

What does oil mean for Rukungiri farmers?

A 29-year-old farmer was hopeful that with the discovery of oil, transportation of produce would become cheaper



Farmers sitting on their produce aboard a truck enroute to the market

Rukungiri is traced roughly 68 kilometres (42 miles), by road, north of Kabale, the prime town in the sub-region. This location lies approximately 400 kilometres (250 miles), by road, southwest of Kampala, the capital of Uganda.

In 2012, the estimated population of the district was 321,300. The basis of the economy of Rukungiri district, like the rest of the country, is agriculture. More than 90% of the population is betrothed to farming. Of the 1,524.28 square kilometers total land area of the district, 1,352.3 square kilometers is arable land. Out of these, 1,150 square kilometers are already under cultivation.

However, production is mainly subsistence, although the soils are very fertile and with potential for intensive commercial farming. The two chief cash crops are coffee and bananas (matooke).

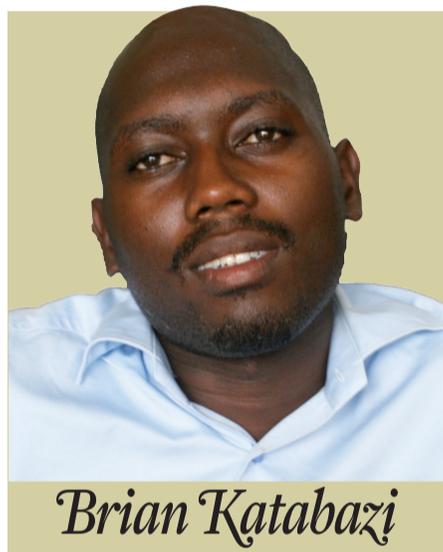
Dairy is also dominant and ingrained in the Rukungiri culture. Some of the best dairy farms in the district are particularly in the sub-counties of Kebisoni and Buyanja. Almost 3.52 million litres of milk are produced in the district annually. Due to the elevation, Rukungiri district is perfect for cultivation of all crops, temperate fruits inclusive. Thus in many sub-counties, there are successful farmers engaged in the production of grapes, apples, pears and peaches.

Quite a number of the population also fetches their livelihood from fishing, particularly from Lake Edward.

Also, Rukungiri is being explored for oil and gas resources. When I discussed with farmers in the district, they said they were excited about oil in the country.

I met a 29-year-old man, Karoli, pushing a shaky bicycle, piled with matooke through the streets of Buyanja. He said the discovery of oil would make it cheaper to transport his matooke, because fuel prices would go down.

"I will be using motorcycles instead of a bicycle and my sales will increase," he said.



Brian Katabazi

Nearby, Zakaayo, a bodaboda cyclist admitted that if the price of fuel was reduced, he would transport produce at a cheaper cost.

Farmers strongly believe that if both major and feeder roads are upgraded, then the cost of transporting produce will go down.

They were also hopeful that if the Government could use revenue from oil to improve health services, farmers would be able to access reasonable and quality healthcare hence reducing expenditure in their households.

A group of farmers from Rwentondo said they wished to add value to their produce.

Electricity accessibility remains a challenge. Farmers, however, have hope that electricity can be generated from oil residues. This will in turn enable them add value to their produce, allowing them compete in the available markets favourably.

When I asked farmers whether they understood anything about currency appreciation and what it would mean for prices of goods and services in the country, they had no idea.

I gave them Agency for Transformation (AFT) leaflets and info packs with more information on what oil means for farmers.

Will many farmers get information; challenge each other, their organisations and Government to make sure that oil works for them? AFT and other organisations will have to do more.

On the other hand, the Government must make sure that corruption is fought at all levels, such that revenue from oil is not mismanaged.

Uganda should embrace good quality public policy, legal framework and public accountability in order to benefit from natural resources, just like Norway and Botswana.

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Farmers from Rukungiri district are expecting a lot from the oil industry in Uganda but they still urge the Government to be vigilant so as to make oil a blessing and not a curse. This will boost the agriculture sector and enhance development.

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Ronald Naluwairo

No excuse for failure to implement Tree Fund

It was reported in the National Forest Plan that between 1990 and 2005, Uganda's forest cover reduced by approximately 1.3 million hectares, representing an average annual deforestation rate of 1.8%.

This rate of loss of forest cover has implications for biodiversity, wildlife and tourism, agriculture and the livelihood of many Ugandans.

A key challenge to efforts aimed at restoring forest cover, is the inadequate sustainable funding.

Aware of this challenge, Parliament established a national Tree Fund. The fund was established "...to promote tree planting and growing at national and local level; and to support tree planting and growing efforts of a non-commercial nature..."

Unfortunately, the national Tree Fund has never been operationalised. Why?

In a letter dated August 14, 2013, Keith Muhakanizi, the finance ministry permanent secretary and secretary to the treasury wrote to the permanent secretary in the environment ministry, giving two reasons. First, that, "Following the creation of the National Forestry Authority (NFA), Government has continued to finance its activities from the Consolidated Fund...The activities hitherto anticipated to be facilitated from the Fund are, therefore, directly under the NFA." This argument is flawed.

The Tree Fund and the NFA are both established by the same law, which clearly lays out activities that the Fund was established to support and the functions of the NFA.

If, for any reason, NFA decided to also fund some of such activities, that should not be a reason not to operationalise the Fund.

Besides, the Tree Fund is important for other reasons that the NFA cannot achieve. For instance, it is a catalyst for Uganda's easy access to existing and emerging international forestry financing and is a vital tool for mobilising resources from donors and private sector players.

Muhakanizi also argues: "I wish therefore to inform you that we do not approve the creation of the Fund in view of the proposals in the Public Finance Bill, 2012, which is before Parliament..." Unfortunately, Muhakanizi's letter does not refer to any specific proposal in the said Bill.

Neither does a critical analysis of the said Bill provide any support for his argument. The Bill does not propose to amend or repeal any section of the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act. In fact, under clause 27, the Bill gives the minister, powers to establish other special funds as may be necessary.

There is no justifiable reason for the delay to operationalise the national Tree Fund.

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COMPILED BY BRIAN MAYANJA

ON THIS Week

1971

OBOTE MEN KILLED

On July 27, president Idi Amin's troops attacked and killed Langi and Acholi soldiers in Jinja and Mbarara Barracks. Many fled the country during the violence. Bodies were often dumped into River Nile. This just a few months after the January 1971 coup, in which Amin captured power from Milton Obote.

1985

OKELLO SWORN IN

On July 30, Gen. Tito Okello was sworn in as the President of Uganda. He took over presidency through a coup, forming a military junta. In his inaugural speech, he said he took over the presidency from Obote to bring stability. He promised to organise elections soon. At the swearing in ceremony, Gen. Okello was flanked by Brig. Bazilio Okello.

2002

RWANDA DRC SIGN DEAL

On 30 July, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo signed a peace deal- The Pretoria Accord- after five days of talks in Pretoria, South Africa. The talks centred on the withdrawal of the estimated 20,000 Rwandan soldiers in the Congo and the rounding up of the ex-Rwandan soldiers and the dismantling of the Hutu militia in Congo