



# Stalled Obote hotel turns into tourist attraction

**Attraction.** During a recent visit to the area, *Daily Monitor* discovered that the land where the proposed hotel was to be erected is preserved.

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## KEY ISSUES

**Request.** The residents say developing infrastructure in the area will attract more tourists, which will in turn increase market and job creation for unemployed youth.

**Response.** The Resident District Commissioner for Mbale, Mr James Shilaku, when contacted for comment said he will first consult before he can give a conclusive response.

**MBALE.** In 1971, shortly before he was overthrown, president Milton Obote had laid a foundation stone for the construction of one of the biggest hotels in East Africa on top of Mt Wanale in Mbale District. This was to spur tourism in the area but the much awaited hotel construction stalled.

What now lies at the construction site is a big white foundation stone that had been laid as a launch of construction process. The usual perception would be that the place is bushy but on the contrary, it is maintained and in a form of football pitch.

During a recent visit to top of Uganda's table mountain, *Daily Monitor* discovered that the land where the proposed hotel was to be erected is preserved following the failed attempt for the last 46 years.

When you stand at the proposed construction site, there is a feel of serenity, cool weather and you are also able to view many of the neighbouring districts of Mbale.

If you are into mountain climbing or trekking, the site is spread 21.9 kilometres away from Mbale Town, in Subali Village, Bubetsye Parish. Traces of tarmac on the road are still vivid al-

though dilapidated.

Mr Boniface Shabile, 70, one of the residents in the area, says as elders and sons of the land, they have continued to attach a lot of significance and respect to the abandoned construction site.

"We have left that land unexploited as a sign of tribute to our beloved president Obote, and also for historical purposes. I always refer to it to inform my grandchildren about the past," he says while pointing at the site.

Mr Shabile, who was one of the casual workers when the Europeans were constructing the road in 1971 as part of plans to build the hotel, says they worked tirelessly to see it built.

"We volunteered to work tirelessly because we knew it was going to change our community to access education, health and household income for our children in future but that never happened," he says.

Explaining why there was need to tarmac the road, Mr Shabile says it was intended to ease transport for the tourists to access the area since it is hilly and hard-to-reach.

Mr Christopher Mafabi, the Wanale Sub-county chairperson, explains that the site was chosen because it has a breathtaking view to all surrounding districts including Sebei and Tororo.

"When you stand here, you can view all surrounding areas. It is exciting," he exclaims. He adds: "The area is well positioned and selling destination to attract tourists."

Mr Mafabi also notes that the moun-

## Voices



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tain peak is lively and that it has several tourist sites such as escarpment, deep valleys, water streaked cliffs, caves and rocks.

"Wanale has imposing beauty from the distance but when you stand here at top, it reveals far much more how Uganda as a nation is gifted. This is being ignored by the current leadership yet it can change the lives of ordinary people in the area and country at large," he says.

Mr Apollo Natiko, the village chairperson says on weekends, he receives more than 20 tourists from different parts of the world.

"They ask me to show them where the hotel was supposed to be built, the caves and waterfalls, among others. They leave pleased and most of them come back," he says, while crossing -checking his visitors' book at his home that is a few metres way from the construction site.

Some of the common caves on Mt Wanale include Kakhukha, Namali and Kusi. He says developing infrastructure in the area will attract more tourists, which will in turn increase market and job creation for unemployed youth.

"We grow fresh and organic food which is on high demand but we cannot access market due to poor road network," he says.

He says as community leaders, they are willing to hand over the land to any investor to take over the project if the government cannot do it.

"We want the project to be com-

pleted because this is our dream. We will welcome any body including the investors to develop the site as long as we are fully compensated," he said.

Another resident, Mr Patrick Siondo says some of frustrated residents have sold part of the land near the site to companies like radio stations and telecommunication companies to build transmitters and masks due to lack of commitment from district leadership and government to develop the place.

Mr Saleh Naminya, CEO, Casa Uganda Safaris limited says Mt Wanale is one of the sites in Bugisu sub-region which is more visited by the tourists before. She adds that the challenge remains with poor infrastructure and lack of accommodation.

"If there was accommodation on top of the mountain, the rate at which tourists would climb that hill to the peak every day would be high," he notes.

Mr Naminya observes that the tourists whom they guide to Mt Wanale are overwhelmed at the sight of waterfalls and caves.

Mr Hussein Kato Madada, the chairperson of Mt Elgon Eco System Forum, is of the view that the government should prioritise the building of infrastructure to boost tourism.

The Mbale Municipality MP, Mr Jack Wamai, blamed the government for failing to build on the projects of the past regimes and it's instead destroying them.

"The government has failed in its responsibility of implementing projects that benefit the nation. Now like such a project, it was intended for the well-being of the ordinary citizens but the government pays a deaf ear yet they want steady progress," he says.

He says building of hotel would help government fight household poverty in that community but government has neglected it.

The RDC, Mbale, Mr James Shilaku when contacted for comment said he will first consult before he can give a conclusive response.