

Hoima airport to be an export route for agriculture products

By Martin Kitubi

Uganda's second major international airport under construction in the Albertine Region for the oil and gas sector will also serve as an export route for agro-products to international markets.

This was revealed by Dr Michael Mugerwa, the general manager Uganda Refinery Holding Company (URHC) Ltd under the Uganda National oil company (UNOC).

Mugerwa said stakeholder consultations were held on how best to utilise the airport other than the oil functions and "we agreed that it should serve as an export route for agriculture products."

He says there should be value addition to a variety of agricultural products to prepare them for export.

"We have potential to export food items, value added coffee and cotton products, bananas, plantain and wheat flour, among others. We hope that it will increase our foreign exchange earnings," Mugerwa told journalists recently.

He said the Government is trying to help communities in the Albertine Graben areas to improve and increase on agriculture production in order to have both for export, the local market and food security.

WHAT GOVT IS DOING

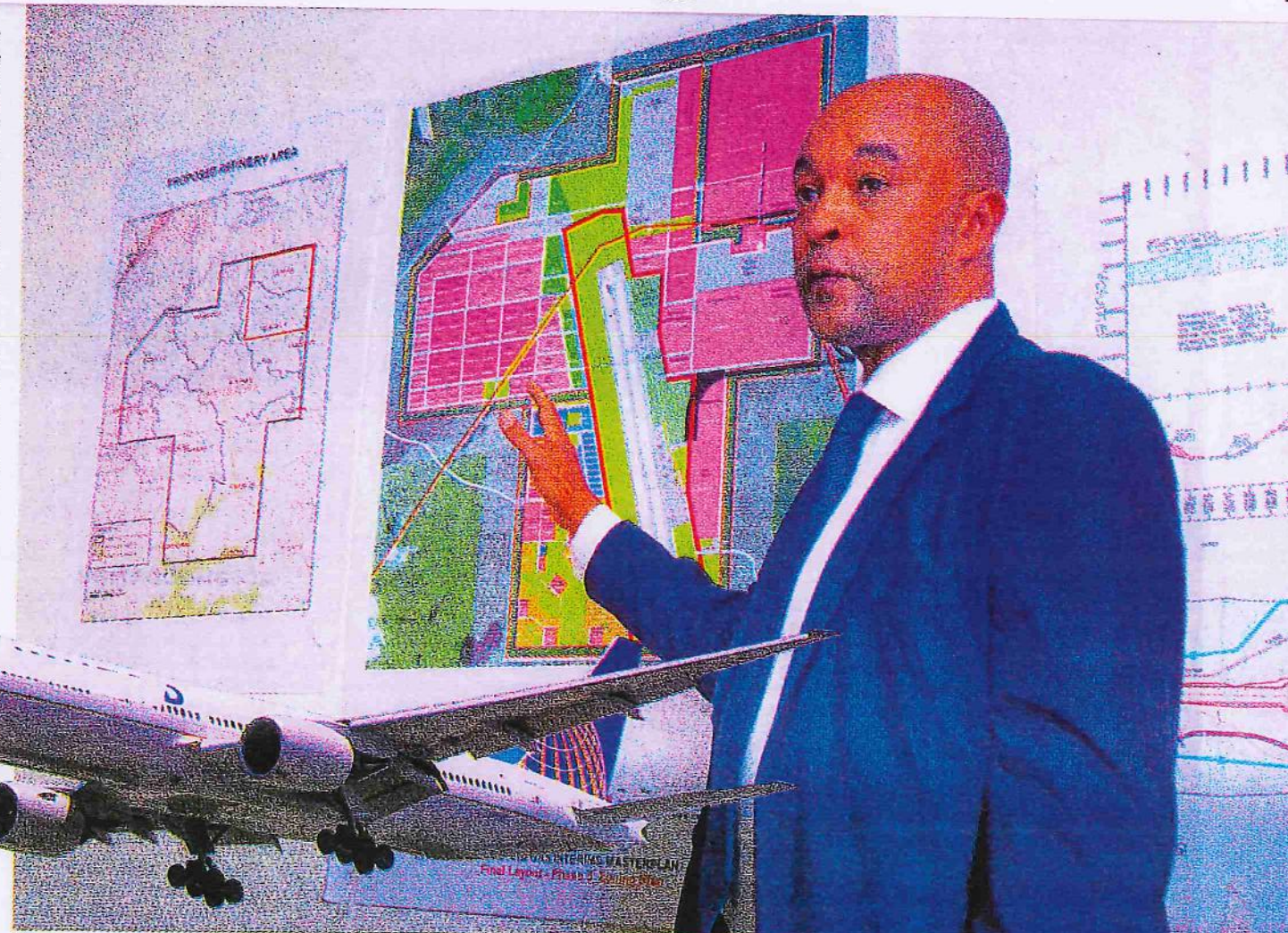
According to the Petroleum Authority of Uganda, the Government has put up an agricultural programme to encourage people to take up agriculture as a commercial activity.

The agriculture ministry has since drawn an investment plan for the purpose. The three-year public investment plan was drawn for the 2017/18 to 2019/2020 financial years. It is hoped that the plan dubbed "agro Economic Impact Deepening in the Albertine Basin, will be a vehicle to grow agriculture in the region.

The plan which is estimated to cost sh5.2b encompasses nine districts. These include Ntoroko, Kabarole, Kyenjojo, Kibaale, Hoima, Masindi, Kiryandongo, Bulisa and Nebbi.

According to a 2013 Industrial Baseline Survey (IBS) done by Total, Tullow and CNOOC, the oil companies in the region, agriculture was identified as the precursor for growth in the Albertine region.

As already mentioned, the target market for the agricultural produce is much wider than the oil and gas



Mugerwa showing the plan of Kabaale Industrial Park in Hoima district where the airport is being constructed. Inset is the Boeing 777. Similar aircraft will be landing at the new airport expected to be ready in 2020. Photos by Miriam Namutebi

Crops Value addition

Adding value to crops such as coffee will give farmers more opportunities for export



players restricted to the area.

What is needed, according to the IBS, is to develop sustainable systems for production, supply and value addition for export.

The programme will be overseen by Deus Muhwezi, the Commissioner for Agricultural Investment and Enterprise Development at the agriculture ministry.

"Through extension workers, we have embarked on mobilising the people in the region to take up commercial farming," Muhwezi said.

"We project increased population in the Albertine region during construction of major projects, and we intend to supply locally made quality food," he added.

The project also includes undertaking research for support investment in production and marketing systems of livestock, fisheries and crops for improved livelihoods of the resident

communities in the Lake Albert Basin.

He explained that the agriculture ministry is encouraging farmers to produce more food items so that the surplus can be exported.

It will also develop functional farmer organisations and strengthen private sector initiatives for sustainable production and productivity, agro processing and marketing in the Albertine Basin.

"To develop appropriate farming, processing and marketing models for supplying food products of acceptable quality and quantity directly to the project camps and the developing markets beyond," says the plan.

It is also intended establish and equip market information centres in the Albertine Basin.

EXPECTATIONS

The Government aims at developing a market information system or database

on production, processing and marketing specifically for the Albertine Basin.

The Agro-Economic impact and Deepening in the Albertine Basin will equip farmers with equipment, postharvest handling structures, machinery and enhance skilled human resource.

The move will promote sustainable production and productivity, agro processing and marketing in the Albertine Basin.

It will also provide sustainable inclusive agribusiness models and operational market information centres in the Albertine Basin.

Through the project, Muhwezi explained, the agriculture ministry is emphasising capacity building for farmers to increase production and productivity

"We do not want food to be imported from other countries, and this explains



On-going works at the air port site in Hoima

The first phase of the airport consisting of the runway and cargo handling facilities is expected to be ready in 2020

why we encourage farmers to form associations to increase production," he noted.

CONSTRUCTION

The 2016 master plan and detailed design for the airport conducted by NewPlan, a local engineering and consultancy firm, indicates that the facility will be constructed in three phases.

According to the plan, the first phase of the airport consisting of a runway and cargo handling facilities is expected to be ready in 2020. This, according to the sources will primarily support construction of the oil refinery. There will also be an aircraft servicing facility.

The second phase will focus on construction passenger facilities and is expected to be completed in 2022.

The third phase will involve further development of the airport to service increased commercial passenger flights and cargo flights for the fish and flower export industry.

Passenger and cargo terminals and the apron are supposed to be expanded in this phase as well as construction of a new parallel taxiway.

The airport which will sit on 174.2 acres of land is part of the 29.57 square kilometre Kabaale Industrial Park land and the project is expected to create

about 1,000 jobs for engineers and craftsmen, among others.

By June, excavations, clearing and levelling the ground for the runway had started.

Works on the sites for the cargo terminals, service wings, storage facilities and some residences were also going on.

Eng. Mihail Gorachinov, a senior project manager at SBC, said that the airport will have a wide and long apron with a capacity for parking four aircraft as huge as a Boeing 777.

CONTRACTORS

In February 2018, the Government selected Shikun and Binui, an Israeli construction firm to build the airport in Hoima which will cost over \$300m (about sh1.1b).

Construction is being undertaken by Solel Boneh International Holdings (SBI), an international arm of Shikun & Binui.

However, construction is being done by SBC Uganda Limited, a joint venture company between Colas Limited from United Kingdom and SBI International Holdings of Uganda.

The scope of works will also include construction of drainage channels, the requisite electro-mechanical, communications and navigation systems and an air traffic control tower.

On-going works