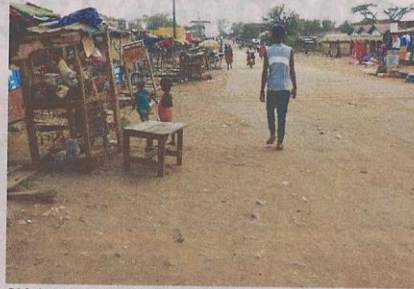




A road in Moroto. Photos by Olandason Wanyama



Chicken traders along Moroto-Kitale road



A section of Moroto-Kitale road in Camp Swahili

By Olandason Wanyama

Moroto reviews land compensation rates

A committee to review compensation for crops and semi-permanent buildings, ahead of road works in Moroto, has been inaugurated.

The Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) requested for compensation rates before embarking on the construction of the 66km Moroto-Lokitanyala road and the Moroto-Kitale route that links Uganda to Kenya through Moroto town.

The move comes at a time when Moroto is facing government and investor acquisition of land for infrastructure development as the mineral and tourism sector takes centre stage.

The nine-member committee, comprising the district land board, production committee and a few stakeholders, will at the end of January come up with compensation rates for crops to be used by the district physical development plan in the subsequent years subject to annual review.

Speaking during a consultative meeting held at Lavender Inn in Moroto town recently, the district lands officer, Michael Cabral Kinyosi, said several factors had hindered the review of property rates.

He said the district had last set up compensation rates a decade ago.

"Our major challenge has been financing," Kinyosi said, adding that the matter has always not been given priority.

"There was lack of key consultations and stakeholders as required by the law and best practices," Kinyosi said.

He advised that the district should review the compensation rates annually to meet the fluctuating market prices.

He said the delay of Gulu University, Moroto campus take off was due to lack of the district compensation rates.

Kinyosi urged UNRA not to work in isolation, but always consult before projects are undertaken.

The Moroto district commercial officer, Derrick Oumo, said land is a critical issue since the district land was under concession. Adding that there is need to create awareness among the people at the grassroots.

WHAT RESIDENTS SAY

One Logwe, a resident of Rupa sub-county, said the compensation was not fair.

"Much of the land has been fraudulently occupied without the district officials' knowledge," he noted.

"The district should champion land acquisition so that the people can benefit," he added.



A signpost at a junction in Moroto

The Katikekile sub-county chief, Samuel Lokong, said communal land ownership has, for many decades, been misunderstood.

"People need to understand

customary land ownership so as to have grounds for negotiation," he said.

The Tapac sub-county land area committee chairperson, John Bosco Lokwang, said in

the past, people thought land in Karamoja was free, but the owners are present.

He added that with the new committee in place, it will empower landowners

to negotiate for fair compensation.

Lokwang asked the committee to consider varying rates for different places during the compilation.

The review of the compensation rates followed ongoing infrastructure development in Karamoja, specifically in Moroto district, where Advocates for Natural Resources and Development and Avocats Sans Frontieres are the nodal agencies in facilitating the review of compensation rates.

PROPERTY VALUATION

In his presentation on principles of property valuation and best practices, Andrew Mutabazi, an external facilitator on land issues, said there was need to help the community understand land acquisition issues.

"This would ensure that the communities are informed and can ably participate in decisions concerning land," he noted.

Mutabazi added that there are parameters, such as location and distance from the main road, among others that may have to be considered before deciding on compensation rates.

UNRA SPEAKS OUT

Mark Ssali, the Uganda National Roads Authority communications officer, says districts are mandated by law to have compensation rates in place.

"For things like crops and semi-permanent buildings, the district should have set rates," Ssali said.

Electricity to return to Nigerian city after protests

Protesters occupying a major electricity supplier in southern Nigeria, leaving a regional capital in darkness for weeks, on Wednesday agreed to end their demonstrations over constant blackouts.

Angry members of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) had occupied offices of the Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company (PHEDC) in the city of Yenagoa, in Bayelsa,

stopping the local electricity supply for some 400,000 people.

After talks with the Bayelsa State government, demonstrators agreed to end their occupation, allowing the PHEDC to restart operations in the next few days.

"We have suspended our protest at the instance of the Bayelsa government," a chairperson for the IYC, Kenedy Olorogun, told AFP.

"We took this approach to make it clear that the status quo is no longer

acceptable," he said, bemoaning frequent power outages.

The government had promised the situation would improve and that electricity supply would return to the city within 48 hours, he said.

The PHEDC also said it would soon restart operations.

Oil-rich Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is plagued by widespread power outages that leave homes and businesses without electricity for long stretches.

The demonstrations in Yenagoa left the city without power for 16 days, leaving many lamenting the crippling effects on their lives.

Queues have snaked out of many of Yenagoa's petrol stations, with local residents scrambling to buy fuel for generators.

The power company insisted it was struggling with a shortfall due to unpaid bills totalling some \$45m (40 million euros).

Nigeria has the potential to

produce some 13,000 megawatts of power from its current grid but on most days can only reach around 4,000 megawatts.

The central government has pledged to overhaul the electricity system and struck an agreement with German firm Siemens last year aimed at tripling reliable supplies by 2023.