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## The proposed Amuru Sugar Works; how a win-win situation can be achieved

Monday, 21 May 2012 00:00 | Written by Owor Arthur

Amuru district has been the centre stage for heightened political activities climaxing in the visit of H.E President Yoweri Museveni to the area on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2012 and on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

The visits have come in the wake of the controversy around land in Kololo, Paillec Parish in Amuru sub-county. This is where proprietors of Amuru Sugar Works were awarded 10,000 hectares of land by Amuru District Land Board on 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2008 for a lease period of 49 years (Minutes of Amuru District Land Board (9), Min. 5 (1) 12/11/2008.) The recommendation from Amuru sub-county Area Land Committee was that the area was "vacant".

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Since then, there have been several protests from both the locals and leaders of the sub-region arguing that there was no vacant land in the area. Their opinion was that land in the area was customary and therefore managed and controlled communally under the clan system. Under the auspices of the Acholi Parliamentary Group, several mobilization tours were organized in the sub-region to raise awareness on land issues in post conflict reconstruction.

Clearly, two schools of thought were discernable. The first held that those seen to be opposing the scheme were large land owners who wanted proprietors of Amuru Sugar Works to acquire land through them. And that they ought to be

major stakeholders.

The second was of the view that the area awarded to Amuru Sugar Complex is public land and the Amuru District land Board had all the powers bestowed upon it under the Land Act, Chapter 227 to award the land to Madhivani.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2012, in a land mark ruling, court held that Amuru Sugar Works' lease offer was lawful and valid as was offered under the hand and stamp of the District Land Board. In his concluding remarks during the ruling, the learned Justice Musene stated that efforts of all parties and others were necessary if meaningful development was to take place. He went on to state that this would provide room for reconciliation as much as possible.



This is the view of land in question

The President's willingness to negotiate was exemplified by publicly withdrawing the very radical former Resident District Commissioner, Milton Odongo indicated that he was leaving no stone unturned. The President's meeting with Lamogi land owners in state house prior to his

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visit to the area (Kololo in Amuru) supports the assertion that he was willing to enlist their support in this multi-million venture.

Amidst growing pressure, the President openly announced his willingness to negotiate with local land owners and other actors (Lamogi Clan) when he urged land owners and local leaders to constitute a harmonized team (Lamogi clan and leaders) to engage government. The team is meant to carry out extensive sensitization in the sub-county stipulating benefits of the sugar complex to the locals. The communities and leaders promised to come up with the said committee in a period of two weeks.

It is apparent that the complex land issues in Amuru that were over simplified were now being placed under context. The long history of displacement, migration, selfish interests and the recent discoveries of oil seem to have been drivers of this confusion. The locals felt government had sinister motives centred on what was beneath the land in the sub-region.

The deployment of policemen at Kololo Primary School (a community primary school) has militarized provision of social services with pupils choosing to stay at home. The school administration intimated to the writer that out of a total of 250 pupils less than 20 had reported for studies on day two. Parents interviewed expressed their frustrations at this development and called for the withdrawal of the police from this school.



Staffroom of Kololo Community School

It is my contention that a win-win situation can be achieved in the Amuru Sugar Works Complex scenario. The right set of actors, deliberate attempts at limiting the use of security elites and active involvement of land owners to me will deliver the peace and development dividends in the area. I also agree with World Bank recommendation that a temporary moratorium be put on issuance on individual titles to customary certificates of ownership. Fast tracking of land policy in Uganda and the creation of Land Information centres to the sub-county levels are some of the practical recommendations in the wake of to return and resettlement.

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