

KALANGALA

By Hope Mafaranga

The annual mandatory repairs and maintenance of Marine Vessel (MV) Kalangala, which operates on Nakiwogo landing site in Entebbe and Lutoboka in Kalangala are due, *New Vision* has learnt.

The mandatory inspection and servicing is meant to meet the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) seaworthiness requirements. Sources have told *New Vision* that the Government is unnecessarily incurring billions of shillings every year to carry out the mandatory inspection for the water vessels in Tanzania and Kenya.

**Unnecessary expenses**

Taking the vessel to Southern Port in Mwanza, Tanzania, as has been the case, has been looked at as unnecessary expenditure by the Government since Uganda can have the same facilities at Port Bell pier.

The managing director of Kalangala Infrastructure Services (KIS), John Opondo, said whenever the vessel is taken to Mwanza or Kisumu in Kenya, an entity spends about \$800 daily, which goes towards the direct costs of hiring a docking facility.

"That is a lot of money for only hiring a docking facility without putting into consideration other indirect expenses. If such facilities are put here at Port Bell, Uganda could save that money for other developments," he said.

Opondo said taking vessels to Tanzania and Kenya denies Ugandans the opportunity to learn marine technical skills.

"Most engineers are Tanzanians and Kenyans, but if this facility is put here, it will enable our own a chance to learn and develop skills in the marine industry and it will also go a long way in creating jobs," he added.

*New Vision* also learnt that some of the components in marine sector cannot be trained

# Govt spending billions on water vessel maintenance



MV Pamba has been grounded awaiting repairs

in Uganda which is why they have to resort to Tanzania.

However, the Fisheries Training Institute in Entebbe, the Uganda People's Defence Forces and Police can train marine operators for their staff, which is not open to the public.

Opondo said marine is a much specialised field which needed to be given maximum attention.

Prof. Eng. John Senfuma, the KIS board chairman, said repairing a vessel costs about \$400,000 outside Uganda. He said if Uganda set up its own facility, it could save the Government more than \$100,000 per repair job. On

average, over sh2b is spent when a vessel is sent to Mwanza for repairs.

Senfuma said the sector heavily depends on insurance and if the vessels get a problem because of poor maintenance, the insurers will not pay or compensate the money. He appealed to Uganda Railways to ensure that they quicken the process of having repairs that are internationally acceptable done in Uganda.

"We did research and discovered that the repairs that require Ugandan vessels to be taken to be taken to Tanzania and Kenya can actually be done here to international standards,"

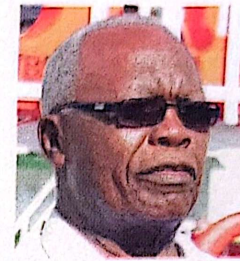
he said.

**Building our facility**

Sources from the Ministry of Works and Transport, said the dry dock at Port Bell can ably facilitate the servicing of the boat if it does not have any vessel waiting for repair.

Currently, the docks is occupied by MV Bukakata-Luku which is awaiting general repairs and modifications before being taken to Buvuma Islands at Kiyindi. Buvuma's vessel is old and too small to handle the quite increasing volume of traffic.

Herbert Mutyaba, the head of UNRA's ferry unit, said



Prof. Eng. John Senfuma

currently, they are running 10 ferries across all navigable waters and plans are underway to get more based on the existing demand for linking the islands to the mainland.

There are other vessels managed by the ministry under public-private partnership such as MV Pearl and MV Ssesse operated by KIS operating on Bukakata-Luku route in Kalangala and another by Uganda Wildlife Authority.

The Government, with support from the World Bank, injected about sh11.5b into refurbishing the once grounded MV Kaawa and with the dry dock at Port Bell pier which facilitated its repairs that started in 2009. The repairs were done by the Southern Engineering Company from Mombasa, Kenya.

On completion of the repairs and replacement of the rescue boat, the vessel was handed over to Rift Valley Railways (RVR) that had taken over Uganda Railways Corporation (URC) assets for management and operations.

MV Kaawa and Pamba were grounded at Port Bell pier in Luzira in 2005, when MV Kabalega sank in Lake Victoria since their seaworthiness could

not be ascertained and both lacked insurance. However, later, Kawa was later repaired.

**Differing responses**

Asked why Uganda still takes vessels to Tanzania for repairs, Mark Ssali, the UNRA spokesperson, said: "As UNRA, we do not take our vessels to Mwanza because we do the preventive repairs and maintenance at the landing sites while the major repair work and overhaul are done in our workshop in Luwero."

Ssali said it is not true that there is a lack of capacity in the industry. "We have enough ferry masters and mechanics to handle the work," he said.

Bernard Khabakha, the inspector of vessels in the works ministry, said there is no expertise in Uganda, adding that it may also be expensive to have them repaired in Uganda compared to Mwanza.

"Despite the lack of expertise here, we are also still looking at and comparing the annual and docking survey cost to see if it makes an economic sense to have all the vessels maintained here," he said.

**Neglected water transport**

Monica Ntege Azuba, the works and transport minister, said plans are underway to remodel Port Bell and the Jinja pier to become regional hub and attract more vessels from neighbouring countries.

She said water transport has been neglected, yet it is a modest means of transport for bulky cargo and could protect the road infrastructure from premature failure.

**Additional reporting by Samuel Balagadde**