

Kalangala's long road to safe water transport

Concern. The biggest habitable part of the district has not had safe transport means since the MV Barnabas broke down in July 1990.

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KALANGALA. On the evening of November 27, 2017, 13 people aboard SECANTA, a cargo boat, survived drowning after it capsized towards Namisoke Landing Site in Bubeke Sub-county, Kalangala District.

The boat, operated by Kalangala Forum for People Living with HIV/Aids Network, was transporting people from different landing sites in the sub-county via Lake Victoria to Kasenyi Landing Site in Wakiso District.

The boat was hit by strong waves and the people were only saved by divers from marine police and the Uganda Red Cross Society.

A week later, three people travelling to Miyana Landing Site drowned at Kuye Landing Site in Mazinga Sub-county after a canoe boat they were using was hit by strong winds.

"Despite spending much time calling for rescue, the boat capsized and none of them was rescued. The boat broke into pieces," says Mr William Muteekanga, an eye witness to the accident.

Records at Kalangala District Police Station indicate that on average, six fatal boat accidents are recorded in the area every year. However, several others go unnoticed and neither are they recorded.

Shs198m

**THE AMOUNT THE DISTRICT
LOSES IN REVENUE EVERY
THREE MONTHS DUE
TO LACK OF RELIABLE
TRANSPORT.**

Many of such water accidents, according to the Red Cross manager Kalangala branch, Mr Ibrahim Ssenyonga, occur between May



Means. MV Pearl, one of the three major marine vessels, operating on the island district. PHOTO BY HENRY LUBULWA

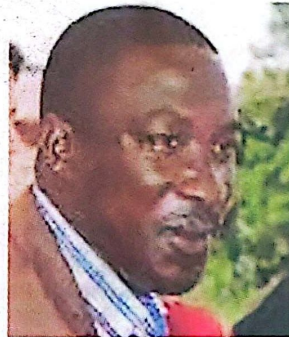
and August, when strong winds blowing from the Tanzania side hit the lake.

"We usually advise people travelling during that period to wear life jackets such that they are protected since they do not have secure marine vessels to transport them to their final destinations," says Mr Ssenyonga.

According to Mr Willy Lugoloobi, the district chairperson, for the past 28 years, the biggest habitable part of the district has not had safe transport means to the main land after the MV Barnabas, the only reliable marine vessel that operated within the area, broke down in July 1990.

"For all those years, the whole district never had a marine vessel, save for the mini-ferry that operated on the southern route between Masaka and Luku-Bugoma Landing Site on the Kalangala side," says Mr Lugoloobi.

Islanders have since been using cargo boats from Kasenyi Landing Site in Entebbe to connect to different docking sites. Some of



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the docking sites such as Bukasa-Kiwungu, Kitobo, Kachungwa and Bufumira, remain utilised while others have been turned into fishing sites.

Kalangala's largest population,

however, lives on the outlying islands despite lacking reliable means of transport.

"This leaves us vulnerable to water accidents yet many of us cannot afford protective gear such as life jackets, reliable boats, and neither do we have skills in swimming," says Mr Richard Lwanga, who once fell in the lake when the boat they were travelling in capsized.

Challenge

Currently, the district has three major marine vessels; MV Kalangala, that plies the route between Nakiwogo-Entebbe, Lutoboka, MV Pearl and MV Ssesa, which operate between Bukakkata in Masaka and Luku-Bugoma in Kalangala.

All the ferries dock on Bugala, leaving the rest of the 63 islands with no reliable means of transport.

The major economic activities in the district are fishing and plantation agriculture, mainly oil palm growing.

However, the furthest outlying islands remain inaccessible, which makes transportation of

fish and other goods to the main land difficult. During a district executive meeting last November, the finance officer, Mr Wilberforce Kakooza, said the district loses at least Shs198 million every three months in goods that fail to reach the market in time due to lack of reliable transport means.

The district locally generates revenue of about Shs320 million every year. This, according to the chief administrative officer, Mr Gabriel Atama, is below the projected annual district budget.

"And all this is because of several challenges, including unreliable water transport, which would transport several staff to collect taxes. The locals too cannot trade because the markets are far away and the people, who buy goods take them at giveaway price, leaving us with losses," Mr Atama says.

In October, the State minister for Works, Gen Katumba Wamala, visited several docking sites in the district and promised an immediate intervention, including procuring another new marine vessel.