

The Observer (Kampala)

Uganda: Buhweju - Can't You See the Road?

BY ALON MWESIGWA, 30 JUNE 2013

This is not a journey for the faint-hearted. Ride to Bihanga, in the hills of the western district of Buhweju, and huge obstacles lie in your way.

This road, which connects to Nsiika - where the district headquarters are located - through Kisenyi sub-county to Katerera in Bunyaruguru in Rubirizi district, sways precariously onto the hills like a thread.

It is narrow and dotted with huge stones as big as an anti-hill. A simple ride leaves one badly needing a massage. Veering slightly from the road could take you rolling to the roots of a mountain. The weak-hearted will never wish for a ride on the road.

Aboard a motorcycle, the rider asks me to hold him firmly. He warily rolls over stones; we jump in the air and firmly get back to the road.

"Don't worry; just hold me," he calms me.

This is Buhweju district's only main road. Two saloon cars can hardly bypass each other. And right from the district's main entry at Kabwohe in Sheema or Bwizibwera in Mbarara, the roads are bumpy and the further you get into the district, the rougher it gets.

And the residents, mostly farmers, must use this road for their errands, which appears impossible sometimes, especially when it rains. Welcome to Kikondere village, Kisenyi sub-county, home to Constance Bamuyaga, one of the residents who eke a living through farming.

At her residence, you are welcomed to a banana grove, jack fruit trees, and apple garden. Seated under a jack fruit tree in her compound, Bamuyaga smiles brightly, seeing the healthy fruits any farmer would wish to have.

Big as the fruits are, she may not get someone to buy them or she may be compelled to sell them at giveaway price, as low as Shs 300 each.

"It is impossible to get any goods to the next market," she says.

Asked why, she replies rather crossly: "Can't you see the road?"

"You see, I must say we [the people of Buhweju] have been neglected so much. Whenever it rains, you can't move out just [because] there is 'no road'," she says strongly.

"You have to call those who can [afford to transport the goods] to the market to buy it from here.

"And they will give you a price of their choice because you called them."

She means brokers - call them middlemen, who come from the neighbouring districts of Ibanda, Mbarara and Bushenyi to buy the farmer's produce in Buhweju.

"They are few," she says, "Not many [traders] can risk this side [Buhweju]."

To understand Bamuyaga's agony, picture this. In the recent rainy season, when the road was muddy and slippery, she sold a bunch of matooke at Shs 3,000. At the market, the same bunch goes for between Shs 15,000 and Shs 20,000.

"This isn't worth my efforts." And who took the profit - the middleman.

Bamuyaga is but one of the thousands of residents who are cursing because of the pitiable road network. It's a Friday afternoon and 57-year-old Angelica Kumwesiga is sorting beans for sale at her retail shop in Omukagyera village, Kibimba parish.

Desperate for buyers, she welcomes me with enthusiasm, but turns peevish when I tell her I am not a buyer. In a couple of days, Kumwesiga's children will head back to school for second term and she surely needs money.

The problem is not that she doesn't know where the market is; it is how to get there. Hiring a boda boda to the nearest market in Bwizibwera, about 13km away, costs between Shs 15,000 and Shs 20,000. The charge is exorbitant because it is equivalent to a sacrifice to ride through the district.

"And how much will I get after selling?" she asks.

In rainy seasons, the roads are muddy and slippery- leaving left residents at the mercy of the middlemen, looking for a kill. In his 2011 visit to the district, President Museveni's convoy got stuck in an extremely muddy and slippery road in Rugongo village in Karungu sub-county, forcing the president to walk about 4km to commission Tamu hospital in Karungu, Buhweju.

Many who saw him that day thought the roads would finally be fixed, but little has been done. Michael Tumwesigye, 34, owns a commercial truck which he uses to fend for his family. He ferries construction materials like bricks and stones for constructors and also transports produce for those who wish to transport their products to the market.

"On a good day, I earn Shs 70, 000," he says, adding: "If the road was paved, I'm sure I would be making about Shs 140,000, double what I earn now".

Buhweju district was carved out of Bushenyi in 2009, with the aim of 'bringing services closer to the people'.

Residents expected access to clean water, health services and paved roads. Three years down the road, there is nothing tangible to show.

The district's only main road, from Kabwohe through Nsiika sub-county, which houses the district's headquarters, connecting to Katerera in Bunyaruguru, is under the central government. However, not even a penny has been allocated to work on it.

In the last three years, the national roads infrastructure budget has soared to over Shs 1 trillion annually - with the 2013/14 budget stretching to Shs 2.3 trillion - the figure analysts say could do much of the country's roads if well utilised.

On his recent visit to the district, minister of Works Eng Abraham Byandala told the residents: "I feel for you; given the nature of your terrain, I will make sure that we send machines tailored to work in such geographical terrain," he said.

This sounds a promising move. But Bujenje county MP Ephraim Biraro told The Observer he had made enough lobbying for the road to be included on the list of

national roads to be worked up on, but in vain.

"I have talked in Parliament," he says.

"I have brought the parliamentary committee on physical infrastructure to see our situation; the African Parliamentarians Network against Corruption has been there; and I recently took there the minister for Works, and he saw what was there. What more can I do?"

Fraud:

Last August, the African Parliamentarians Network against Corruption, a group of MPs fighting corruption, visited the district only to find a road whose funds had been provided, not constructed.

The funds, about Shs 300m, were meant for the construction of 44km road connecting Buhweju and Rubirizi districts contracted by Lubmarks Investments Limited.

The second road from Nyakabirizi in Bushenyi through Birere to Nsiika, about 45km, was contracted to SKEDA engineering company. The roads were contracted at a tune of Shs 568m upon completion. Although the money was spent, none of the roads was completed.

Several feeder roads in the district have turned overgrown bushes, with some being used to graze cattle. The most affected road is Nyakashaka-Ekikorojo-Rwanjere road, which connects Buhweju to the neighbouring Sheema and Bushenyi districts. Others are Burere-Nsiika and Bihanga roads.

While the district's LCV chairperson, Sebastian Kerere, agrees that the situation is out of hand, he says the district continues to try.

"We are working on them [the roads]. You know it is an endless exercise; we keep on working," Kerere said.

Although Kerere could not specifically disclose how much the district's budget for roads is, he maintained: "It was not enough for all the work that needs to be done."

In 2010, government received 1,400 units of road equipment, financed through a \$100m (Shs 260bn) loan from the Chinese government. It comprised dump trucks, graders, wheel loaders, excavators and bulldozers, which were supposed to be sent to the districts. Buhweju has not seen such equipment.

Hard to reach:

To people who have never been to Buhweju, the entire western Uganda is glowing and several other services are fully functioning. Not in Buhweju, though - residents here are tired.

"Whenever I go out there, sometimes I'm reluctant to say I come from Buhweju," says one of the residents. "We want the government to declare the district a 'hard-to-reach place'."

Here, the district would be in the same category as Karamoja region.

"Maybe the government there can pay attention to us," says Kerere.

And Bamuyaga cannot agree more. "Yes, if this district is declared 'hard-to-reach', government might listen to our cries. It's long overdue!"

"I have been pushing for that [the hard-to-reach status] and I'm sure if all the attention given to Karamoja [could] come to us, then Buhweju would be better," MP Biraro says.

But will this bring government to pay attention to the district?

Will the roads be worked on and perhaps Bamuyaga and other residents see their products reach the market without being cheated by the middlemen? Only time can tell.

This Observer feature is published in partnership with Panos Eastern Africa, with funding from the European Union's Media for Democratic Governance and Accountability Project .

[Considered a Honda?](#) Honda.ca/Why-Honda

Find Out Why Customers are Choosing Honda. Visit Honda.ca Today

[Canadian Charity](#) CCFCanada.ca

Helping 360,000 children & families Christian Children's Fund of Canada

[Photos of Apartheid](#) google.com/culturalinstitute

Explore New Photo Exhibits with The Google Cultural Institute.



Copyright © 2013 The Observer. All rights reserved. Distributed by AllAfrica Global Media (allAfrica.com). To contact the copyright holder directly for corrections — or for permission to republish or make other authorized use of this material, click [here](#).

AllAfrica aggregates and indexes content from over 130 African news organizations, plus more than 200 other sources, who are responsible for their own reporting and views. Articles and commentaries that identify allAfrica.com as the publisher are produced or commissioned by AllAfrica.

AllAfrica is a voice of, by and about Africa - aggregating, producing and distributing 2000 news and information items daily from over 130 African news organizations and our own reporters to an African and global public. We operate from Cape Town, Dakar, Lagos, Monrovia, Nairobi and Washington DC.

© 2013 AllAfrica // Privacy // Contact

AllAfrica - All the Time