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IMPACT

One of the most basic aims of the project was to improve the pot-holed riddled road, travelling along which has over the years been a nightmare due to the terrible state into which it descends especially during the rainy seasons. This has not been achieved due to delays in commencement of work.

It had been envisaged that upgrading the road would lead to an upsurge in the volumes of traffic between Kenya and Uganda, which would in turn serve as a catalyst in boosting trade and commerce between the two countries and allow farmers to access markets inside and outside of Uganda, but that has not happened.

Those in the transport business have not been spared. Vehicles easily break down and fuel consumption is much higher on account of the pathetic state of the road.

The cost of cost of doing business has remained high in terms of both time and money. Movement of goods continues to be a problem, which continues to undermine efforts to grow business and trade in the area.

The Elgon region in which the road is meant to pass is one of the leading producers of Coffee due to the high soil fertility levels and abundant rainfalls experienced in the area.

Coffee is also one of the biggest cash cows the region a source of livelihoods for families and communities in the area, but one of the biggest hurdles has been lack of access to markets on account of the terrible state of the road.

This has often meant that traders who brave the road in order to buy the coffee either underpay the farmers in order to make up for the toll that it takes on their vehicles, or the farmers have to bear the high cost of transportation on the roads in order to ferry their coffee to area where they can be offered better prices.

The expected ease of access to schools and health centres has also not happened.



Agreement. The executive director of the Uganda National Roads Authority (Unra), Ms Allen Kagina, signs a contract for the upgrading of Mbale-Lwakhaka road.



Explaining: Mark Saali.

OFFICIAL EXPLANATION

Unra's director for Communications, Mark Saali, says that the project has slightly been pegged back over issues evolving around compensation of people who will be affected by the works, but that the Authority is working around the clock to ensure that compensation is expedited to allow for the work to begin.

"The contractor is now fully mobilised and ready to go. As Unra, we expect to begin paying Project Affected Persons (PAPs) for the first 10km at end of this week and through next week. The contractor will start work straight away. We will then pay the PAPs for the next 10km soon after that," he said.



MONITOR'S POSITION

Investment in the road infrastructure in West Nile region and Western Uganda as seen with the Arua-Vurra-Oraba road, the Ntungamo-Mirama Hills road and the Mityana-Fort Portal road have sparked off unprecedented levels of growth in those regions. Trading centres have sprouted and businesses have grown in leaps and bounds. It is a scenario which the people in Mbale and Manafwa are no doubt looking forward to.

This is both about the short term benefits such as the jobs that it will open up, but also about the long term benefits including the fact that it will not only spur growth, but also serve as a strategic link between Uganda and Kenya through Lwakhaka and the Kampala-Gulu-Juba corridor. It will eventually become an alternate regional and national trade and transport route for Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Burundi.

Given the immense benefits that are bound to accrue from the same, it is incumbent upon Unra to expedite the compensation process to allow for work to begin.

VOICES



"When it rains, the road becomes impassable. It affects us tremendously because we cannot go to Mbale Town and the people in Mbale cannot come this side. It also becomes impossible to transport produce or any other commodities. It is so frustrating. Government should act very fast on this road or else we shall have to stage a demonstration," FRED MUJEMU, RESIDENT OF MANAFWA.



"We have decided whenever it rains, we do not work because we fear to get stuck along road. This affects us as drivers, but it also affects the community too because they cannot move. The government should therefore speed up the process of tarmacking the road as it has the potential to spur business in the area," JOSEPH WALWEBULE, VICE CHAIRMAN MANAFWA-BUDUDA DRIVERS STAGE



"We are not happy with the pace of works on the road. It is not to our expectations because by now the road should have been quarter way done. The government is yet to compensate the affected residents before the works can start. As leaders, we are having a lot of pressure from the community since most of them think that the road is under the district," RONALD KIMANAYI, VICE CHAIRPERSON MANAFWA DISTRICT.



"The road will spur economic growth at the border post and in the interior. It will promote trade, which will have overwhelming returns for both the government and local people. When completed it will also act to shorten the route from the Kenyan sea port of Mombasa to South Sudan," MIKE WERIKHE, STATE MINISTER FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY