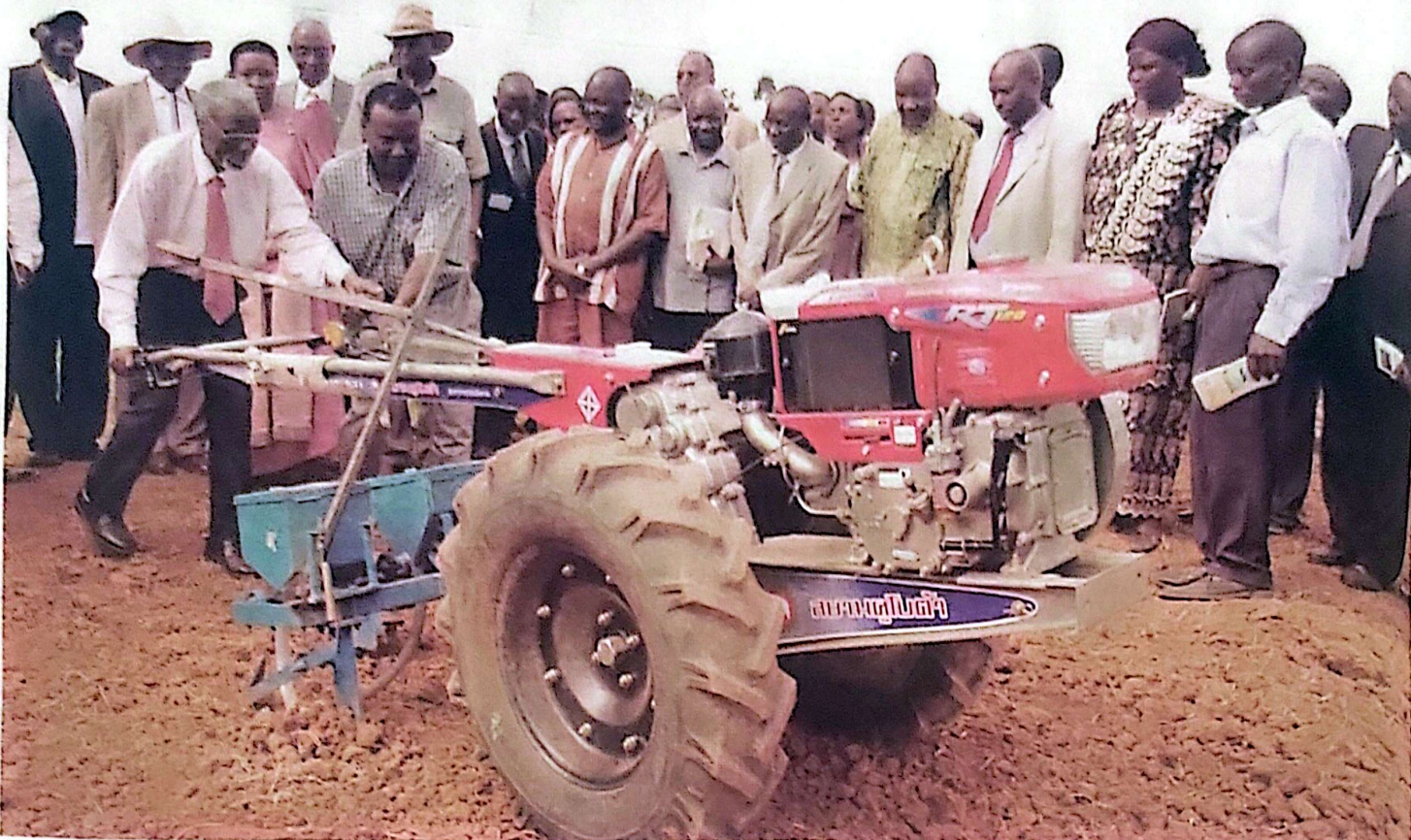


Promise Tracker

New special report. The **Promise Tracker** is Daily Monitor's weekly special feature that will track the promises made by leaders of all categories as well as public agencies to the people. The aim is to cause accountability, show status and analyse whether it was realistic, unrealistic or empty promise.



Launched. Second Deputy Prime Minister Kirunda Kivejinja (left), being helped by Senior Agriculture Engineering ministry of Agriculture Stephen Kizito (2nd left) at the launch of the Walking tractors for the National Agricultural Advisory Services (Naads) at Namalere in Nangabo Sub-county, Wakiso District in 2008. FILE PHOTO

9 years later, farmers still wait for Walking tractors

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THE PROMISE:

On June 12, 2008, Dr Ezra Suruma, then minister for Finance, Planning and Economic Development, announced in his Budget speech for 2008/2009 that the country was to import walking tractors for distribution to farmers ahead of the next planting season.

Walking tractors are two-wheeled and are in some cases called hand tractors. They are quite popular in many parts of the world and are mostly used on small farm holdings.

"I am also allocating Shs2.8 billion to commence the nationwide move towards mechanisation of agriculture. By the commencement of the next season in September 2008, National Agricultural Advisory Services (Naads) will have imported 500 walking tractors with standard implements to be distributed to farmer groups in 500 parishes to begin the drive to increase agricultural production," Dr Suruma

said.

He said the tractors had been tested in various parts of the country in the Financial Year 2007/2008 and found to "versatile".

"Honourable Members will need to note that a phased approach to mechanisation is necessary to allow development of the necessary training and maintenance support that will need to be created across the country," he added.

The planned distribution of the walking tractors was captured under the "labour, extension and mechanisation" section of the budget, which also provided for the training of "farmers in the use of fertilisers, pesticides, farm machinery and irrigation and to disseminate tested crop varieties and production techniques to farmers to improve their agricultural yields" at a cost of Shs37 billion.

Dr Suruma's announcements were in line with the provisions of the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) which government launched in 2000 and began implement-

ing in 2001.

PMA, which was an integral part of government's strategies to tackle poverty as spelt out in the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) of 1997. The PEAP, which was revised early in the century, had four main goals - creation of a framework for economic growth and structural transformation; ensuring good governance and security; directly increasing the ability of the poor to raise incomes;

500

NUMBER OF WALKING TRACTORS WITH STANDARD IMPLEMENTS NAADS WILL HAVE IMPORTED TO BE DISTRIBUTED TO FARMER GROUPS IN 500 PARISHES

and directly increasing the quality of life of the poor.

With over 80 per cent of the population living in rural areas where agriculture is the biggest contributor to the population's livelihoods, it was believed that modernisation of agriculture would help increase productivity on the various farms, increase amounts of produce available for marketing and create direct and indirect employment opportunities, all of which were expected to translate into increased household incomes and better standards of living.

The procurement of the tractors from Thailand was meant to have been complete by the end of September 2008, but the process was halted after the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) raised a red flag amid complaints that PPDA rules and regulations had been breached and that prices had been inflated.

While the market value was at the time known to be between Shs6.5 million per unit, supply documents indicated that each was to be supplied at Shs18.5 million.

Since then the tractors have never been distributed to the farmers countryside and no one seems to know where the funds that had been allocated for the purpose went.

Mr Jim Mugunga, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Finance, says that he is not certain what could have happened to the money, but hastens to add that under previous accounting regulations money could have been retained and spent the following financial year. The problem, though, is that there is no evidence that the tractors were ever bought.

IMPACT

Failure to take bold steps towards the mechanisation of agriculture has meant that the country has not been able to register significant growth in the sector.

According to a paper that was produced by Mokoro Ltd for the Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI) in 2010, growth of Uganda's agricultural sector slowed down from a peak of 7.7 per cent in the Financial Year 2001/2002 due to a worldwide tea and coffee boom, to a low of about 0.1 per cent in the Financial Year 2006/2007.

That sharp decline was attributed to a severe drought that ravaged the country that year. Though the country experienced recovery the following year, growth has stalled at around 1.8 per cent, a situation which the paper attributes to a cocktail of reasons.

"Overall sector growth is hampered by the inability of farmers to increase farm productivity. Uptake of modern farming technologies (including irrigation, use of fertilisers and pesticides, soil health practices and minimising post-harvest losses) remains low and results in a slow rate of growth in the sector as

a whole, and in production in particular," the paper says.

This problem has been mainly attributed to low funding levels for agriculture, a view that is echoed in the report "Financing and performance of the Agriculture sector for the Financial Year 2014/2015" which was produced in September 2015 by the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group.

"The low allocation towards capital spending means that the sector cannot fund activities such as construction of valley tanks/dams, irrigation schemes, and purchase of equipment such as tractors," the paper says.

Budgetary allocations to the agriculture sector remain less than 10 per cent of the national budget, which contradicts what the government set out to do when it joined other African Union states in endorsing the Malabo Declaration of 2014, which seeks to, among other things, enhance investment finance in agriculture and work towards ending hunger by 2025 by among other things doubling of productivity through funding of irrigation, mechanisation and provision of inputs.



Trained. Farmers going through Walking tractors training.
FILE PHOTO

"The issue of the Walking tractors has not been brought to our attention, but it is something that the committee would be interested in since we are keen on mechanisation of agriculture. We are, however, happy that this financial year, government has set aside money to purchase at least 185 tractors for distribution to some farmers."

MS LOWILLA OKETAYOT, MP (NRM), PADER DISTRICT AND CHAIRPERSON OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE.

"I wouldn't know what could have happened to the money. The best person to explain would be the accounting officer, but under the new financial regulations, any unused balances automatically revert to the consolidated fund. Even if an accounting officer does not return it we can always go to Bank of Uganda and mop it."

JIM MUGUNGA, SPOKESPERSON MINISTRY OF FINANCE, PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

"This is a matter that must be followed up because the entire mechanisation plan is being gone about like some kind of joke. NAADS recently brought in 40 tractors, but they were all distributed in Isingiro for purposes of enhancing the growth of grass. They have provided for the acquisition of another batch of tractors, but that is too small for a country whose backbone is agriculture."

FRANCIS BARNABAS GONHASA, MP (FDC) KABWERI COUNTY, KIBUKU DISTRICT AND SHADOW MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE.

Official explanation.

The Executive Director of the NAADS, Dr Samuel Mugasi, who had earlier promised to talk to *Daily Monitor* about the tractors, did not pick up his known mobile number when contacted later.

Ms Connie Acayo, the assistant commissioner in charge of communication in the Ministry of Agriculture, told *Daily Monitor* that the project had been partially implemented.

"The ministry imported some 50 walking tractors. These were distributed to different farming groups around the country. I would want to believe that the other 450 were not procured and distributed because no funds had been allocated towards that purpose," she said.

However, that position seems to be at variance with events surrounding the purchase of the walking tractors that Dr Suruma pronounced himself on.

While it is on record that the ministry imported the walking tractors early in 2008 and they were officially flagged off

by President Museveni in April 2008, there is no record that the 500 were ever imported and distributed.

Besides, if the distribution of the 50 was flagged off amid so much fanfare, why would the importation and subsequent distribution of the 500 farmer groups in parishes across the country not be commissioned with a much bigger bang?



In charge. Dr Samuel Mugasi. FILE PHOTO

Daily Monitor position

This is yet another case of a government programme gone wrong because of procurement problems. As a country we must expeditiously move to streamline the procurement process.

It was largely on account of the intervention of the PPDA that the process of identifying a contractor for the 600MW Karuma project was delayed, for example. The PPDA's September 2012 intervention followed protests by some of the unsuccessful bidding companies that the contracts committee had proceeded to the stage of subjecting the bids to financial evaluation without informing them of the outcome of the technical evaluation.

On February 21, 2014, the then Director of Planning at the Uganda National Roads Authority (Unra), Mr David Luyimbazi, told participants at a workshop organised by both the National Planning Authority (NPA) and the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACFODE), under the theme "Effect of Procurement Procedures and Project Implementation on Resource Absorption" that the procurement processes in Uganda are "unnecessarily long", which has adversely affected service delivery.

Mr Luyimbazi, who was presenting a paper

titled "The Effects of Procurement and Project Implementation on Resource Absorption in the Road Sector", said that delays caused by procurement in the road sector were costing the country \$100m per month.

In short, you just have to point out a project that has attracted considerable public funding and you will have procurement problems to deal with. Of course, it is important to have well laid out procurement procedures in order to avoid abuse of public funds. But a balance has to be struck to ensure that control does not override effectiveness.

Procurement issues aside, the story of Walking tractors highlights the largely indifferent attitude the government has had towards developing agriculture over the years. It is obvious that farmers can no longer rely on that hand hoe to compete in modern times. Walking tractors is one cheap technology that can be used to set the farmers on road to mechanisation, as Dr Suruma pointed out in 2008.

Why hasn't the government paid due attention to this important issue and ensured the acquisition of walking tractors nine years since the promise was made and resources committed for the purpose?..



Received. Farmers in Gulu and Amuru districts receiving tractors to ease their cultivation hurdles in 2017. FILE PHOTO

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