



Plot 43, Nakasero Road
PO Box 7683 Kampala, Uganda
Tel: +256 312 263 850
psfu@psfuganda.org.ug
www.psfuganda.org

THE STATE OF TOURISM ROADS IN BWINDI AND MGAHINGA

TO THE

HON. MINISTER OF WORKS AND TRANSPORT

PRESENTED BY

PRIVATE SECTOR FOUNDATION UGANDA (PSFU)

February 2024

About PSFU

Hon. Minister, we bring you greetings from PSFU and appreciate the work you are doing towards the development of the economy of Uganda.

Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU) is Uganda's umbrella body of the private sector made up of over 320 Business Associations, Corporate bodies and the major Public Sector Agencies that support private sector growth. Since its founding in 1995, PSFU has served as a focal point for private sector advocacy as well as capacity building and continues to sustain a positive dialogue with the government on behalf of the private sector. PSFU is also the government's implementation partner for several projects and programs aimed at strengthening the private sector as an engine of economic growth in Uganda. PSFU is a value-based and ethically driven entity premised on 12 sectors that drive Uganda's economic growth. These sectors include Agriculture, Agribusiness and Forestry; Construction and Real Estate; Financial Services; Professional Services; Tourism; Manufacturing; Human Resources (Skills, Health, and Education); Transport and Logistics; Trade and Commerce; ICT; Culture and Creative; and Energy, Mining, Oil and Gas.

Background

During our engagement with H.E. The President on 29th November 2023 at Kololo Ceremonial Grounds, we brought to his attention the poor state of Tourism Roads in the Southwestern part of Uganda, especially those leading to the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and the Mgahinga Gorilla Trekking Park.

Hon. Minister, in 2022, a total of 65 roads with a total length of about 4,000 kms were mapped out. A total of 1,507 kms have been completed while the other roads totalling 948 kms are at stages of development –civil works are ongoing and 594 kms have been planned to be worked in the current 2023/24 FY and 2024/25.

Despite the good job being done to improve the Tourism roads, the most strategic roads to Mgahinga and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park areas are still underdeveloped, these roads are currently impassable because of the incessant rains pouring in the region. Most of these roads have been washed away by the heavy storm running water thus negatively affecting the tourism sector.

Hon. Minister, the distance from Entebbe to Bwindi is **about 502 kms** and takes about **12 hours** while using road transport. Further, from Hamurwa (Kabale-Kisoro Road) alone takes **over 4 hours** to reach Bwindi because of the very poor state of the roads. It is also important to note that Bwindi and Mgahinga alone attracts over 60% of the total national income from tourism. To put this into perspective, a Gorilla Trekking permit in Uganda is US\$ 750 while a National Park Permit costs US\$ 40. What this means is that, out of 1 international tourist in Bwindi or Mgahinga, you need about 19 tourists in any other national park. More so, out of every tourist, over 7 jobs are created. On average, Uganda has 22 families of Gorillas that can be visited each family by 8 tourists each day. Meaning, each family fetches US\$ 6000 per day totalling to US\$ 132,000 per day, US\$ 3,960,000 per month and **US\$ 47,520,000** per year (**UGX 178.2 billion**) only from permits.

Hon. Minister, for further perspective, most tourists chose to do Gorilla Trekking in Rwanda whose permit is US\$ 1,500 because it takes about 2 hours 25 minutes from the Kigali airport to the reach Volcanoes National Park Rwanda (102 kms). Uganda has the potential of cutting the time spent between Kampala and Bwindi or Mgahinga **from 12 hours** to only **45 minutes** by working on the Kanyantoro –Butogota (16.5km) and Butogota – Buhoma (15km) and a runway, putting air traffic control, immigration and customs at Kihiihi Airstrip through a Public Private Partnership arrangement to make it an international airport. What that means is that even when our permit is costed over US\$ 1,000, we shall still be very competitive. This would eventually create thousands of jobs, develop the hospitality industry in the area and fetch over **US\$ 63.36 million (UGX 237.6 billion)** annually only from the sale of Gorilla permits.

Other activities that can be done in Bwindi and Mgahinga include **nature guided walks, village walks, butterfly and bird watching, and rare fauna and flora species**. These also fetch a lot of money to the country and have potential of creating tens of thousands of jobs.

In the year 2022, Uganda experienced an upward trend increase in the number of international travellers, with visitor arrivals surging by 58.8% from 512,945 to 814,508 tourists with the sector showing a recovery of 52.8% from the 2019 levels. By 2022, the tourism sector was contributing 4.7% to GDP contributing UGX 7,916.1Bn (USD 2.1bn) which is equivalent to 47% of the country's GDP. In terms of employment, the Tourism sector contributed 620,000 direct jobs in 2022 which is approximately 3.5% of the total employment in Uganda.

For the last five years from 2017 to 2021, Mgahinga Gorilla National Park and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park received a total of **151,739** tourists combined that is in **2017** 30,031; **2018** 39,923; **2019** 43,934; **2020** 16,610; **2021** 21,241; 2022 38,105 tourists¹. According to the statistical abstract by the ministry of Tourism, wildlife and antiquities shows that that for the year 2022, the visits to the two National Parks by the tourists contributed a tune of 10% of the total population of tourists who visited the various National parks in Uganda with Murchison being the highest at 40%, and the second being Queen Elizabeth National Park at 26% then two combined come third at 10%. Hon. Minister, the reason we do not have a traffic of tourists visiting both Bwindi and Mgahinga is because of distance because of poor infrastructure thus they chose to go to Rwanda.

The government has prioritized the construction of tourism roads that is, the government of Uganda has set to construct 325 kilometers of tarmac roads in various parts of the country to facilitate the tourism sector. The roads include Kitgum – Kidepo (116Km), Lake Bunyonyi-Kisoro-Mgahinga (74Km), Karenga-Kapedo-Kaabong (70Km) and **Kisoro-Rubuguri-Muko. Kabale-Ruhija- Buhoma road 144 kms, Kanungu-Hamurwa road, Kihihi-Butogota-Buhoma (Kanyantorogo –Butogota (16.5km) and Butogota – Buhoma (15km).**

Kanyantorogo- Buhoma 37km, Buhoma measuring 10km Nkuringo-Mgahinga 60kms out of 180km of tarmac. If these roads are constructed, it will be easier for one to move around from Mgahinga Cross to mountain climbing then to Queen Elizabeth then to view the Chimpanzees in Kibaale National Park, and then proceed to Murchison National Park.

Hon. Minister, while we appreciate the current work by the government to develop and improve the road infrastructure in Uganda, this seems not to be directed towards the most productive sectors like tourism. This is evident in other sectors like manufacturing where most of the industrial parks are in a very sorry state and they share the same sentiments as the Tourism sector. We have seen some roads being constructed due to political influence with no benefit to the nation and no contribution to the economic growth and development of the Country.

¹ UBOS, 2022. Statistical Abstract https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/05_20232022_Statistical_Abstract.pdf

The Objective of this Letter

This letter intends therefore to bring to your attention the poor state of the Tourism roads and request that through your office this can be budgeted for by your Ministry in the 2024/25 Financial Year. If possible, Hon. Minister, we can take you to a guided tour of these roads in Bwindi and Mgahinga to have a clear picture of what is happening on the ground.

We pray that:

- a) The Ministry of Works and Transport and Government of Uganda takes a keen interest in resolving the tourism infrastructure issue especially for the access to the two National Parks (Bwindi and Mgahinga) as soon as possible otherwise, the government and private sector are going to continuously lose revenue and jobs since tourists find it feasible to travel to Rwanda and take two (2) hours to Volcanoes National Park for gorilla trekking as compared to moving on Ugandan dilapidated roads networks for over 12 hours.
- b) Consider fast-tracking the process of the construction and improvement of various aerodromes in various areas, especially Kisoro and Kihiihi and upgrading them to international airports. The required facilities are construction of runways for big aircrafts, investing in air traffic control, customs, and immigration officials. This can ease the travel from either Entebbe airport or any other place of origin for tourists straight to the National parks instead of embarking on a 500km distance by road. This can be done through Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) with the existing privately owned aerodromes such as one in Kihiihi.
- c) Consider budget allocation in the FY 2024/25 towards the construction and development of Tourism roads and said aerodromes as identified above. Moreover, as indicated above the returns on investment is as fast as instant. Hon. Minister, working on the proposed infrastructure will transform the tourism industry forever and the investment can be recovered in less than 2 years.

In conclusion, we commend the government for the good job well done on the construction of roads. However, this has not been the case for the roads in Bwindi Impenetrable and the Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks which are in a very sorry state, and the earlier the intervention the better to save our tourism sector.

Annex: Pictures showing the current state of the said roads



Photo 1: Tourist Van Stuck along Buhoma- Ruhiiija Road. **Photo 2:** Floods along Butogota-Buhoma Road

Sincerely,

Stephen Asiimwe

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

CC: Permanent Secretary and Secretary to the Treasury – Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

Permanent Secretary – Ministry of Works and Transport