# Hoima halts business over controversial new district

BY PASCAL KWESIGA

Hoima district council has halted its activities, following a recommendation by security agencies, as the plan to split the district continues to take a tribal dimension and threatens to degenerate into violence.

The plan to carve Kikuube district out of Hoima has created two factions in the district council. It has polarised the people as the group demanding the creation of the new local government continues to incite citizens against the ones opposed to the scheme.

The council meeting, which had been scheduled to take place on Thursday, was not convened after security feared it could turn into a fist fight.

The Police on October 24 broke up a fracas that threatened to degenerate into a physical fight between councillors aligned to the two factions at Trisek Hotel in Hoima where several stakeholders had convened for the district budget conference.

The brawl that saw councillors on the two sides pick up plastic chairs and confront each other started after the (councillors) demanding Kikuube district to be operationalised realised that it (Kikuube) was not among the issues which had been lined up for discussion.

The Hoima district speaker, Nathan Isingoma, said the leadership has put most of the planned activities on hold until the question, which has divided the people, is resolved.

"The people insisting that we should have a new district are becoming violent and security has advised that we suspend all activities that may bring us together (councillors opposed and those supporting the split of Hoima) because there might be bloodshed," Isingoma said.

He explained that the council meeting, which had been slated for Thursday, was supposed to receive the state of the district address from its chairman, Kadri Kirungi and discuss a string of issues regarding service delivery.

"Yes, it is affecting service delivery because we are not currently working. We hope the matter will be resolved soon," Isingoma noted.

## UNDERLYING ISSUES

In 2010, Hoima district councillors passed a resolution to split the district into two, but they rescinded the decision two months ago during another council meeting. The councillors also petitioned Parliament, requesting it to reverse its resolution to operationalise Kikuube district in the next financial year as earlier planned.

The district set up a committee comprising councillors who are opposed to the creation of Kikuube to follow up their petitions to Parliament and the local government ministry against the decision to split Hoima. Majority of the councillors are opposed to the proposal.



Muhairwe (in green shirt) and Hoima Woman MP Tophace Kaahwa at a meeting on carving Kikuube district out of Hoima. This was at Sir Tito Winyi Primary School in July. Photo by Robert Atuhairwe

The leaders argue that earlier demands to split the district have been overtaken by events and that the council has already taken major decisions to elevate Hoima to a city status on account of its oil resources. According to government plans, Hoima is supposed to be developed into an oil city. Moroto and Fort Portal are supposed to be developed as mining and tourism cities respectively.

The Government plans to build a 60,000 barrels per day refinery and an international airport in Hoima to facilitate oil-related activities before 2020. It also plans to set up an industrial park near the planned refinery in Kabaale village in Hoima.

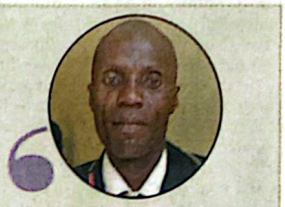
The development of oil resources is expected to spawn a petrochemical industry and other huge businesses in Hoima and leaders are arguing that planning for a city would be complex if the district is divided. The district has four constituencies – Buhaguzi, Kigorobya, Hoima municipality and Bugahya.

The new district would take away Buhaguzi, which includes Bugambe, Buhimba, Kabwoya, Kyangwali and Kizirafumbi sub-counties. Kigorobya constituency has only one sub-county – Kigorobya. Bugahya comprises Buhanika, Kyabigambire, Kitoba and Buseruka sub-counties. The municipality constituency is made up of areas around Hoima town.

Buhaguzi, which would form the new district, is the largest part of Hoima district and has most of the oil wells in Bunyoro.

There are claims that the finance ministry has already created an expenditure code for Kikuube district, but it (Kikuube) is not listed in the local government ministry planning documents among the five new districts to be operationalised in the coming financial year.

"Hoima gets sh23b each financial year and Hoima's expenditure code is 509 in the finance ministry, but they have secretly created an expenditure code 628 for Kikuube. They are reducing Hoima's allocation to sh10b and giving Kikuube sh12b," James Mulindambura, the district secretary for education, claimed.



**NATHAN ISINGOMA, HOIMA SPEAKER**

**People insisting that we should have a new district are becoming violent and security has advised that we suspend all activities**

The district leaders are arguing that splitting Hoima will not take services any closer to the people. They say creating Hoima city, with more divisions, town councils and constituencies will be more relevant in terms of service delivery.

Their position is backed by the finance minister, Matia Kasaija, and Secretary to the Treasury, Keith Muhakanizi, who have repeatedly said there is no money for running districts being created each financial year, and that new administrative units are hampering service delivery.

The finance ministry spokesperson, Jim Mugunga, could not confirm if an expenditure code has been created for Kikuube, but said the creation of new districts has serious implications on budget performance, and meagre resources have to be split to run new administrative units.

## KINGDOM REJECTS

When the resolution was passed to create Kikuube in 2010, Buhaguzi was sparsely populated. But in the last five years, most areas in the constituency have been occupied by people who have relocated from southwestern Uganda, mainly the Bakiga and Banyarwanda, commonly known as Bafuruki.

This partly explains why the indigenous Banyoro are opposed to the creation of the new district. In all areas dominated by the immigrants, the Bafuruki do not vote the indigenous Banyoro into political positions. This trend has enraged the indigenous Banyoro, who are worried that the 'newcomers' are seeking political dominance in Bunyoro.

The fresh push for the district is being led by the Buhaguzi MP, Dan Muhairwe, who mainly relied on the 'newcomers' to defeat the indigenous Banyoro who he contested against in the 2016 parliamentary election.

It is claimed that the Bafuruki have already allocated themselves political positions in the proposed district even before its creation.

On October 26, the two factions of councillors met the local government minister, Tom Butime and presented their arguments. The minister asked them to also engage Bunyoro affairs minister Ernest Kiiza over the same.

## PREVIOUS TRIBAL TENSION

The current tension is a poignant reminder of the tribal friction between the indigenous Banyoro and Bafuruki that followed the 2001 and 2006 elections in the greater Kibaale.

Some lives were lost in the clashes triggered by election of the immigrants to key political positions.

## INCITEMENT

Addressing a crowd at Hakituuti village in Kyangwali sub-country on Wednesday, Muhairwe asked the councillors from the constituency to cease participating in Hoima district council activities unless the entire leadership supports the operationalisation of Kikuube next financial year.

If the district is not operationalised by July 2, the MP said he will mobilise the people of Buhaguzi to stop paying taxes to Hoima district.

Muhairwe promised to push for the district through a top government official, who is being accused by the Banyoro of siding with the Bafuruki to dominate them in their area.

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