

Kitgum official, CAO lock horns over district land title

Demand. The officer claims he used Shs17m of his own money to pay for the title, money he wants the district to refund to him before he surrenders the crucial document.

BY DAN MICHEAL KOMAKECH
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

KITGUM. Kitgum District's senior land officer Mathew Otto is holding on to a land title the district needs to pave way for the construction of a market in Orom Sub-county.

Mr Otto claims he used Shs17m of his own money to pay for the title, money he wants the district to refund to him before he 'surrenders' the crucial document.

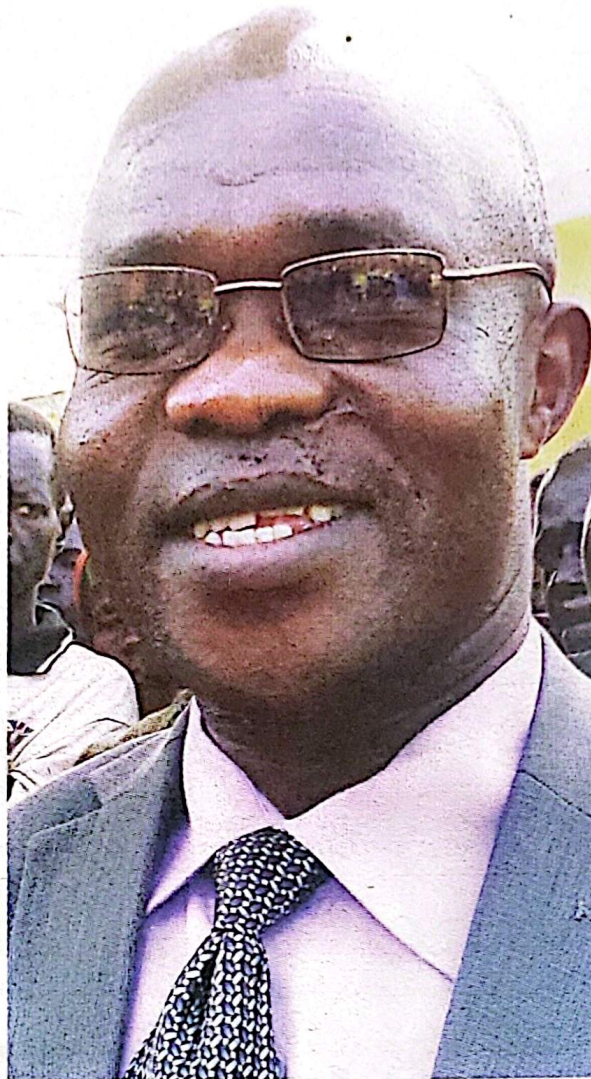
M/s Omara Atubo & Co Advocates, which claims to be acting on Mr Otto's behalf, has written to the district asking it to refund Mr Otto's money.

The advocate says should the district fail to refund the money within one week, the matter would be taken to a court of law.

Kitgum District chief administrative officer Joseph Lomongin confirmed the district has received the demand notice.

He said he was still perusing the letter before deciding on the next course of action.

He, however, said the district



On the spot. Kitgum District chief administrative officer Joseph Lomongin. PHOTO BY CISSY MAKUMBI.

BACKGROUND

Mr Otto claims he used his money to get the land title because the Trade ministry 'urgently required' the document yet the district reportedly did not have funds to survey the land and secure the land title.

It was in this context that some district officials allegedly requested Mr Otto to help to secure the document.

Up to this stage, the officials who reportedly asked for Mr Otto's help remain unnamed.

had written to Mr Otto asking him to hand over the title.

"It could be true that Mr Otto used his money to secure the title. But he has to produce clear and genuine accountability before the district explores refunding the money," he said.

The matter comes on the heels of the district council's

directive asking Mr Lomongin to ensure his office gets the land title since he is the custodian of district assets.

The Kitgum District vice chairperson, Mr Gaston Billgrahm Odongkara, said there is no evidence that Mr Otto used Shs17m to secure the title.

Mr Odongkara, who also

doubles as the district secretary for finance and planning, questioned Mr Otto's decision to use personal funds for a district item.

He added that Mr Otto's adamancy was stalling the establishment of the multibillion border market project at Okuti in Orom Sub-county.

The site for the market is close to the border between Uganda and South Sudan.

Once complete, the market is expected to generate revenue for the district since many traders operating between Uganda and South Sudan use it as a base.

In 2014, 17 clans offered 269,482 hectares of land for the construction of the market.

The offer followed government 'expression of interest' in establishing a modern market near the Uganda-South Sudan border to boost regional trade.

The move was informed by the Common Market for East and Southern Africa policy to promote regional trade.

Expected returns

According to projections, once ready, the market would bring Shs25b annually into Kitgum District's coffers.

During a visit to the district last month, the Trade ministry's permanent secretary, Mr Julius Onen, commended the district for 'securing' the land title for the Okuti border market.

He said upon completion of the construction, the market might be the biggest border market at the Uganda-South Sudan border - bigger than the one at Elegu border crossing.

Uganda has six border markets, including Malaba at the Uganda-Kenyan border, Mutukula (Uganda-Tanzanian border), Katuna (Uganda-Rwanda border), Bwera at the Uganda-Democratic Republic of Congo and Elegu.