

# Slow progress on tourism road construction

**INACCESSIBLE.** Getting to Uganda's tourism spots is cumbersome owing to poor roads, many of which are due to be upgraded or reconstructed

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The Mbale-Sironko-Budadiri-Bumasiywa Road - a key link for tourism - is one of the most perished in the country despite being a key economic link. A number of sections including bridges were washed away by the rains, while others have numerous diversions that make driving a nightmare for tourists and motorists visiting the Mt Elgon National Park. "The parlous condition of the roads is holding back growth and development of tourism in this area especially when it rains," says Fred Kizza, warden of Mt Elgon National Park. The park received 3075 visitors in 2016.

Kizza reveals that this particular route also connects to tourist attractions such as Pian Upe National reserve and Kidepo National parks in North eastern Uganda thus making access difficult for tourists.

"With the Mbale-Sironko-Nakapiripiri-Pien Upe National reserve roads in very bad shape, a one-day journey from the northern Karamoja region to Kampala, the capital city, may take travellers three days or more because in the rainy season, many roads are impassable," he says.



A heavy truck stuck along the Sironko-Nakapiripiri Road which leads to Pian Upe Reserve. PHOTO BY DAVID MAFABI

72

NUMBER OF TOURISM ROADS EARMARKED FOR CONSTRUCTION.

Board, the number of tourists visiting Uganda had hit the 1.74m visitors' mark in 2015 and the target is more than two million visitors by the end of 2017 once the construction of the roads that lead to these tourism hubs are completed.

"We incur high expenses on vehicle repair along the roads during our tours, especially on the Sironko-Budadiri road, Wanale Road and Mbale-Budada during the rainy season," says Swalley Namanyi, the executive director at Cass Uganda Safaris, a tourist travel company. The operators have adapted to using strong costly tour trucks for their expeditions.

According to Dr Fred Muhumuzza, a renowned development economist and researcher, if we do not have right infrastructure to propel tourism business competitiveness in the region, our efforts to turn tourism from merely valuable natural resource into a high income-generating activity will be in vain.

"We must find a strategy and consolidate the current benefits under tourism, but also look at how we can improve our roads to attract more tourists," says Dr Muhumuzza adding that there are underlying problems that cut across Uganda's economy and also affect tourism which must

be addressed as a whole such as limited marketing and competition from neighbouring countries.

**Construction progress made**

"UNRA has started construction on some roads. For others, procuring of the works contract is ongoing under the ADB financing while

others such as Buhoma [45km], Kabale - Lake Bunyonyi [12km] and Kisoro - Mgahinga National Park Headquarters [17km], the designs have commenced and are expected to be complete by 2018 to commence construction works. I think all is not bad," says Asimwe.

According to the Principal Public

**TOURISM CONTRIBUTION**

**HIGH EXCHANGE EARNER**

Currently, the tourism sector is the fastest growing with annual growth rate of 21 per cent and contributing at least 24 per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings. The Figures from the 7th Annual Tourism Sector Performance Report indicate that tourism is a pillar of Uganda's economy, contributing nearly Sh7.5b to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the financial year 2015/2016. This translates into 9 per cent of the country's GDP.

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

With the Ministry of Tourism stating that the year 2017 is a year for tourism sector development, according to minister Prof Ephraim Kamuntu that have already started re-positioning themselves and promoting the country as a top tourist destination.

"Government is now committed to improve roads going to game parks and other tourist attractions to make them easily accessible to visitors. Power and lodges in those places need also to be improved," said Prof Kamuntu. Vice chairperson of Parliament's Budget Committee on Tourism, Ignasius Mudimi Wamakuyu [MP Elgon County in Bujumbuli district] highlights the need to increase the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities budget to at least 2 per cent from the current 0.13 per cent (Shs 30.8b).

# Construction crippling the sector

## Status of tourism road construction in zones

**R**oad construction status in the seven tourism zones is as follows:

- South Western zone** [Bwindi impenetrable national park and Mgahinga Gorilla national park and associated environments has nine roads measuring 340km; procurement done for two roads, the two under construction while design studies are ongoing for five roads.
- Western Rift valley zone** [Queen Elizabeth, Rwenzori, Saramba National Parks, Bwindi-Bugyo hot springs, Lake Edward and George] has 16

roads measuring 849km, two completed, one under procurement while 13 are still under feasibility study.

- Murchison Falls Zone:** [Murchison falls National park, Lake Albert areas, Wildlife reserves, Budongo forest and associated environments] has 13 roads measuring 978km. Four roads are under construction, four no work has been done on four roads under the district local governments of Nebbi, Hoima and Adjumani while one road is under procurement.



It takes many hours to get to Uganda's national parks due to bad roads. PHOTO BY DAVID MAFABI

- Kidepo Tourism Zone** [Kidepo valley national park, Mt Kadam, Wildlife Reserves and historical sites] has 14 roads measuring 1317km with five roads under design study, two roads completed, one under procurement, two under construction while four roads are under the district local governments and works are yet to commence.
- Mt Elgon Tourism Zone** [Mt Elgon national park and associated environments] has nine roads measuring 272km; two roads are under construction,

three roads under detailed design study, one road completed, one road yet to be advertised for bidding and one is under district local government.

- Jinja Tourism Zone** [Jinja and Kayunga] has two roads under the district local governments of Kayunga and Jinja. Works are yet to begin.
- Kalangala Tourism zone** [Masaka] has nine roads measuring 310km with eight roads under engineering designs study while one road is under procurement and work is expected to commence soon.



A man attempts to dig vehicles out of the mud along the Namugamba-Budadiri Road to Mt Elgon. PHOTO BY DAVID MAFABI

9%

CONSTRUCTION WORK COMPLETED ON TOTAL NUMBER OF PLANNED TOURISM ROADS

If I had to be somewhere in Uganda right now, it would definitely be...



**KALANGALA:** I love the nature, water and the scenery. Kalangala provides a good getaway. I also love the fresh fish which is served there. The whole environment is adventurous and great for being away from the usual. It is also fun since travel there is by ferry which gives one a good view of Lake Victoria.

RHONA NABISINDE, SOCIAL WORKER



**MURCHISON FALLS CONSERVATION:** Composed of Murchison falls National Park, Bugungu and Karuma Falls wildlife reserves, it has a variety of wildlife and bird species. It is where the Nile falls through a narrow gorge, cascading down. It becomes a placid river whose banks are thronged with hippos, crocodiles and buffaloes.

SIMON SSENKURUGU, ARCHITECT



**NGAMBA ISLAND:** Ngamba Island on Lake Victoria has beautiful scenery and above all, doubles as a sanctuary for chimpanzees. The food is simply amazing as a result of exotic herbs which give the food a great taste. The island's location calls for use of water transport which allows for sightings along the lake shore.

DOREEN AKOT, NURSE



**MURCHISON FALLS:** While there, you will encounter the lions and crocodiles among other animals. The star attraction is the waterfalls, with an impressive spray of water which can be seen mid-air. One can best appreciate the beauty of the falls while hiking along the riverbank. This is an experience that one should not miss.

ALVIN KISEKULO, TEACHER  
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