

Ministry seeks funding to boost oil palm project

By Eddie Ssejjoba

The agriculture ministry is seeking Parliament's authorisation to borrow \$75.82m (about sh250b) from the International Fund for Agriculture to support the National Oil Palm Project (NOPP).

According to a report presented to MPs on the parliamentary committee on national economy during a three-day visit to Buvuma district, palm oil production was facing a shortage of 1,275 metric tonnes of crude oil per day.

The current palm oil production in Kalangala provides a daily production of 225 metric tonnes per day, yet the oil refinery in Jinja, owned by BIDCO Uganda Limited, requires a daily supply of 1,500 metric tonnes of crude oil.

Connie Masaba, the project manager of Vegetable Oil Development Project 2, which has been replaced by NOPP, told MPs led by the committee chairperson, Syda Bbumba (Nakaseke North) that the loan was required to support oil palm growing in Buvuma, Mayuge Bugiri, Namayingo, Masaka, Kyotera, Mukono and Buikwe districts.

She said the project would also use the funds to establish other palm oil trials in other parts of the country.

The old loan of \$52m, which the Government acquired, according to Masaba, covered oil palm development in Kalangala district, sunflower and soybean, simsim and groundnut growing in 51 districts in southwestern Uganda, West Nile, eastern and northern Uganda.

In Buvuma, according to Masaba, the project will this year establish nurseries

for oil palm trees, once the land acquisition process is completed.

She said so far, the project had acquired 5,000 hectares of land and had embarked on environmental assessments as they wait to complete the process before the actual planting starts.

Bbumba asked the project implementers to sort out pending issues and challenges and expedite the process, saying the committee was sick of government projects which are never completed.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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"We shall engage the finance ministry to see that they address issues of delayed land compensations," she said, adding that they were also interested in hearing from the communities about the project.

The state minister for agriculture, Christopher Kibanzanga, who accompanied the committee members, told Joanne Ikiiza, the legal officer of the National Association of Professional Environmentalists, that the Government would safeguard the environment.

Kibanzanga said the project would strictly adhere to environmental concerns, such as preserving forest cover and leaving at least a 200-metre buffer zone from the lake.