

On Monday, September 28, 2020, Uganda authorised the construction and upgrading of roads inside the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The roads were Kasindi-Beni (80km), Beni-Butembo (54km) and Bunagana-Rutshuru-Goma (89km).

The roads would increase mobility, trade and security in the region.

DRC is Uganda's second-largest trading partner in the region, whose 2018 import bill (from Uganda) was \$204m (Shs755b). With a proper road network and unlimited market access, Uganda was expected to reap heavily from this investment.

With an international airport at Kasese (and later a railway to Butembo), Uganda's economy would be integrated with that of eastern DRC. The benefits from such economic integration would be enormous.

With what I have always referred to as Museveni's DRC roads, the construction of Kasese international airport and a harbour at Katwe (Uganda) and at Kyavinyonge (DRC) on Lake Edward would complete the picture of a manifest national strategic interest in the DR Congo.

A Congolese lawmaker once told me that even if Uganda constructed those DRC roads as an investment, the trade volume between Uganda and the DRC would bring actual returns in less than 10 years.

The story of an international airport to be built in Mbarara is now well-known. Mr Museveni wrote a broad and winding letter explaining how it would work and temptingly situated it into a global air traffic network.

It was very tempting. Plus, the developers said they would use their own money. But

Kasese airport is better than Mbarara airport!

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Asuman Bisiika
Minority Report



you know Ugandans have a bad experience with investors who claim that they will "use their own money".

And so, with Mr Museveni's letter (if there is a need to know), the proposed construction of an international airport in Mbarara is now a matter of policy. This means the people running the government must support and be seen to support the project proposal for what I should be allowed to call 'Mbarara International Airport'.

The good thing with me is that I am not one of the people who run the government. So, I would like to politely differ (with loyal deference to Mr Museveni) on this matter. And I say: An international airport built at Kasese would be a better deal than the one proposed to be built in Mbarara. In vernac-

ular: 'Kasese International Airport' is better than 'Mbarara International Airport'.

In spite of being geographically well-placed, Uganda would take long to attract global air traffic. Save for air traffic connected to the exploitation of oil in Bunyoro sub-region, Uganda as a country has not promoted itself for such a strategic interest. It would, therefore, be advisable that Uganda concentrates on regional markets and interests.

If Mbarara airport's target is an international air traffic bridge between South America and Asia, I fear that we are most likely going to attract dark business like drug trafficking.

I am familiar with Works minister Gen Kautumba Wamala's recent comment on the development of Kasese airfield (perhaps into an international airport). There are rumours to the effect that, before the really national need for Hoima International Airport, Kasese airport was the priority. Land was secured and fenced off. As is commonplace, what was required was the green light from Mr Museveni.

The trade volumes between Uganda and DRC are so huge that Uganda should start positioning itself in a manner that reflects strategic national interest. Not dreams of an international air traffic bridge in Mbarara.

The writer is the former executive director of the East African flagpost