



Amongi interacting with Minister of State for Lands, Housing and Urban Development Isaac Musumba during the dialogue with Amuru leaders yesterday



Amongi (extreme right) handing over the agreement to John Otto Orap II of the Pamuca chieftdom, who was flanked by Faustino Okello of Toro chieftdom (extreme left) and Denis Atwom Opiyo during a meeting of Amuru leaders yesterday. Photos by Godiver Asege

TERMS OF CONSENT

Among the terms of consent, which will take effect upon getting a court seal, is creating a legal entity to hold shares

By Moses Walubiri

After more than a decade of litigation and behind the scenes negotiations, residents of Amuru have accepted to give Madhvani Sugar Works 10,000 hectares to establish a sugar factory in which they, together with the Government, will be part of the shareholding.

Yesterday, the cultural leaders in the project-affected areas gave their assent to a draft consent agreement between the Government and the five individuals that had resorted to litigation to challenge the giveaway of Amuru land to Madhvani for the sugar factory.

Led by Prof. Nyeko Pen-Mogi, the vice-chancellor of Gulu University, who had been mandated to reconcile the parties, the cultural leaders of the chiefdoms of Pagak, Toro and Pamuca said the project will help put to use land that is almost empty.

Among the terms of the consent, which will take effect upon getting a court seal, is creating a legal entity to hold shares for the benefit of the people of Amuru.

"Upon execution of the terms of the deed of settlement, there will be negotiations of the details of shareholding of the people of Amuru in Sugar Works Ltd," lands minister Betty Amongi said as the cultural leaders prepared to give their take on the consent deed.

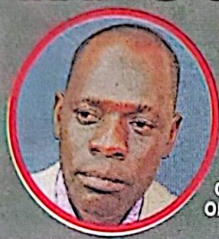
The land in Amuru sub-county, in particular areas of Kololo, Lakang, Bana, Omeo, Lujoro, Lwak Obito and Pailyech, which had been earmarked for Amuru Sugar Works in 2006 had initially resulted in a court battle, pitting local leaders against Amuru district land board.

In 2006, former MPs Michael Ocula, Concy Aciro and David Penytoo filed a case, challenging the decision of Amuru District Land Board to give Madhvani Sugar Works land to construct a sugar factory in Amuru sub-county.

Originally, part of communal land in Amuru, the land in question was gazetted as a game reserve in the 1960s by the government of Dr Milton Obote.

However, in 1972, Idi Amin's government degazetted it. Those who sought to challenge the decision of Amuru district land board argued that after the land was degazetted in 1972, it reverted to

Amuru to get shares in sugar firm



Gilbert Olanya

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THE PLAN

The Government accepted to revert the land in question to customary ownership, on condition the community gives 10,000 hectares to Madhvani

its original customary ownership status. However, Justice Masalu Musene, in his judgment, made it clear that the land remained public land, even after degazettement.

With the issue of Madhvani establishing a factory in Amuru getting different narratives and being viewed through the political prism, President Yoweri Museveni decided to foster dialogue, despite Ocula appealing Masalu's judgment in the Court of Appeal.

And, in January 2015, Ocula's group reached an understanding (consent) with the Government over a number of issues pertaining the project affected areas, including compensating all those that will be displaced by the factory.

Despite the court victory, the Government accepted to revert the land to customary ownership on condition that the community gives 10,000 hectares to Madhvani for the sugar project.

"You see children running around naked with no single primary school in the area. There is abject poverty. But then you hear some people shouting that they do not want Madhvani," Pen-Mogi, an academic who once ventured into the rough and tumble of politics as a lawmaker, said as he took a swipe at politicians whom he accused of using misgivings about the Amuru land issue to gain political leverage.

Last Friday, Museveni met lawmakers from the greater Acholi sub-region over the Amuru land issue.

According to lands minister Amongi, all MPs, including Kilak South MP Gilbert Olanya, who has over the years turned opposition to the Amuru Sugar factory into a personal crusade, attended.

"I told the President that in principle, I support the project. The disagreement has been on the approach, which has not been dealing directly with land owners," Olanya told *New Vision* in a telephone interview.

Prof. Ogenga Latigo, said the project will come in handy to put into proper use land the community has no capacity to utilise.

SUGAR FACTORIES

So far, all the sugar factories are located in the western, central and eastern Uganda, with none in the northern region.

According to Amongi, the 21 families occupying the 10,000 hectares earmarked for the project will be compensated.

Furthermore, the Government will equally have a stake in the project. Additionally, as part of the project Madhvani will have to set up schools and health facilities for the community.

In January 2015, the Government and the Lamogi community of Lamogi sub-county of Kilak county in Amuru district signed another agreement for the withdrawal of the pending case in the Court of Appeal to pave the way for the establishment of the sugar factory in Lamogi sub-county by the Madhvani Group of Companies.

The signing ceremony that was witnessed by President Yoweri Museveni took place at the President's country home in Rwakitura, Kiruhura district.

The then Attorney General, Peter Nyombi, represented the Government while Jackson Obalim and over 60 other members of the Lamogi community, signed on behalf of their people.

However, after years of engagement and negotiation between the Government and the Lamogi community, the community has agreed to withdraw the court case and pave the way for the construction of the multi-million sugar factory in Amuru district.

According to the Government, the sugar industry in Amuru will have multiple advantages to community as it will produce, sugarcane and supply the factory as outgrowers, generate employment for the community, have infrastructure extended to the area and attract a large working force that will be a source of market for all the produce that the community will produce, on top of producing more sugar for the growing Ugandan population and for export.

The agreement that was signed in 2015 also provided for the compensation of the affected communities and shareholding in the incoming factory.

The sugar companies have lately been struggling to acquire land for expansion as the demand for sugar in the country and region rises.

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