

NEMA clears construction of oil roads

By Nelson Kiva

The National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) has cleared the construction of six roads and two bridges in the oil region.

The deputy executive director of NEMA, Christine Akello, said the environment authority cleared the project, following the presentation of satisfactory environmental impact assessment reports for the construction and possible mitigation measures by the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA).

The roads are Masindi-Paraa-Buliisa; Buhimba-Nalweyo-Bulamagi; Lusalira-Nkonge-Lumegere-Ssembabule; Masindi-Biiso, Kabaale-Kiziramfumbi and Hohwa-Nyairongo-Kyaruseha.

The bridges are Tanga Gate and Emmi bridges.

The third schedule of the National Environmental Act, Cap 153, Section 3 requires undertaking environmental impact assessment before implementation.

The article also states that any major repairs, extensions or routine maintenance of roads in scenic, wooded or mountainous areas undertake the assessment.

While handing over certificates of approval of environmental impact assessment for the projects to UNRA executive director, Allen Kagina, on Friday, Akello called on UNRA to act according to the recommendations of NEMA, stated in the certificates for every project.

Kagina, accompanied by her technical team, had a meeting with technocrats from NEMA, to discuss environmental issues on oil roads at Kagina's office in Nakawa, Kampala.

"Some sections of the roads traverse ecologically sensitive areas, such as Semliki, Murchison Falls National Park, Budongo and Bugoma forest reserves, which are sanctuaries for wild animals. We must protect them," Akello said.

"In all these undertakings, UNRA highly regarded environmental protection



Kagina receiving a certificate of approval from Akello at the Uganda National Roads Authority's head office in Kampala on Friday. Photo by Ramadhan Abbey

issues," Kagina said.

UNRA environmental specialist Dan Mainza said assessment studies were

undertaken for all the proposed critical oil roads by an in-house team, supported by a range bio-physical and social

economic experts certified by NEMA.

Mainza said UNRA would install speed control measures in ecologically sensitive zones (national parks and forest reserves) and communities and maintaining connectivity by installing the wild-animal under passages, as well as maintaining the canopy cover along central forest reserves.

Other conditions are that UNRA will have to restrict road works within the existing road footprint to reduce habitat destruction.

Contractors shall work closely with local authorities and all auxiliary sites, such as workers' camps and quarry sites shall be located away from human settlements and conservation areas. In addition, all contractors shall develop a waste management plan.

In December 2016, the Government resolved to fast-track over 10 oil roads to have the necessary infrastructure in place by next year, though Kagina said resource mobilisation and inevitable

procurement delays held the pursuit back.

"It is true that over 600km is a lot to accomplish in two years, but within this period, we have identified key bottlenecks that we should begin with, such as escarpments, sharp corners, swamps and bridges. Once these are done, the companies can transport equipment to the sites," she said.

Kagina said the procurement process was ongoing and the Government had secured a loan worth sh3.27 trillion from the Exim Bank of China and UK Export Financing.

UNRA head of designs Eng. Patrick Muleme, said an estimated sh150b comprehensive resettlement plan had been prepared to cater for the compensation of the people who would be affected, sensitisation and follow-up of the displaced persons.

"Our target is to have the compensation and sensitisation done before the end of this financial year," he disclosed.