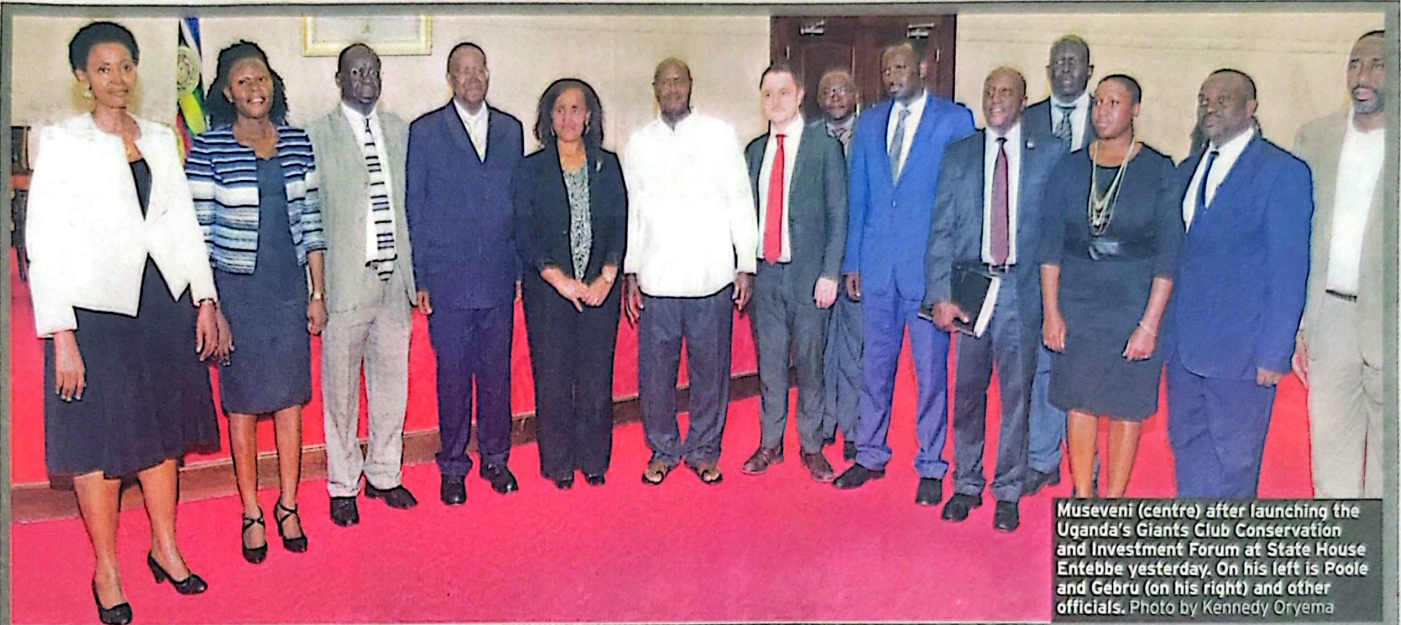




Museveni (centre) after launching the Uganda's Giants Club Conservation and Investment Forum at State House Entebbe yesterday. On his left is Poole and Gebru (on his right) and other officials. Photo by Kennedy Oryema

RALLYING SUPPORT

Uganda will host a tourism investment forum meeting in October

By David Lumu

Rather than concentrate on the age limit debate, which he said has no political bearing for now, President Yoweri Museveni yesterday said all efforts should be channelled towards creating a safe environment for investment in the country.

Museveni said by hosting the tourism forum on investment, the country will open doors for investors to build the booming tourism sector in the country, which is in line with the goal of Government — transforming Uganda from a peasant society to a middle-income state by 2020.

This was during a press conference at State House, Entebbe, which he summoned, to rally support for the tourism investment forum meeting that Uganda will host in October.

Museveni said the tourism investment forum will not only spur long-term and strategic investment in the tourism sector, but also secure long-term funding sources for the protection network of Uganda's protected wildlife and conservation areas.

Increasing foreign exchange

The target of the Government, Museveni explained, is to ensure that the number of tourists coming into the country increases from the current 1.3 million to four million by 2020.

Increasing the foreign exchange earnings from tourism to \$2.7b by 2020, from the current \$1.3b, is the other target that the President wants implemented by stakeholders in the

Museveni launches new tourism drive



TOURISM IN UGANDA

- The country recorded a total of 1.73 million international arrivals and 1.71 million departures in 2015.
- The number of visitors to national parks increased from about 202,885 in 2014 to about 215,558 in 2015.
- The most popularly visited national park in 2015 was Murchison Falls (34%), followed by Queen Elizabeth (30%) and Lake Mburo National Park (12%).
- 36% of the visitors to national parks were foreigners, who are non-residents.
- Uganda has 12 national parks and three active game reserves. These offer a wide range of tourism products, including gorilla tracking, nature guided walks, village walks, butterfly and bird watching, rare fauna and flora species.
- The number of visitors increased from 203,000 in 2014 to 216,000 in 2015, representing a 6% increase.

SOURCE: UBOS abstract, 2016

tourism sector.

"We also hope that the forum will help us create jobs," he said, urging organisers not to invite poor people masquerading as investors to the summit, but rather moguls who will

invest heavily in the tourism sector of Uganda.

Giants Club, a conservation charity organisation, are the organisers, led by Oliver Poole, the executive director.

He emphasised that there two major

challenges to the tourism sector in Africa — underdevelopment and democracy.

On underdevelopment, Museveni said the majority of people in Africa are still dependent on agriculture for a living, unlike developed countries such as the US, where the majority are in the service and industry sectors, with only 2% being involved in agriculture.

"If you want to support conservation sustainability, then assist these countries to become modern," he said.

This was a repeat of a message he delivered last year in Laikipia, Kenya, when he inaugurated the Giant Club, which is mainly concerned with the protection of elephants in the region.

INCREASING VISITORS

Uganda targets to increase the number of tourists from 1.3 million to four million by 2020

In 1986, Museveni said Uganda had only 500 elephants compared to 5,000 now. "Uganda is one of the few countries where poaching is minimal," he said.

On democracy, the President said it creates a clash between the need to conserve game reserves and other wildlife areas and the need to cultivate these areas.

"People go to national parks and when you remove them, they do not vote for you. Many politicians are opportunists; they do not want to annoy voters. Therefore, we must build an organic society. We cannot go on with a peasant society where peasants also produce peasants and you think we are growing," he said.

The tourism minister, Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu and Almaz Gebru, the UNDP country director, also attended the press briefing.