

# Govt finalises safety centres for Ugandan waters

Construction of the nine search and rescue co-ordination centres to improve the safety of navigation on Ugandan waters has been completed.

The modern water navigation centres are being constructed by the Ministry of Works and Transport at a cost of \$15.85m (sh55.2b). Of this, \$13.7m is a loan from the African Development Bank, while \$2.1m is a contribution from the Government of Uganda.

The nine centres are aimed at responding to distress calls by water transport users so as to save lives. The facilities include that at Kaazi on Lake Victoria in Wakiso district, Zengebe on Lake Kyoga, Kaiso and Panyamur on Lake Albert, as well as the national condition centre at Entebbe.

The centres, which are part of a broader Multinational Lake Victoria Maritime Communications and Transport project, are pending commissioning.

At its initial stage, the project was only covering Lake Victoria, but it was extended to Lakes Kyoga and Albert, which also have a number of water vessels.

Henry Ategeka, the acting assistant commissioner for inspection,



One of the five Search and Rescue Centres of Kaazi on Lake Victoria

registration and licensing in maritime administration under the works ministry, expressed optimism that the project will be ready by March, as they are making final touches with the remaining works.

The project was initially covering

three countries — Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. However, Kenya has since pulled out.

A total of 11 boats were procured for the project; nine for search and rescue co-ordination, one for firefighting and one for a fully-fledged ambulance

boat. Ategeka said the project encompasses a maritime survival training centre located at Entebbe Fisheries Institute, geared towards equipping a variety of maritime-related skills to applicants.

"This facility has been furnished with a modern maritime training pool for enhancing and training of divers and frequent lake users in swinging tactics.

"This will be through implementing standard training and certificate for watch-keeping, which is an international convention under the auspices of the International Maritime Organisation dedicated to improve and standardise training for all seafarers worldwide," Ategeka said.

He said a modern simulator for training fresh marine vessel controller learners and enhancing competence for those already in service has also been put in place.

Ategeka, who is also the regional project co-ordinator, said the completed search and rescue co-ordination facilities have started

bearing fruit with a number of passengers on water under distress being rescued.

Waiswa Bageya, the works ministry permanent secretary, recently appealed to the Government to prioritise timely allocation of funds for operationalisation, rehabilitation and maintenance of transport infrastructure to minimise premature failure and financial loss.

"Some of the transport projects where the Government allocates significant funds are left to waste while others are not given attention for rehabilitation and maintenance," he said.

Bageya said the project is being implemented at a time when Uganda is not doing well in maritime, adding that it will greatly save lives of water transport users on the Ugandan lakes where it is being implemented.

Robert Ntambi, the commissioner for maritime administration under the works ministry, said the project will co-ordinate maritime safety through the deployed rescue boats.