



Tourist site. A tourist views Sipi Falls in Kapchorwa recently. PHOTO BY DENIS MUKLUNGU

Kapchorwa locals oppose water scheme on Sipi river

Effect. The residents argue that the project will affect water levels at the river, hence the tourism prospects in the region.

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KAPCHORWA. Local leaders and residents of Kapchorwa District have opposed a government plan to establish a gravity flow water scheme on Sipi Falls.

The residents argue that the project will negatively affect the tourism prospects in the region.

The scheme is intended to supply water to residents in the sub-counties of Chebonet, Kawewo and Sipi in Kapchorwa District.

According to the residents, Sipi Falls, a favourite tourism attraction in the region, draw a large number of backpackers from overseas and Ugandan visitors, who tour the scenic falls.

Mr Robert Cheptoe, an elder, said government's decision to establish the scheme on the falls was born out of "ignorance and selfishness" because tapping water from the source of the Sipi Falls would automatically reduce its water levels.

"This is a sign of disrespect and selfishness because we expected government to be aware that Sipi Falls is not only a source of livelihood to many, but a precious symbol, which we identify with as Sabinu people," Mr Cheptoe argued.

Residents believe Sipi Falls are a tower of tourism and that more than 80 per cent of tourists that visit the region are interested in touring the waterfalls and having a cold shower at the bottom of the falls.

The protests come as government, through the Ministry of Water and Environment, with support from World Bank, is in its final stages of commencing the construction of a grav-

ABOUT SIPI

Sipi Falls, a series of three waterfalls, are located 300km north east of Kampala, in Kapchorwa District, northeast of Sironko and Mbale. The waterfalls lie on the edge of Mt Elgon National Park near the Kenya-Uganda border and they are a marvel that fascinate many visitors. The falls roll off cliffs that stand as high as 70 metres on the slopes of Mt Elgon.

They offer a breath-taking moment with cool environment.

ity flow water scheme codenamed Bukedea Upper Gravity Scheme at a cost of Shs5 billion.

According to a letter dated January 23, signed by Mr Joseph Anguria, the director of Icon Africa Consult, the project consultant, and copied to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Water, although the project has been handed over to the contractor and implementation activities are underway, the residents have fears that must be addressed first.

"The Bukedea Upper Scheme was handed over to the contractor and initial project implementation activities are now underway. However, it has been noted that some sections of the community have some fears and reservations about the project," the letter reads in part.

In a heated stakeholders' meeting attended by officials from the ministry of Water, Icon Africa Consult and district leaders in Towel Village, Kapkwirwok Parish, Sipi Town Council last week, the residents urged that allowing government to tap water from the source of the river will reduce the volume of water and affect the tourism potential in the region.

"We have records when this river had dried up naturally in around 1948. This was understandable, but

briefly

Parents storm school

TORORO: Parents of Okwira Primary School in Nagongera Sub-county, Tororo District have blamed the school administration for the poor performance in the recently released Primary Leaving Examinations. The angry parents, who stormed the school at the weekend, also demanded the immediate transfer of the head teacher, Mr Joseph Ochieng Chwala, accusing him and his teachers of failure to deliver. The Nagongera Sub-county chairperson, Mr Simon Dogo, promised to present the parents' concerns to the district for action. [Joseph Omollo]

Poll to cost Shs400m

JINJA: The Electoral Commission (EC) has said the Jinja East MP by-election will cost Shs400m. The revelation was made by the EC chairperson, Justice Simon Byamukama, while addressing electoral stakeholders at Jinja District headquarters last week. The seat fell vacant after the Court of Appeal in Kampala annulled Nathan Igeme Nabeta's victory, citing irregularities. This followed a successful petition lodged by Forum for Democratic Change's Paul Mwiru. The by-election is slated for March 15. [Tausi Nakato]

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Residents reject water scheme on Sipi river

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Voices

"This is a sign of disrespect because we expected the government to be aware that Sipi Falls is not only a source of livelihood to many, but a precious symbol, which we identify with as Sabinu people,"

ROBERT CHEPTOER, AN ELDER

"We have records when this river had dried up naturally in around 1948. This was understandable, but we do not want it to dry up because of man-made activities,"

ALEXANDER BUKASE, SIFI TOWN COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON

"This region is endowed with tourism products but I wonder why instead of coming up with plans to develop it, the government is doing the opposite,"

SALEH NAMINYE, DIRECTOR OF CASA LODGES AND SAFARIS

"The volume of water we need to run the project is only 13 per cent. This is not too much water and it cannot affect their businesses,"

MOHAMMED BADAZA, PROJECT TECHNICAL OFFICER IN THE MINISTRY OF WATER

we do not want it to dry up because of man-made activities," Mr Alexander Bukase, the chairperson of Sipi Town Council, said.

They then resolved as council that the project should be revised to meet their demands.

"They should draw water from the lower part of the river, but not from the source," Mr Bukase said.

He blamed officials from the Water ministry, district leaders and the implementing partners for failure to sensitise the residents about the project.

Mr Juma Chebet, the chairperson of Sipi Falls tour guides, said they fear that a large number of youth in the district, who are working as tour guides, waitresses and receptionists in the numerous lodges, will be rendered jobless if the falls become extinct.

Mr Saleh Naminye, the director of Casa Lodges and Safaris, one of the lodges operating in the area, said Sipi Falls offer a number of activities to tourists, including campsites.

Mr John Satya, another resident, wondered why the project was named Bukedea Upper Gravity Scheme yet the officials claimed it was for the people of Kapchorwa.

"They want to steal our water in disguise and leave us languishing in poverty. This is our life given to us by God," he said.

The Kapchorwa District chairperson, Mr Songo Chepkuru, said the ministry officials should fully engage the residents before proceeding with the project, adding that nobody would wish Sipi Falls to disappear.

However, Mr Mohammed Badaza, the project technical officer in the Water ministry, said residents are opposing the project out of ignorance of the facts.

The Kapchorwa Resident District Commissioner, Ms John Francis Kuka, said the district would organise meetings to sensitise the residents on the benefits of the project.

"This is one of the government projects aimed at improving the welfare of citizens," she said.

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