

President Yoweri Museveni. Kalungu West MP Joseph Ssewungu said the

Court action

Vision Group is demanding that

Constitution. The detention is an infringement on press freedom.

the basis of the law.

By Vivian Agaba

MPs have put to task officials from the Ministry of Agriculture to explain why they took over functions of the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) without following the correct procedure.

This, after Parliament's committee on statutory authorities and state enterprises (COSASE) established that in 2013/2014 financial year, the ministry, working on a cabinet directive, made some amendments to the National Agricultural Advisory Services Act 2001. The MPs said amending laws is not within Cabinet powers.

The MPs were interfacing with a delegation that was led by state minister for animal industry Joy Kabatsi to respond to audit queries raised in the 2013-2014 Auditor General's (AG) report.

NAADS, a semi-autonomous public agency within the Ministry of Agriculture, was put in place by an Act of Parliament of 2001 to provide agricultural advisor and extension services to farmers countrywide.

Committee chairperson Abdu

Agriculture ministry officials faulted over NAADS mandate

Katuntu (Bugweri MP) tasked the Kabatsi with explaining why the ministry went ahead to carry out an illegality, yet herself as a lawyer knew the right procedure when it comes to amending an Act of Parliament.

"Laws are never made in vain, but should be followed to the letter and my learned friend should know that. What the agriculture ministry did was contrary to the law," Katuntu said.

He noted that the reason the ministry took over the mandate of NAADS and left it with only a single spine extension system was to target the money government was investing in NAADS.

"By the time NAADS was put in place, the ministry was not doing its job. Advisory services to the farmers across the country had totally collapsed. After seeing some money being given to

NAADS, you grabbed their mandate of giving advisory services to farmers so that you could take that money," Katuntu said.

In 2014, President Yoweri Museveni directed Cabinet to dissolve the infamous NAADS project due to its poor performance and that the funds which were hitherto allocated to the project be utilised to enhance agro-based production.

Dr Samuel K. Mugasi, NAADS executive director, reported that after the advisory mandate was taken away from them, they were left in charge of distribution of inputs to farmers countrywide and supporting value chain addition.

Kitgum Woman MP Beatrice Anywar said following the decision to take over NAADS' activities, ministry officials

decided to terminate the services of extension workers, especially at sub-county level and yet NAADS continued to receive budgetary allocation.

"As a committee, these are issues we need to query further. For instance, how many people lost their jobs when the ministry took over the functions of NAADS?" she asked.

MPs wondered why the ministry had a lawyer to advise them on such matters. In her response, Kabatsi said: "When we sought for the AG's advice, he said we should go through the process properly."

The minister was asked whether the Attorney General's advice was in writing, but said it was verbal.

The MPs told Kabatsi not to drag the AG into this controversy in case he was not part of the fraudulent process.

Okasi Opolot, a technical person in the agriculture ministry, apologised to the MPs: "The ministry erred; it moved very fast to implement Cabinet's decision without following the right procedure. We are asking for time to be able to operate more effectively within the law.

The committee gave the minister Kabatsi (inset) 30 days to come up with a statement explaining all the raised concerns which she will table to Parliament for discussion and the Speaker of Parliament will advise on the best way to deal with the matter.



WAY FORWARD