



Abandoned. Cows grazing at a site where Masaka Industrial Park was expected to be constructed. PHOTO BY ALI MAMBULE

# Masaka industrial park fails to attract investors

**Long wait.** Residents of Masaka were made to re-imagine a town with a flurry of activity as President Museveni launched an industrial park in the area two years ago, but, as **Ali Mambule** and **Al-Mahdi Ssenkabirwa** report, the land on which the factories are supposed to sit lies deserted as the search for investors appears fruitless.

The cows and goats are grazing. Rodents have burrowed troughs at different spots; grass is growing luxuriantly. The only evidence that this is what is supposed to be the Greater Masaka Agro-Processing Industrial Park is the foundation stone laid by the President when he launched it two years ago.

The 960-acre piece in Mazigo Village, Bukakata Sub-county, was unveiled in June 2015 during a function presided over by President Museveni with the view of benefitting some 40,000 Ugandans. It was to be supported by the China-African Friendship Association Uganda, in partnership with Chinese Schuan Province.

"I thought that the project would take off after the 2016 general elections, but there is no sign that will happen soon," Mr James Mugwanya, a herdsman tending his cattle on site, says.

The idea was driven by Vice President Edward Kiwanuka Ssekandi, an MP for Masaka, who approached the Chinese in 2013. According to the Memorandum of Understanding

that was signed between Masaka District and the Chinese under their consortium China African Friendship Association Uganda, the former were required to provide free land for the industrial park.

Masaka District identified the land to host the project.

The Chinese would then identify investors from their country. Initially, the Chinese investors were to inject \$300 million into the project.

They would also set up several agro-processing plants dealing in tea, coffee, and animal multiplication centres. The enterprise would integrate tea and fruit processing, pork packing and fish cage farming as well.

#### Questions from the community

During a recent community forum (*baraza*) held at Lambu Landing Site in Bukakata, Bukoto East MP Florence Namayanja asked Ms Mary Karoro Okurut, the minister for General Duties in the Prime Minister's Office, on the progress of the project. Ms Karoro, who had represented Mr Ssekandi at the function, skipped the question by the Opposition legislator.

To Mr Aloysius Jjuuko, the sub-county chairperson for Bukakata, there is an alternative way to do it.

"There are local investors who are eager to invest in such big projects but they have not been given the opportunity," Jjuuko says.

There is an apparent coordination problem

## \$300m

AMOUNT OF MONEY CHINESE INVESTORS WERE EXPECTED TO INJECT INTO THE GREATER MASAKA AGRO-PROCESSING INDUSTRIAL PARK

lem. Former Masaka District chairperson Joseph Kalungi chaired the Greater Masaka Regional Consortium which supported the industrial park project, but his successor, Mr Jude Mbabaali, says is not involved in its running.

"I am not in position to comment about that project because I have never received any document regarding its establishment," Mr Mbabaali says.

But Mr Kalungi, who lost the district leadership to Mr Mbabaali in 2006, insists that the project is still ongoing, adding that identifying investors is a process which must be given enough time to be realised.

The Memorandum of Understanding they signed with the Chinese, Mr Kalungi says, "is still binding." He adds: "Of course the delay may affect the project to some extent, but it will at one time become a reality."

Mr Kalungi, however, blames the new district leadership for the laxity to follow up the projects that were in pipeline at the time of elections including the stalled industrial park project.

"I suspect that the new Masaka District leadership is intentionally neglecting this project," Mr Kalungi said, citing a number of projects that have come to a standstill because of what he describes as "lack of political will" from the current local leadership which is dominated by Opposition Democratic Party members.

Mr David Bulonge, the vice chairperson China-Africa Friendship Association in Uganda, says the Masaka Industrial Park was disadvantaged by the timing, having been unveiled at a time when the country was preparing for general elections.

"After the elections, the then consortium chairperson Joseph Kalungi and many other local leaders, including district councillors in the eight districts of Masaka sub-region, lost in the elections, meaning that the new office bearers had to be brought on board. This has been done. Since the initiators of the project were NRM members, the DP members who are in office today at all levels view it as an NRM project, which is not the case," Mr Bulonge says.

According to Mr Bulonge, the project was also delayed by the need to conduct an environment impact assessment study since it is located in a vast wetland that drains into Lake Victoria.

China Construction and Communication Company Ltd (CCCC), which is building the Entebbe-Kampala Expressway, was supposed to build roads, drainage systems and other physical infrastructure at the industrial site.

#### Preparations

Mr Bulonge says some preparatory work has been done. He says the consortium has so far sent 60 youth from Greater Masaka to China to study the Chinese language, and