, "Taking Uganda to modernity through job-creation and inclusive development", the party was to make new investments in the sector by working on existing lake ports and deploying more vessels on Lake Victoria.

"We will also undertake new investments in water transport by constructing and deploying three ships on Lake Victoria,

modernising Port Bell (in Kampala) and Jinja Pier, constructing a new port at Bukasa and launching six new ferries," the manifesto reads in parts.

"All these will go a long way in improving water transport and also opening up new routes. For instance, the modernisation of Port Bell and the Jinja Pier will present the opportunity of passenger and cargo service on water between Jinja and Kampala," the document adds.

The promise was very sweet music to the ears of most members of the business communities in both Jinja and Kampala.

Prior to the breakup of the East African Community (EAC) in 1977, the two ports were formerly properties of the East African Railways and Harbours Corporation (EARHC), which operated sailing operations between Kisumu in Kenya, Mwanza in Tanzania and Port Bell



Decayed. A grounded ferry at Port Bell on Lake Victoria.

in Uganda, using rail ferries that carried loaded rail wagons from tracks on the three ports.

However, the breakup of the EAC and subsequent sharing out of assets of the EARHC resulted into massive cuts in what Uganda was investing on the development of the water and railway transport sector, which inevitably led to a decline in the quality of services on offer.

The competitiveness of rail and water transport was at the same time undermined by the further collapse of

Uganda's industrial sector in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the shift of focus to the development of roads.

Jinja town, which had been Uganda's most

1970

Shift. The competitiveness of rail and water transport was undermined by the further collapse of Uganda's industrial sector in the 1970s and early 1980s.

OFFICIAL POSITION

It was not possible to speak to the representatives of the Ministry of Works, Mr. Simon Mubiru, as he was reportedly out of the country, but according to the Budget Policy Statement of the Ministry of Works for this financial year, 2017/2018, work on the two ports is one of the key priority areas to be addressed under the inland transport segment. "Under inland water transport, the sector has prioritised the development of central corridor route during FY 2017/18. This will be achieved through development of Bukasa port on Lake Victoria and upgrading of Port Bell and Jinja ports. The sector will also continue to support provision of ferry services on strategic inter-lake crossings," the statement reads in part.

(quay wall and bolders) are damaged and the quay pavement is very poor. The port's rail infrastructure, consisting of tracks to the link-span and a rail shunting yard, is not functional and is in very poor condition," the document reads in parts. The document also reveals that the tracks linking the pier to the main rail line is missing thanks to the work of vandals and that the oil pipeline jetty is not functional. It adds that the access road is poor and unpaved and it has neither a fence nor a proper gate. Port Bell may be more operational, but it too has serious challenges. The study by Maritime & Transport Business Solutions reveals that trains cannot access the port due to encroachment on the line leading to it, has uncovered drainages and a very old crane for lift on and lift off operations and that its warehouses, customs houses and toilets are in a state of disrepair. Against such a background, the promise raised more than optimism for the business communities in the two towns as it would open up prospects for increased profits accruing from a reduction in the cost of doing business.

The problem though, is that this seemed to be another one of those promises that Mr. Museveni and the ruling NRM were repudiating and dangling as another vote catcher. Why?

It was not the first time that the promise to revamp the piers and provide more vessels to improve water transport on the lakes had been made. It was first made by the President on June 8, 2011 as he delivered the State of the Nation Address.

In line with the promise made to have the piers redesigned, a Danish firm, OSK Ship Tech was hired to carry out the work and list what they required. The redesigns are said to have been completed in September 2013 at a reported cost of \$4 million, but work was never been implemented due

VOICES



"The designs are complete and we are now at the funding stage. We are mobilising funds. We are engaging the World Bank (which has committed \$120 million for the renovation of the ports) and the European Union (EU) which has reportedly committed \$24 million for link between Port Bell and Kampala Business Park) and we are looking at commencement of work in the financial year 2018/2019,"

"So many things need to be done in terms of expansion and re-equipping the port, but once that is done, we need to start limiting use of the roads for especially the movement of cargo and focus on railway and water transport. We need to make it mandatory for goods to come in by lake and through that port. If you don't do that, you are lost."

"Encroachment on the rail reserves was bad, but KCCA could not continue the evictions because of a court injunction. Evictions will resume before commencement works of the rehabilitation in 2018, but what we shall do this time round is talk to the area MPs to sensitize their people."

DAVID MUGENZI, CHAIRMAN UGANDA TOURISM BOARD (UTB)

MANAGING DIRECTOR UGANDA RAILWAYS CORPORATION, ENG CHARLES KATTEBA

ENG WENICA AZUBA - MINISTER FOR WORKS

to a failure by the government to make available the projected \$19 million for the actual rehabilitation.

IMPACT

During the presentation of the budget for the financial year 2013/2014, the then Minister for Finance and Economic Planning, Ms. Maria Kiwanuka, said development of the lake and water transport sectors was very much at the centre of Uganda's plans for achieving economic development and fostering regional cooperation and integration.

To that end, she said, government intended to revive lake water transport with special emphasis on rebuilding infrastructure on Lake Victoria and providing them with appropriate technologies to enable it become a major waterway.

A movement in that direction, she said, would ensure that Uganda got a strategic alternative route to the sea and also facilitate bulk movement of agricultural produce, but this has not happened. Uganda remains heavily reliant on the Kampala-Mombasa highway for its exports and imports.

Plans to revive the Southern route to the Indian Ocean through Dar es Salaam are not moving at the desired pace.

Ms. Kiwanuka said this would help lower the cost of transport to internal and external destinations and in the process lower the cost of doing business.

As it were, the developments have not taken place and the ports and the facilities therein continue to be in a pathetic state.

The benefits that had been expected to accrue, especially in the area of a reduction in the cost of doing business, increased profitability for the business community and creation of employment opportunities have not materialised.

MONITOR'S POSITION

Renovation and operationalisation of the two ports is no doubt a great idea that will do well to stimulate the growth of the marine transport sector, which has not been receiving as much attention as other sectors have been over the last several years.

As the business community will no doubt be telling us when the project is finally done, one of the challenges to doing business in Uganda is the high cost of transport of goods, especially by road. Manufacturers and importers alike pass on the cost of transport

to the consumers. This means higher prices for consumer commodities. The situation is likely to change once the piers are done and vessels are provided to help with the transporting of goods by lake.

That aside, transporting of goods by road imposes serious limitations on the transporters. The traffic and road safety laws including the Vehicle Load Control Bill 2002 requires truck hauling goods from 10 weight of 3.5 tonnes to be subjected to axle load control. The maximum gross vehicle

weight allowed on Ugandan and Tanzanian roads is 50 tonnes spread over seven axles, while Kenya allows a maximum of 48 tonnes spread over six axles. This means that one can only use roads to transport so much. On the other hand, water and rail would allow movement of bigger volumes of goods, which would be a big boost to the import and export sides of business. That is why the government should be encouraged to pursue developments on that front.

VERDICT

Promise was Realistic ☐ Promise was Unrealistic ☒ Promise was Empty ☐ Promise is Overdue ☐

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