

# Uganda's water transport back on its feet

By Reagan Ssempijja

**W**ater transport in Uganda is part of the National

Road Network under Ministry of Works and Transport. Worth noting for an ordinary Ugandan is the space covered by water in the country. About 241,038 square kilometers of Uganda's total land area is covered by swamps, lakes and rivers, most of which are navigable.

Almost all of Uganda's water resources are Trans-boundary in nature and shared with her neighbors such as Kenya and Tanzania (Lake Victoria) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Lake Albert and Edward). Water transport is therefore used to transport communities living in the Islands, across the lakes, tourists and goods.

## Inland system

According to the Ministry of Works and Transport, the inland water transport system in Uganda is divided as Lake Victoria transport and transport on the remaining five lakes and six rivers. Lake Albert provides truck ferries to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Port of Kisumu in Kenya is part of the Northern Corridor transport system.

"The Kisumu route does not



Boats loaded with merchandise at Kisenyi landing site

attract transit to Uganda due to the low capacity of the Nakuru - Kisumu railway track. This route connects Kenya to both Tanzania and Uganda through Lake Victoria. Unfortunately it can only support low axle loads. The growth of the hyacinth has only worsened the situation and even further affected vessel movement," the Ministry of Works and Transport report states.

Worth noting though is that Uganda does not have river ports but has two inland ports on Lake Victoria. That is the Jinja pier and Port Bell. Only one ship operates between Port Bell and Kampala. Uganda also utilises the neighbouring

in Tanzania and Kisumu in Kenya.

The Uganda Railways Corporation operates services from Port of Mombasa to Tororo/Kampala while marine services operate between Port Bell and Jinja to Kisumu in Kenya, and to Mwanza and Bukoba in Tanzania.

International lake transport is currently grouped with rail transport and the international ferry services (wagon ferry services) to Kisumu and Mwanza. The domestic lake transport, like river transport, is now mainly a small-scale private sector activity with minimal fixed infrastructure support.

Geoffrey Obara, an official



A new ship being tested by experts on Lake Victoria

## UNRA CONTINUES TO WORK TIRELESSLY TO ENSURE THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECTS LEAVES AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE COMMUNITIES

from Uganda Railways Corporation (URC), noted that there are also insufficient navigation aids. "The Inland Water Transport Study (IWTS), carried out in 1988, identified over 70 landing sites around Uganda where formal or informal water transport services had been operated."

The ministry operates ferry services as a continuation of the national roads across points on rivers and lakes where it would be uneconomical to build bridges. These ferry

services are important for linking parts of the country to the capital, regional centers and communities.

## Performance

The 2017/18 sectoral report indicates that the 9 ferries at Kiyindi, Mbulamuti, Masindi Port, Laropi, Obongi, Kyoga 1, Kyoga 2, Nakiwogo and Bisina were fully operational and are delivered the scheduled trips.

"For Albert Nile 1 (Wanseko), construction of a temporary landing site 300m away from the old one and access road is in process and is at 80% progress. The ferry is now operational since March 28, 2018 and was commissioned," the report states.

The ministry has also gone ahead to construct bridges on a number of water bodies to ease transport above water bodies. While construction 15 bridges will continue through the year, the following five bridges will be substantially completed by June 2019. These include; the new Nile Bridge, whose physical progress is at 79%, Nalakasi Bridge whose progress is at 68.5%, Lopei Bridge whose progress is at 41% and Kaabong whose progress is at 66.6%. Then there is also Opot Bridge.

## Challenges

The sectoral report indicates a number of challenges which include among many the following; inadequate funding

for road maintenance which continues to downgrade the level of service for the national road network;

Despite the budget constraints and the over-commitment, the requests and pressure to commence construction of new roads continues without funding remains a challenge. At the moment UNRA has over 2,000km that are on the unfunded priority list.

Interference in the procurement process by outside lobbyists continues to be a serious problem. This is disruptive and affects the timely completion and the quality of the outcomes of the Authority's procurements.

## Encroachment

The continued encroachment on the road reserve and the increasing illegal roadside activities greatly undermined the functionality of the road network, and hence reduced the safety and level of service of the roads;

Although UNRA has made significant strides in improving the management of social safeguards, the authority has continued to register some cases of poor treatment of workers on site and child abuse. UNRA continues to work tirelessly to ensure that implementation of projects leaves as little as possible negative effect on the communities.

Corruption is still a challenge especially at the weighbridges. In collaboration with the UNRA Investigations and Compliance Team, all corruption cases are investigated thoroughly and the involved staff are dealt with accordingly. Additionally, heavy rains upcountry, especially in Kabale, Mbale, Kotido, Buwuma, Aleptong that cut off roads and washing away bridges require emergency intervention.



Passengers disembark from a ferry that connects Mbulamuti in Kamuli district to Kayunga district