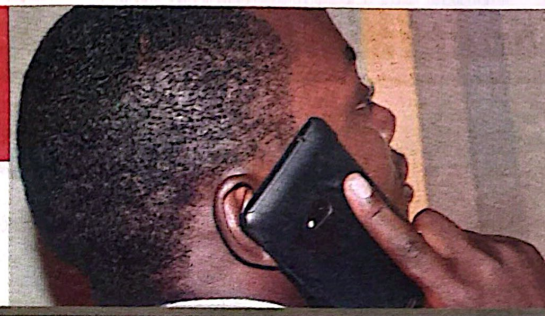


Africa's phone users reach 700 million. Mobile phone subscriptions are now almost eight times higher in Africa than in 2000, reaching about 700 million. According to a report by the International Telecommunication Union, mobile technology has played a crucial role in promoting financial inclusion in sub-Saharan Africa. [Monitor correspondent]



Ex-Uganda Railways employees cry foul as govt delays pension payment

Little. The workers also allege that they are being paid less than what they are supposed to get.

BY ISMAIL MUSA LADU
iladu@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. For almost a year now, former Uganda Railway Corporation employees have not got their monthly pension after government declared the annuity surplus to requirement.

According to the Uganda Railways Pensioners Association, their members are wallowing in poverty as the authorities responsible continue to ignore their plea, or provide them proper explanation for the delay to pay them their pension.

And for that, the retired employees, majority of whom are weak and sickly due to advanced age, said they are struggling to survive.

Some expressed regret for dedicating their productive years to the corporation, wondering whether pension, which is lawfully due to them, has since become a state favour.

Speaking to *Daily Monitor* in Kampala last week, Mr Ladislaus Nakoko, one of the pensioners, said: "It is almost a year now since I last got my pension. I have a family but I cannot take care of them because I cannot access my pension."

He added: "As we grow older we need extra care and that cannot happen if we are unable to access our pension. We do not want to be a burden to our children and families but as long as we don't get our pen-



Some of the former Uganda Railways Corporation employees appear before the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament in 2013. They maintain that government has refused to pay their pension giving no explanation. FILE PHOTO

sion on timely basis we are bound to degenerate into something we don't want."

In a similar predicament is Mr Eddy Bongo.

He is not sure whether he will live to see another day, considering his unpredictable health condition.

He said: "I have undergone a brain tumour operation. The cost of the drugs I am taking is very expensive. And without my pension ... I just don't know what to do!"

And then there is Mr John Karokora.

He said several of his colleagues have since died before getting their pension. And there is no hope that their families would be beneficiaries either.

"Many of our colleagues have died angry. Others are bedridden wondering where the next help will come from yet that is not how it is supposed to be."

"We have a right to live no matter our age. We want the authority to know that we are suffering. And we do not even have money to take us

back to our villages to vote."

The members of the association (Uganda Railways Pensioners Association), totalling 1250, say they are being paid below what they should be earning due to what they describe as irrational formulae used in calculating pension due to them.

Confirmation

In an interview on Thursday last week, the acting managing director Uganda Railways Corporation, Mr Charles Kateeba, confirmed that in

the last 11 months, the former workers have not been paid their pension, amounting to about Shs1.5 billion in total.

He said: "We have arrears of 11 months. And we have been working with government to have them paid. The good news is that a supplementary budget has been secured and in the next one or two weeks all of them will be paid their pension."

He added: "I have confirmation from the ministry of Finance that the pensioners will be paid all their outstanding arrears and thereafter they will be paid every month as it is supposed to be until the end of the financial year."

According to Mr Kateeba, the corporation cannot afford to pay the Shs130 million every month to its pensioners because the source of its income is not only limited but also overwhelmed by competing priorities.

He also denied claims that authorities have not explained the current situation to the pensioners.

RIGHT TO PENSION

According to the report of the Sectoral Committee on Public Service and Local Government on the Petition by Uganda Railways Pensioners Association of 2013, it is a right of pensioners that their pension is paid. Government and Uganda Railways Corporation should ensure that this is not violated.