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Residents of Buhweju District have asked the government to prioritise roads, schools and health facilities, saying their decision to vote out the Opposition should now translate into improved service delivery.

Buhweju, which was carved out of greater Bushenyi District in 2010, has a population of about 170,000 people. Despite its agricultural potential, it remains the only district in Ankole Sub-region without a single kilometre of tarmac road. The district's rugged and hilly terrain has, for years, made access to basic services such as health care, clean water and markets difficult.

Most residents are farmers growing coffee, tea, bananas, millet and potatoes. The district is also known as one of the biggest producers of waragi, a local brew. However, poor road infrastructure has limited the movement of produce and access to essential services.

For the past decade, Buhweju has largely been represented in Parliament by Opposition legislator, Mr Francis Mwijukye. He first entered Parliament in 2016 on the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) ticket. In 2019, Buhweju was split into two constituencies—Buhweju West and Buhweju County. Mr Mwijukye retained his seat in Buhweju County during the 11th Parliament but lost it in the recent elections to National Resistance Movement (NRM) candidate Zaddock Mutekanga.

Mr Mutekanga polled 11,322 votes against Mr Mwijukye's 9,790, becoming the only NRM MP to unseat an Opposition legislator in Ankole Sub-region. His victory has raised expectations among residents that the government will now pay greater attention to the district's long-standing challenges.

Some residents recall remarks made by President Museveni in 2018 while

Buhweju demands roads, schools after voting NRM



Residents dig a community access road in Kayonza Cell, Kayonza Parish in Rubengye Sub-county, Buhweju District, on January 11. PHOTO/JULIUS BYAMUKAMA

campaigning for the NRM flag bearer in the Sheema Municipality by-election, where he said he had "removed Buhweju from the map of Uganda" because of voting for the Opposition. At the time, the President contrasted Mr Mwijukye with former NRM MP Ephraim Biraro, whom he described as persistent in lobbying for services.

"Buhweju had a hardworking man called Biraro in Parliament. That man used to bother me so much with services like roads, water and schools. But they voted for a person who just makes noise in Parliament," President Museveni said at a rally in Kihunda, Sheema Municipality.

Residents now say their decision to support NRM leaders is aimed at changing that narrative.

Mr Deo Muhwezi, a resident of Kyesi-ka, said the community hopes the government will now listen to their concerns. "We have poor roads and a weak communication network. We hope our new leaders will lobby for us so that we can transport our produce easily and access communication services," he said.

Challenges

Mr Muhwezi added that many health centres lack medicines, which continues to affect the district's development.

Mr Innocent Rugyero, another resident, said Buhweju had not been adequately served despite its historical role in the liberation struggle. "There was army training in Bitsya and Nsiika, and even the force that captured Kam-

pala trained from Buhweju. One wonders why the district has never been appreciated. It is the only district in Ankole without a tarmac road," he said.

Mr John Francis Ainomujuni, a boda boda rider, said improved roads would unlock the district's potential. "Once we get a tarmac road, Buhweju will be back on the map. Farmers will develop faster. We are a rich district with resources like gold and copper, but we lack roads," he said.

Buhweju West MP-elect John Bosco Kariisa acknowledged the challenges facing the district, particularly in education and health. He said many parishes do not have schools, contrary to government policy requiring a primary school in every parish and a secondary school in every sub-county.

KEY DEMANDS

- Tarmacking of major district roads.
- Construction of a district hospital.
- Improved staffing and drug supply in health centres.
- More primary and secondary schools.
- Extension of electricity to unserved parishes.
- Access to clean and safe water.
- Improved mobile communication network.

"In the few schools we have, the infrastructure is very poor. You may find two classes, like Primary One and Two, sharing one classroom," Mr Kariisa said. He added that residents, including farmers, artisanal miners and unemployed youth, have high expectations from the new leadership.

"Even before I am sworn in, I will use my networks in government to ensure Buhweju's priorities are considered in the upcoming budgets. We have painted Buhweju yellow and we want to work as a team," he said.

The Buhweju District Woman MP-elect, Ms Namara Annet Oyes, said she joined politics to improve service delivery especially in the health sector.

"When I looked at health services, I realised they were lacking. It was embarrassing that mothers could give birth on the roadside without even a razor blade," she said, adding that she had previously lobbied for mama kits to support expectant mothers.

Ms Oyes said although the district has a road network of about 110 kilometres, none is tarmacked.

"People want better roads to take their produce to markets. If the government can give us water, electricity and good roads, then it will have truly served Buhweju," she said.