

Decentralise Namugongo tourism promotion

The Catholic, Anglican and Muslim Namugongo Martyrs shrines are key Ugandan uniting national symbols and tourist attractions.

They are actually Pan African and also broader international religious sites. For apart from the two and half million Ugandans who are estimated to have trekked to Namugongo this year, about 10,000 were international pilgrims.

These came from Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda Burundi, DR Congo, Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, the US, Britain, Ireland, Germany, Mexico, Canada, Italy and as far as Australia.

For a country that was traumatised by a history of religious and ethnic sectarianism, these three martyrs' shrines have a uniting potential. Namugongo is also the biggest tourist attraction in Africa.

Based on the above estimates of the tourists that visited this year and assuming that each one of them spent at minimum between sh50,000 and sh100,000, then Uganda earned about \$50m from this year's Uganda Martyrs Day religious tourism and festivities.

However, for Uganda to maximally benefit from Namugongo's potential, then the dysfunctional and grossly underfunded Wakiso district, requires to be decentralised.

For as the old adage goes "...you cannot eat your cake and concurrently have it!" This in turn would enable the resultant organic local governments to optimally manage their affairs and their offering the required service delivery, which all in turn would



boost this area's tourism potential.

For instance, the required creation of Kira-Nangabo district (or better still Namugongo district) with a combined population of 500,000 people, would ensure that this area gets a public general hospital to service the medical needs of its residents and indeed those of the millions of tourists who religiously visit its sites every year.

In the past, three Catholic Popes, starting with Pope Paul (VI) in 1969 and the Anglican's Archbishop Roberts Runcie of Canterbury, in 1984, visited and led prayers at these sites. This in addition to scores of national and visiting heads of state and hundreds of other dignitaries.

This trend is bound to increase. That is given the developments that are occurring at these three localities, such as the construction of a grand Martyrs Museum spearheaded by retired Archbishop Mpalanyi Nkoyoyo, that is taking place at the Anglican site.

The creation of Kira-Nangabo district, would also enable this area obtain a district

road unit. This would ensure that its roads are well maintained, which is a prerequisite to attracting and sustaining tourism.

The required decentralisation also requires Nangabo (150,000 people) becoming a municipality. Currently, most municipalities, say Entebbe, Kumi or Rukungiri do not have this population size. Kira municipality with a population of 320,000 people and which is the second largest gazetted urban centre after Kampala, requires to be sub-divided into four more divisions.

For currently it only has three divisions similar to Lugazi, Kisoro and Koboko municipalities whose combined population is not even half of that of Kira alone! This required decentralisation of Kira would in turn boost service delivery and the promotion of Namugongo as Uganda's and Africa's prime tourism destination!

For equity and the required accessing of services to the other citizens of the currently dysfunctional Wakiso district, they would be need to decentralise it further into Entebbe (Makindye Sabagabo, Sisa, Katabi, Kasanje, Bussi and Entebbe) Busiro East, Kyadondo North and Busiro North districts.

Apart from the latter, each of these would have an approximate population of 500,000 people; which, according to the 2014 national census results, is double the national median size of a population of Ugandan districts. For then it was only 240,000 people, when we had 117 districts.

The writer is an ambassador and Uganda's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations

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The writer is- advocate. H- Forum in Wi- Dialogue Pl-