

Energy

Concrete electricity poles for Karamoja

By Daniel Edyegu

As a way of checking frequent destruction of electricity poles by wildfires, the Government is piloting the use of precast concrete poles in Karamoja and Acholi sub-regions.

The \$80m scheme (about sh288b), under a contract period of 15 months from this month, will see the extension of electricity to two more districts in Karamoja sub-region. For five other districts in the area where power already exists, it will be extended deeper into the rural areas to increase access. Kotido and Kaabong are receiving power for the first time. Orom sub-county in Kitgum district will receive an extension of power through Kotido district.

Daji Group, a Chinese firm, has been contracted to do the power extension, while Ghods Niroo Engineering Company, an Iranian firm, is rendering the consultancy supervision

service. The scheme is being funded with a loan from the Islamic Development Bank (IDB).

Anthony Wamabuya, the senior construction engineer with Rural Electrification Agency (REA), explained in an interview on Tuesday that the precast concrete poles would stretch 700km, transmitting 33KV power to the sub-region.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ The concrete poles, unlike wooden ones, do not rot, cannot be degraded by termites and are resilient to fires.

"We did a survey on the appropriate kind of poles to use in this region in 2014. Our findings indicated precast concrete poles would be better than the current wooden poles use due to the rampant



Grace Birikadde (left), the REA environmental specialist, addresses residents of Amudat town council at Lochege parish. Photo by Daniel Edyegu

bush burning in Karamoja," Wamabuya explained.

In Karamoja, bush burning mainly occurs in the dry season as pastoralists burn the dry grass to allow for emergence of lush vegetation to graze the animals. In February 2014, for instance, bush fires burnt over 30km of the newly commissioned Muyembe-Nakapirit-Amudat power line. The fire destroyed numerous wooden poles along the stretch.

Precast concrete poles are produced by casting concrete in a reusable mold or "form" which is then cured in a controlled environment. The concrete poles are reinforced with steel inside to strengthen them.

"The price of one concrete pole is about 40% more than the wooden one, but the benefits from it justify the additional cost. The concrete poles, unlike wooden ones do not rot, cannot be degraded by termites and are resilient to fires. And while wooden poles have an estimated lifespan of 20 years, concrete poles last an



Lokeris greeting an elder at Moroto municipality during a meeting on the new power extension scheme

estimated 50 years. And they are more or less maintenance free," Wamabuya explained.

Under the scheme, which will be jointly executed with Uganda Electricity Distribution Company Limited (UEDCL), a total of 104 transformers will be installed along the extension areas with over 2400-targeted new connections.

"UEDCL will improve the Opuyo power station in Soroti from where 132KV will be transmitted to Moroto. A new power sub-station is to be built in Moroto to step down this power to 33KV. In this scheme, our primary target for immediate connection are all the local government administrative units, schools, health centres and the small-scale industries," Wamabuya

stressed.

At an introductory meeting with the residents of Naturum parish, Lorege sub-county, in Nakapiripit district, Peter Lokeris, the state minister for minerals, asked the residents to use the power to improve their economic status.

"Rather than travel all the way to Mbale, say, to buy welded doors and windows, why don't you use the electricity to start a metal fabricating workshop and earn an income or open a maize milling plant? But do not risk stealing power. It will kill you," Lokeris warned.

Felix Lochaale, the Napak district speaker, wooed Karimojong who had shunned the region due to lack of electricity to return and invest home.

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It's been 10 years since you departed from us. As a family we cherish your memorable moments with us, your bravery and commitment to educate us, nurture us and give us your best as a responsible father, husband, grandfather and friend. You are still very much alive in our hearts and spirits. Proudly and dearly missed by your wife Moudah Kobusingye, your Children & their families: John Kateshumbwa, Leonard Mugizi, Dicksons Kateshumbwa, Moudah Kyobutungi, Margaret Kyomuhangi,

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