

The Catalyst

NEWSLETTER

Impact Beyond Borders



Sio Port Project Set to Accelerate Regional Trade

Developing sustainable civil and marine infrastructure to enhance inland water transport, support fisheries and trade and promote environmentally responsible use of Lake Victoria

By Belinda Osoro

In the quiet but industrious waters of Lake Victoria, a bold infrastructure project is taking shape, one that promises to redefine livelihoods, trade and regional connectivity across Kenya's western frontier. The Rehabilitation and Construction of Sio Port (Phase I), being implemented by Kenya Shipyards Limited (KSL) on behalf of the Kenya Ports Authority, is poised to unlock the economic potential of one of the region's greatest natural assets while anchoring Kenya's blue economy ambitions. Located in Busia County along the Kenya-Uganda border, Sio



Catalyzing Shipbuilding Industry

MANDATE

To lead and catalyze the introduction of the new shipbuilding industry in Eastern Africa with a focus on meeting the local demand from Kenya Navy, Ministries, Departments and Agencies with maritime assets and other public and private domestic and regional clients.

VISION

To be the leading catalyst in the development of the shipbuilding industry in Eastern Africa.

MISSION

To establish and develop the growth of shipbuilding industry through the provision of world-class construction, refit, maintenance and repair of ships and other maritime services in a sustainable and efficient manner.

CORE VALUES

- 1. Integrity:** Observing the highest standards of ethics, honesty and accountability always.
- 2. Professionalism:** Delivering the best quality service to customers with utmost rigor and efficiency.
- 3. Team Spirit:** Working together in a spirit of creativity and mutual respect to achieve common objectives.
- 4. Excellence:** Quest for the highest level of performance through continuous improvement of skills and best practices.

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At Sio Port, KSL is not merely constructing a pier; it is laying the foundation for movement of goods, of people and of ideas.

Port has long served as a modest yet vital gateway linking communities across the lake. Today, it stands at the centre of a renewed national and regional push to revitalise inland water transport, enhance fisheries and stimulate cross-border commerce in line with Kenya's Vision 2030 and broader continental trade frameworks.

Through the stewardship of Lt Col Brian Omito, Manager, Civil and Modular Maritime Works, Kenya Shipyards Limited, the project's objective is clear: to develop sustainable civil and marine infrastructure that enhances inland water transport, supports fisheries and trade and promotes environmentally responsible use of the lake. Through the construction of a durable pier, stabilisation and reclamation of adjacent waterfront areas and installation of modern access control and security systems, Sio Port is being transformed into a safe, efficient and well-organised lakeside facility capable of supporting both current and future blue economy activities.

This transformation aligns with the Government of Kenya's Blue Economy strategy, which prioritises the development of maritime infrastructure as a driver of inclusive growth. It also reinforces regional integration goals under the East African Community and the aspirations of the African Union through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which seeks to boost intra-African trade.

For residents of Sio Port, however, the project is not just about policy or infrastructure. It is about restoring opportunity.

"The construction of the jetty is a progressive step," says Shamim Burhan, 28, a local food vendor whose business was previously conducted in temporary wooden sheds. "We are looking forward to better structures and improved business conditions."

Her sentiments are echoed by Wilkister Fatuma, 26, a Beach Management Unit (BMU) treasurer and mother of three. "We used to rely on tree shade for shelter. With these developments, we hope for better business

opportunities and stronger cross-border relationships," she says.

Their optimism reflects a broader expectation among local communities that the upgraded port will revitalise economic activity and improve living standards, particularly for women who form the backbone of small-scale trade and hospitality services along the lake.

Historically, Sio Port was a vibrant hub for regional commerce, facilitating the movement of goods across Kenya and Uganda during the era of the East African Railways and Harbours. That legacy faded following the collapse of the regional framework in 1977, leaving many feeder ports underdeveloped.

According to Alex Odongo, Secretary to the local BMU, the new project signals a return to those more prosperous times.

"The business in the olden days was very active, with goods moving across the lake despite poor roads," he recalls. "This project will bring back that vibrancy and open new opportunities for trade."

Even in its current state, cross-border trade through Sio Port remains active. Kenya imports goods such as sugar, soap, potatoes, maize and cassava from Uganda, while exporting bananas, edible oil, wheat, salt, cement, rice and livestock.

That reality was vividly illustrated recently when The Catalyst team visited Sio Port. A boat arrived from Uganda's Rugala Island, an unmistakable symbol of regional integration in motion. The vessel carried not only passengers but also neatly labelled cargo: cassava, charcoal, bananas and firewood. It was more than a routine arrival; it was a living testament to the resilience of lake-based trade and the enduring ties between neighbouring communities.

Sio Port's unique geography, where the Sio River meets Lake Victoria amid wetlands of papyrus reeds and hippo grass, adds both ecological richness and

operational complexity. Balancing development with environmental sustainability remains central to the project's design ensuring that economic progress does not come at the expense of fragile ecosystems.

Beyond trade, the upgraded port is expected to catalyse growth across multiple sectors of the blue economy. Improved infrastructure will facilitate the transportation of agricultural produce via water, reduce logistics costs and enhance efficiency for traders and transporters. At the same time, modern facilities will support the fisheries sector, enabling better handling, preservation and value addition of fish products. Tourism is also set to benefit. By positioning Sio Port and surrounding islands as alternative destinations, the project will diversify Kenya's tourism portfolio while stimulating rural

economies and promoting more equitable distribution of tourism revenues.

These developments are part of a broader government strategy to revitalise small and feeder ports across the Lake Victoria region, strengthening maritime logistics corridors and reinforcing confidence in inland water transport systems. For Kenya Shipyards Limited, the project reflects a deeper institutional mandate. At Sio Port, KSL is not merely constructing a pier; it is laying the foundation for movement of goods, of people and of ideas.

In doing so, the company is reaffirming its role as a regional maritime powerhouse, demonstrating that when maritime assets are paired with resilient infrastructure, the ripple effects extend far beyond the shoreline.

As the sun sets over the waters of Lake Victoria, the outlines of a transformed Sio Port are already beginning to emerge not just as a construction site, but as a symbol of renewal, integration and shared prosperity across East Africa.



Beyond trade, the upgraded port is expected to catalyse growth across multiple sectors of the blue economy

Muhuru Bay Pier Modernisation to Transform Lake Victoria Economies



By The Catalyst News Team

The modernisation of the Muhuru Bay pier by Kenya Shipyards Limited on behalf of Kenya Ports Authority is poised to unlock a new era of economic growth across the Lake Victoria basin, positioning the lakeside town as a strategic gateway for trade, fisheries and regional integration.

Nestled on the shores of Lake Victoria in Migori County, Muhuru Bay is undergoing a transformation that aligns with Kenya's broader blue economy aspirations and long-term development blueprint under Kenya Vision 2030. The project which is under the supervision of Lt Col Brian Omito, Manager, Civil and Modular Maritime Works at Kenya Shipyards Limited and his team of professionals and technical personnel, seeks to develop sustainable civil and marine infrastructure that enhances inland water transport, supports fisheries and trade and promotes environmentally responsible use of the lake.

At the heart of the project is the construction of a durable pier, stabilisation and reclamation of adjacent

waterfront areas and installation of access control and security infrastructure. Together, these elements will create a safe, efficient and well-organised lakeside facility capable of supporting both current and future blue economy activities.

For a community long defined by both potential and neglect, the transformation is already tangible.

"I am born and bred in Muhuru Bay. In the olden times, Tanzanians transported oranges, maize and dagaa using big ships," says Tobias Otieno, a 49-year-old carpenter working on the project site. "The modernisation of the pier will activate businesses around here; goods will move in wholesale with vehicles coming to carry them from the pier."

His optimism reflects a wider sentiment among residents who see the project as a turning point. For years, the once-busy pier had deteriorated into disuse, cutting off vital trade routes and shrinking economic opportunities.

For Emily Anyango Otieno, a 31-year-old

businesswoman in the dagaa trade, the stakes are deeply personal.

"On average, I make about Sh10,000 a day, but the quantity of dagaa has reduced as the pier depreciated," she says. "Tanzanians, who are our business associates, no longer visit like before. If cross-border trade is restricted, dagaa becomes scarce. I cannot wait for the pier to be completed because it will bring more boats, more buyers and more certainty for our business."

Her experience underscores the central role the pier will play in revitalising fisheries, reducing post-harvest losses and expanding market access. With improved infrastructure, traders will be able to move goods faster and more efficiently across the lake, reinforcing Muhuru Bay's historic role as a commercial hub.

Indeed, the project is expected to strengthen cross-border commerce between Kenya and Tanzania, advancing regional integration under the East African Community and supporting intra-African trade in line with the African Continental Free Trade Area.

For veteran businessman and legal practitioner Jared Wigina, 60, the project represents a return to a lost golden age.

"Growing up here in the 1970s, the pier brought volumes of cross-border trade. We had ships, we had activity and Muhuru Bay Centre was thriving," he recalls. "The modern pier will revive hospitality businesses, beaches, fisheries, aquaculture, tourism and transport. It will create jobs, attract NGOs and investors, and ultimately reduce poverty."

His vision reflects the broader economic ripple effects anticipated from the project. Beyond trade, the modernised pier is expected to stimulate investments in tourism, real estate and ancillary services, leveraging

Muhuru Bay's natural assets such as its white sandy beaches and strategic location near the Tanzanian border.

The initiative is part of a wider government push to revitalise Kenya's blue economy, recognising water bodies as engines of growth. By improving maritime infrastructure, the country aims to unlock opportunities in fisheries, transport, tourism and environmental conservation, particularly in lakeside counties.

On the ground, the impact is already visible. Local residents have been engaged in construction works, injecting income into households and restoring a sense of dignity and purpose within the community. For many, the project is not just about infrastructure, but about reclaiming identity and opportunity.

"This modernisation shows we matter," one community member noted during stakeholder engagements.

Yet the transformation goes beyond economics. Improved connectivity is expected to catalyse complementary developments, including better road infrastructure linking Muhuru Bay to Migori town and beyond. This, in turn, will attract private investment and enhance access to markets.

As construction progresses, Muhuru Bay is steadily shedding its image as a forgotten outpost and reclaiming its place as a vital node in East Africa's maritime network.

What is unfolding on these shores is more than a physical upgrade. It is a strategic intervention anchored in national policy, regional integration and community resilience.

In the quiet calm of Muhuru Bay, the outlines of a new economic frontier are taking shape; one pier, one boat and one opportunity at a time.



Pictorial



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