

Haphazard Construction and the Impact of Climate Change Threaten Mombasa

Now may just be the right – and only – time for tourists who wish to visit Mombasa to do so, as the city, located on Kenya's coastal line, is at risk of soon being submerged by the rising sea level, scientists say.



This is obviously quite worrying news, but not just for Kenya or any tourist wanting to enjoy the local beaches. In fact, this dire prospect can cause big problems in the whole region, as the Lamu Port Southern Sudan–Ethiopia Transport, one of the region's biggest construction projects can also be put in grave danger if this scenario comes to pass.

The eventual flooding and submersion of Mombasa, one of Kenya's most emblematic cities and the biggest city on the coast line, is not news, as a call for action was already made at the UN's conference for climate change in Paris in July 2015. The experts discussed the impact of climate change on the rise of sea levels.

Mombasa has been plagued by strong flooding in the last year, causing grave danger to the population, which has had to be evacuated on a large scale, as homes got inundated and houses destroyed, leaving some people gravely injured. This situation is something the population is somewhat used to, as flooding is a usual occurrence in the county, but the large population of the city, along with new weather patterns, are worsening the situation, leading experts to worry that it may become unsustainable and that the city of Mombasa may eventually completely disappear.



The solution for such a grave problem, experts as well as officials like Mombasa County's Minister for Land and Housing agree, is to improve the urban planning, in order to protect people from the elements to which climate change further exposes "low-lying areas" like the coast city, as well as the development itself.

However, Mombasa's last urban plan has already expired almost two decades ago, which probably explains why development got out of hand in the last few years. To try and remedy the damage done and guarantee there will be a future for Mombasa, the city council has designed a new master plan, supported by \$1.3m provided by Japan, which is meant to repair the blockage of waterways, among other problems. It is to be completed by March 2017, roughly a year from now, and the Minister is quite confident that it will "solve all problems with planning in the county".



The new master plan is quite ambitious, and it seems to target all the right problems, particularly the failure of drainage systems and the new threats presented by climate change, which council officials cite as the main culprit behind the flooding, but it also faces large obstacles, the biggest of which being the fact that the people from Mombasa have built structures that can now not simply be taken down.

Mombasa's new master plan comes very late, as the situation has certainly been worsening over the sixteen years that have passed since the last urban plan expired, but all hopes are that, if successfully completed, it might still come in time to keep the city from being fatally flooded.

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