

By Ronald Mugabe

Uganda tourism campaign turns to promoting culture

Ugandans should embrace their cultures and promote them as a tool to steer the nation into the desired middle-income status, the state minister for tourism, Godfrey Suubi Kiwanda, has said.

Addressing the youth during the second annual Uganda International Cultural Tourism Fair at the Uganda Museum in Kampala on Friday, Kiwanda highlighted the fact that culture is the only thing that cannot be duplicated.

He said culture is the biggest tool that can bring huge volumes of foreign currency into the economy by attracting millions of tourists.

"It is our role as the young generation of this country to take the mantle and promote our culture. Culture is not politics. We can work together to promote our cultures, irrespective of our political inclinations," Kiwanda advised.

"When one appreciates and enjoys their culture, it is easier for others to enjoy it too. Today, we are getting only about 1.5 million tourists a year, yet Kenya hosts over eight million tourists a year. But even with only 1.5 million visitors, tourism is contributing almost 10% to our national Gross Domestic Product. That means if we raise our capacity to four million visitors, we shall be able to contribute a lot more than the 10%. Let us put tourism and culture at the forefront to boost our economy," he added.

The minister also revealed that renovation of the country's



An exhibitor from Igongo Cultural Centre, Enid Kyarikundo, showing some cultural items from western Uganda to Kiwanda, Mutuuzo, Tumusiime and Kyagulanyi. Photo by Ronnie Kijambu

biggest museum is yet to be launched.

Peace Mutuuzo, the state minister for gender and culture, also reiterated Kiwanda's appeal and emphasised that culture is an area Ugandans need to continue researching on.

She called on the youth to

identify new aspects that can be employed on the international scene to attract tourists.

"This calls for protection, preservation and promotion of our cultural diversity as a country. The Government has undertaken a number of strategies to protect and preserve

the rich cultural heritage of the country. Our work and task is to market it," she stated.

"Of late, we are looking at the creative industry as the fastest growing industry and since our culture is so diverse, it is one of the areas we can tap into to get not only to the middle-income

status, but also first-income status," she added.

Former chairman of Uganda Tourism Board, James Tumusiime, who is the proprietor of Igongo Cultural Centre in Mbarara, said there is need for Ugandans to use culture as a platform to

understand each other and this in turn will attract tourists into the country.

He noted that musicians should be brought on board so that they sing songs that depict Uganda's cultures, while artists can help through showcasing painted or hand-made materials.

Tumusiime cited Uganda's Vision 2040, which recognises tourism as a key player, but the country still depends on nature and wildlife tourism, which he says is not fair. He said there is need for embracing other tourism potentials such as culture.

"When one appreciates and enjoys their culture, it is easier for others to enjoy it too."

Kiwanda

Kyadondo East MP Robert Kagulanyi (Bobi Wine) stated that Uganda for a long time has benchmarked her tourism potential on nature, physical features and wildlife, but it is time "we put more emphasis on our diverse cultures because culture is a more marketable resource".