

A rush back to Hoima

BY PASCAL KWESIGA

Thirty four years ago Hoima was regarded as a sleepy and backwater town. Nothing significant seemed to happen there. However, all that changed in an instant when oil was discovered in 2006.

In the past, while locals moved out of Hoima because the area was not ideal for investment, it has since become a Mecca of sorts. Suddenly, there is a rush back to Hoima. Some of those who had disposed of their land, have had to buy just a piece of real estate in the area expensively because the discovery of oil has pushed up the prices.

Before 1986, the town had one paved road; the main street. But there were also a few paved stretches linking to the main street. Indeed, Hoima was not ideal for investment in 1986. There was no hotel in the entire town. What people knew as hotels then were mere restaurants in dilapidated structures.

"We had no idea that hotels were supposed to look like the huge facilities (hotels) we have today. For us, then, hotels were those small places where we went to eat food," Jackson Nuwamanya, the former Hoima town council speaker, says.

There was only one lodge running under businesses owned by Nsamo brothers. The small accommodation facility shared the same building with other businesses like hardware shops. The fact that there was one small lodging facility means that there were not many people visiting Hoima for business and other activities at the time. The only hotel – Kolping – was constructed in the early 1990s.

"It belongs to Hoima diocese and it was constructed around 1993. When they were building it, we all wondered who would buy their food. We wondered if one needed to build such a big building for a hotel. It was the first facility to have a hotel and accommodation facilities. Surprisingly, we are the ones who now eat in these hotels," Nuwamanya adds. Kolping – the only hotel in the town many years ago – now competes with more bigger and fancy hotel facilities in Hoima.

The Bunyoro affairs minister, Ernest Kiiza,

says Hoima has achieved significant strides in development over the last three decades. "Hoima has come from far. Now the roads in the town are all being tarmacked and the oil roads are improving connectivity in the region." Kiiza urges the people to engage in production to benefit from the improving road network in the region.

"The roads have eased transport within the region for people and the transportation of goods and services. The cost of transporting goods between towns has reduced and the time taken moving produce has shortened.

HOIMA GETS NEW ROADS

The Government has upgraded about 6km of roads in the town under the first phase and electrified three major streets for about sh30b. About 4km of roads will be upgraded in the five-year second phase of the project scheduled to begin this year.

According to the municipal engineer, Bonaventure Kiiza, the second phase will involve beautifying Booma grounds, including fencing it and establishing a football pitch, gardens, and other facilities in the complex as well as constructing modern slaughter houses and upgrading the waste composite site in Kibati suburb.

The new roads scheduled for upgrading under the next phase include Palace Road,

a stretch between Government Road and Rotary stage running through Kijungu suburb beside Hoima Restort and Kijungu Hill Hotel, a stretch running from Hoima-Fort Portal Road to Sir Tito Winyi playground and Mandela SS in Kiryateete and a bypass connecting Masindi and Hoima-Kampala highway behind Kinubi. Others include roads connecting to the Hoima-Kaiso-Tonya Road from Dugaha round about and some within the central business district linking to the major streets.

Part of the Kigumba-Kyenjojo road which is under construction runs through the central business district. Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) has engaged the contractors into building the oil roads leading to St Peter's Cathedral in Duhaga (Anglican Church) and Bujumbura; the headquarters of the Hoima catholic diocese.

The President directed that the two roads be upgraded.

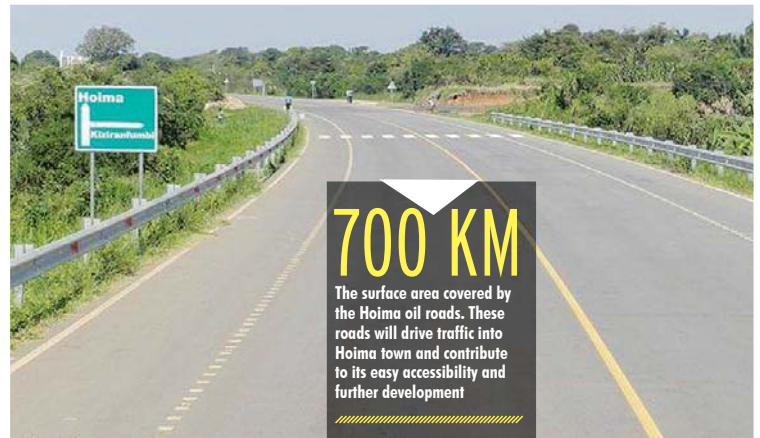
The roads authority, according to Kiiza, is expected to upgrade about 7.5km within the town. Some of the approximately 700km oil roads will drive traffic into Hoima town and contribute to its easy accessibility and further growth. The oil roads are running through all the towns and villages in the region and that means a lot for the region in terms of movement and development of the local economy. People need to utilise the existing NRM programmes to engage in production and improve their livelihoods," Kiiza says. The municipal mayor, Mary Mugasa, says: "Hoima has really grown.



A busy street in Hoima town



Oil drilling in Hoima



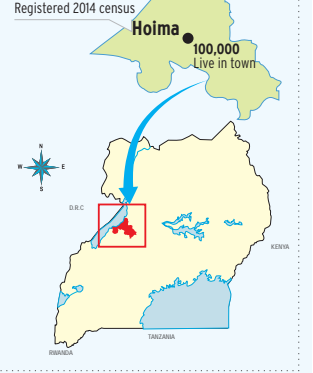
700 KM

The surface area covered by the Hoima oil roads. These roads will drive traffic into Hoima town and contribute to its easy accessibility and further development

Hoima at a glance

570,000

Registered 2014 census



There are now several points where people work at night because of the street lights. The economy is growing."

POPULATION GROWTH

The population is growing and that is a big incentive for production," the minister states. He notes that the infrastructural development in Hoima and the oil activities have a ripple effect across the region.

"A number of hotels and accommodation facilities and residential houses popped up in the suburbs. "Hoima town is very rich in accommodation, including more than 20 well serviced hotels, apartments and bungalows for short and long stays," the Uganda Investment Authority states in the district's 2016 investment profile.

As a result of the discovery of oil and population growth, the district was selected among the municipalities to benefit from the multibillion Uganda Support to Municipal Infrastructural Development. Hoima started implementing the five-year first phase of the programme in 2012. The 2014 census put the population of Hoima district at over 570,000 people.

The town's population grew by over 95,000 between 1991 and 2014. The investment authority, in the district's 2016 investment profile, estimates that there are over 600,000 people in the district, excluding about 50,000 refugees.

Hoima is scheduled to become a city in 2021.