

Good roads strengthen regional integration by increasing the movement of people and goods, expanding economic opportunities.

BY FELIX WAROM OKELLO

Dust rises in soft clouds behind trucks plying the Nebbi-Goli road as they struggle on the murram stretch linking Nebbi to Zombo District.

Every bump on the road tells a painful story of isolation, delayed opportunities and a sub-region yearning to move forward but held back by the ground beneath its feet.

On the Paidha-Nyapea road, a produce trader near the hilly Nyagak area wipes sweat from his forehead and tightens his grip on his motorcycle. On the carrier are sacks of cassava and matooke bound for the market.

Mr John Ogentho left Nyapea before sunrise, but by 9am, he has still not reached his destination after suffering a puncture caused by the poor state of the road.

"There was a sharp stone lodged in the tyre. With such a rough road, your journey can never be smooth," he says.

He is rushing to Paidha Market, where trade on Wednesdays and Saturdays begins early, hoping to catch the first customers.

"Oh no, I am not sure whether I will find my customers. It may delay my other programmes. Bad roads consume more time than distance," he says.

Similarly, Mr Benson Opio, who is pushing a bicycle loaded with matooke destined for Paidha Market, stops to rest by the roadside.

At Guna Trading Centre, a group of residents sit beneath a mango tree sharing roasted maize and conversation. Among them is Mr Opio, who looks exhausted.

"I would have been in town by now, but because of the bad road, I am here resting. I need to regain strength before tackling the slopes on the Nyagak road and pushing uphill to town," he said.

"I have paid taxes for the last 25 years and we have continued voting for this government, but I do not see any benefit. Our cries for a tarmacked road have not been heard," he adds.

The situation in Nebbi and Zombo mirrors what travellers endure on the Arua-Terego-Obongi road.

Mr Robert Adukule, a trader who frequently travels to Obongi, says: "A bad road is like a locked door. Even foreign investors are attracted to areas with good roads because they spend less time transporting materials. This road from Manibe to Obongi is very important because many people use it for official du-

Bumpy roads delay growth in West Nile



Travellers use a section of the bumpy Nebbi-Goli-Paidha road at Jukia Hill in Nebbi District on Saturday. PHOTO/FELIX WAROM OKELLO

ties and trade."

During the rainy season, vehicles often become stuck for hours or even days in the reddish mud, leaving traders counting losses and residents angered by delayed government intervention.

"Good roads do not just make travel easier; they reshape how an entire region functions. When transport becomes faster, cheaper and more reliable, it unlocks multiple layers of economic and social growth," Mr Adukule says.

Deep in parts of Obongi District, floods regularly render roads impassable, causing pupils and teachers to miss lessons. In hotspots such as Kali, Itula and Palorinya, flooded roads cut off access to health centres, schools and markets.

Flooded roads

Ms Yemimah Akandru, a parent and smallholder farmer, says: "Last term, my children missed classes because the road was flooded. They stayed home for days. How can we talk about development when even reaching school is a struggle?"

"When I harvest groundnuts, I lose almost a quarter before they reach the market. By the time transport arrives, some would have already got spoiled. If the road was better, I would earn more and my children would eat better," she says.

During the recent presidential campaigns, district leaders across West Nile repeatedly raised concerns about the region's poor infrastructure. They argued

WEST NILE AND THE 2026/27 FY PLAN

On April 1, Mr Tony Awany, the MP for Nwoya County in Nwoya District, chaired the Parliamentary Physical Infrastructure Committee during the scrutiny of the Ministerial Policy Statements for the Financial Year 2026/2027 under the Integrated Transport and Infrastructure Services programme in Kampala. Together with the Minister of Works and Transport, Gen

Edward Katumba Wamala, and a team of technical officials, updates were provided on the status of roads across the country.

Among the projects highlighted in West Nile were the Laropi Bridge, whose procurement process is ongoing and construction is expected to begin by December 2026; the Yumbe-Moyo road, where civil works are ongoing under World Bank funding; and the proposed Pakwach Bridge ferry services, whose design process is still underway.

that if they were to continue voting for the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government, key roads had to be prioritised for tarmacking.

Among the roads highlighted were the Nebbi-Goli-Warr-Vurra road, Pakwach-Wadelai-Madi Okollo road, Manibe-Terego-Yumbe-Obongi road, Obongi-Moyo road and the Pakwach-Panyimur-Parombo-Erussi road, all of which leaders described as urgent because of their heavy traffic volumes.

While campaigning in Pakwach on October 7 last year, President Museveni told supporters: "For me, I like roads, railways and electricity because they drive investments. We have already worked on the Karuma-Pakwach-Arua-Oraba road and it is under repair. The Nebbi-Goli road will definitely be

worked on." He added: "Before I leave West Nile, I will give you details of who will tarmac it."

While campaigning in Madi Okollo on October 13, Mr Museveni also said: "We have plans for the roads from Pakwach-Wadelai to Rhino Camp. It is part of the roads earmarked for tarmacking in the next plan."

His remarks across West Nile renewed hopes among residents, although many remain sceptical after years of unfulfilled promises.

No gain to protect

However, former Arua Municipality MP Kassiano Wadri of the Alliance for National Transformation (ANT) believes there are "no gains worth protect-

ing" given the region's continued infrastructural challenges.

"For many years now, I have seen nothing to protect. Key sectors such as roads, health, education and agriculture are still lagging behind in West Nile."

He added: "The NRM government has scored zero on the Nebbi-Paidha-Vurra road because it has remained a forgotten promise. They used to call the Manibe road 'Wadri Road' when I was MP for Terego County, yet it remains in a terrible state. It is laughable."

President Museveni's campaign slogan in the last election was "protecting the gains."

Unlocking the future

Last month, the Senior Advisory Consultant for West Nile Region Strategic Development, Mr Joel Aita, told the *Daily Monitor* that good roads are critical in attracting investment.

"Businesses prefer areas where goods and workers can move efficiently. With good roads, investors are more willing to establish factories," he said.

"No other urban centre in the region sits at the intersection of four national economies spanning a territory larger than Western Europe. The borders of Uganda, the DR Congo, South Sudan and the Central African Republic are not walls," he explained.

"They are arteries through which an estimated \$800m (about Shs3 trillion) in informal cross-border trade flows annually, much of it passing through these roads — largely untracked, untaxed and unfinanced," he added.

Mr Aita noted that formalising even a fraction of this trade through infrastructure such as bonded warehouses, one-stop border posts and certified agro-processing facilities would generate returns far greater than the initial investment costs.

Ray of hope

For travellers using the Koboko-Yumbe-Moyo road, there is at least some optimism.

Ms Halima Anguko, a trader, said: "The tarmacking of this road would boost business because it connects to South Sudan. With the few kilometres already completed, movement has become faster and easier. If all the major roads in West Nile are improved, it will create more opportunities for cross-border trade."

On the Koboko-Moyo-Yumbe road, machines continue carving through the earth, levelling surfaces and replacing dust with smooth black tarmac. At first, residents watched from a distance with uncertainty, but confidence is slowly growing. Once completed, taxi operators will also be able to make more trips each day between Arua and Moyo.

Meanwhile, the construction of the Atiak-Adjumani road has already brought relief and excitement among road users, many of whom say trade has improved considerably.