

# Promise Tracker

## Govt's delayed delivery of tractors frustrates farmers

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### THE PROMISE

One of the promises that the ruling NRM party made in the run up to the 2016 general election was to make deliberate interventions and investments in the agriculture sector to boost production and improve farmers' incomes and national revenue.

The party listed 20 action points to achieve the goal. At number nine on that list was a plan to promote mechanisation of agriculture.

"Promote mechanisation through availing machinery for hire at affordable rates, for bush clearing, ploughing, harrowing, planting, harvesting and making silage and hay to make it easy for medium and large-scale farming," the manifesto read in

part. The party claimed that between 2010 and 2015 handed out some agricultural equipment, including tractors, ox-ploughs, earth moving equipment and multi-purpose threshers to commercial farmers in select districts.

According to the party, the partial mechanisation had improved productivity in areas where the equipment had been distributed. This seemed to inform the next part of the promise.

"As part of agriculture mechanisation, 40 tractors and implements will be delivered before the end of FY 2015/2016. These will be given to organised farmers in 10 districts to get tractors. More 50 tractors will be available in FY 2016/2017. A hire service for the tractors is being worked out," the party stated.

The 40 tractors, procured by National Agricultural Advisory Services (Naads),

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 a realistic, unrealistic or empty promise.

### 218

**Tractors.** The number of tractors that the government promised to distribute to farmers' groups. The beneficiaries are yet to receive them.

were given to farmers in Lyantonde, Kiruhura, Ibanda, Mitooma, Sheema, Mbarara, Isingiro, Bushenyi and Ntungamo districts by President Museveni in March 2017.

Now, more than 17 months since Mr Museveni swore in for another term, 218 tractors that the Minister of Agriculture, Mr Vincent Ssempiija, said were to be

imported by Naads for distribution to other farmer groups in the country are yet to be delivered.

However, this promise to boost mechanisation came against a backdrop of a series of failed attempts to move in that direction.

Spurred by number 5 of the 10-point programme - "Building an independent, integrated and self-sustaining national economy," the leadership of the NRM had in its first years in power attempted to establish a semblance of a tractor hire service akin to what the country had in the 1960s and 1970s. Ms Victoria Ssekitooleko, who was the Minister for Agriculture between 1986 and 1995, and presided

Rudimentary Farmers in Nyaravur Sub-county, Nebbi District, cultivate their gardens with hand hoes.

PHOTO BY FELIX WARDOM OKELO



MONITOR'S POSITION

**M**echanisation of agriculture is certainly the way to go. It is important that a list is borrowed from the tractor hire service that government used to run in the 1960s and 1970s. Back then, government would hire drivers and mechanics to drive the tractors and provide maintenance service when it was required.

Resources may not allow for that to happen in the same way, but it is still important that people from beneficiary communities are trained in driving and mechanical engineering to provide the services when required. Farmers also need to be provided with basic training in the use of tractors and other tools for cultivation. If what the Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Kabwari County MP (FDC) in Kibuku District, Mr Francis

Barnabas Gomaahasa, says is anything to go by, the few people who have since begun mechanisation on their own farms are importing labour to operate their machines from countries like Kenya and Zimbabwe. This should not be allowed to continue.

One of the ideas that the NRM had promised in the run up to the 2010 elections was creation of Village Farmer Development Forums (VFDFs) countrywide.

According to the 2010 manifesto, the VFDFs were meant to be the vehicles through which households would be reached for purposes of alleviating poverty, fighting household food insecurity and helping farming communities make the transition from subsistence to commercial farming.

One hundred farmers were meant to be selected from each parish and helped to leap into commercialised farming every year.

The VFDFs would be vehicles through which Naads would ensure that there would be a steady supply of high yield multiplied planting and stocking materials to be passed on to the farmers as and when they needed them.

The idea was never picked, but now that we are talking mechanisation, it would be a nice time to revive it. They would come handy in serving to convince Uganda's predominantly traditional and ill-educated farming communities to learn and get training in mechanisation, irrigation and methods of modern farming.

VOICES



"We have been told that money for tractors was budgeted for and there is a stakeholders meeting scheduled for this week, but it is not simply about the money. We have been concerned for a very long time over issues of policy and regulation. The way Naads is operating now is not guided by a legal framework. What we need is a master plan that will help guide irrigation and tractorisation,"  
LOWILA OKETAYOT, PADER DISTRICT MP



"Mechanisation is not simply about providing farmers with tractors and ploughs. Those simply open up the ground. You need to provide harrows, seeders, planter application facilities and weeders. The private sector in Amuru and Agago are already doing a commendable job. If government cannot borrow a leaf from them, let them look at countries like Kenya and Zimbabwe,"  
FRANCIS B GOMAHASA, KABWARI COUNTY MP



"We cannot underestimate the benefits that would accrue from the use of tractors, but how farmers are organised is critical to the success of the mechanisation plan. How many farmers will constitute a group or how many can they be before a tractor is allocated to them? Wouldn't it be better for the tractors to be based as sub-counties? These are some of the questions [that need to be answered]."  
AGNES TAAKA WEJULI, BUGIRI MP

OFFICIAL EXPLANATION

**T**he commissioner in charge of Agriculture Infrastructure, Mechanisation and Water for Agricultural Production, Mr Ronald Kato Kayizzi, says procurement of the tractors is in the pipeline, but declined to commit himself on the time frame within which they are expected to be delivered and distributed to the farmers.

meeting this week to hammer out the other details. It is only after that meeting that I will be able to authoritatively tell when they are expected to be delivered and given to the farmers," he said.

However, the pace at which the procurement and distribution of tractors and other related equipment is being implemented has largely meant that farmers continue to use hand hoes and other rudimentary methods of farming.

Hoes remain the biggest farming tool among farming communities.

It is estimated that up to 93 per cent of farm holdings in the country cultivate using hand hoes. This has continued to undermine production.

According to a paper that was produced by Mokoro Limited for the Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI) in 2010, Uganda has been unable to make significant steps in growing its agriculture sector.

Impact

Growth is said to have 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, a scenario which was partially attributed to a severe drought that hit the country.

The paper says though some recovery was registered in the financial year 2007/2008, it has stalled at around 1.8 per cent per year, a scenario which is blamed on a number of reasons, including failure to mechanise.

"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. Therefore, the primary objective of enhancing incomes for the farmers and revenue for the government remains out of reach.

over the project, says the tractors were sent to a select number of sub-counties and placed under the control of the LCIII chairpersons.

"The LC [III] chairman was the top authority on the tractor. He decided who could hire it and managed the proceeds. Becoming an LCIII chairman became a life and death affair because everyone wanted to control the tractor. That is how it was run down," Ms Ssekitoleko recalls.

In 2000, Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA), a government strategy, encouraged the private sector to venture into the provision of tractor hire services.

"Past programmes of government tractor hire services and tractorisation have largely performed unsatisfactorily and under PMA, government will not engage the public sector in the direct provision of these services," the document read in part.

Pursuant to that, the National Enterprise Corporation, a commercial arm of the Ministry of Defence which was established in 1989 as a tractor hire scheme, was launched in November 2009.

Others in the tractor hire services business include BID Network, which operates in parts of eastern Uganda.

Tractor hire services' nightmare

However, for those in government operating a tractor hire service remains a nightmare.

Their frustrations were best captured by President Museveni in September 2013 when he handed over 20 tractors to farmer groups from Mityana, Bulambuli, Madera, Kiboga and Soroti districts.

"The issue is who do you give the tractors? Government can buy many tractors but who will manage and maintain them? If given to individuals, they are looked after very well, but when given to groups, they are mishandled. I am taking a gamble because people made a request. If you mismanage them, it is up to you," Mr Museveni said.

While the farmers' groups now wait for the 218 tractors, sections of the public are waiting to see how the beneficiary groups will manage them.

The commissioner in charge of Agriculture Infrastructure, Mechanisation and Water for Agricultural Production, Mr Ronald Kato Kayizzi, told *Daily Monitor* that procurement of the tractors is in the pipeline, but declined to commit himself on the timeframe within which they are expected to be delivered and distributed to the farmers.

"Naads is spearheading the procurement process. They have so far worked on the specifications and we are due to hold a



Modern equipment. Second Deputy Prime Minister Kirunda Kivejinja (left) and the senior agriculture engineer in Ministry of Agriculture, Mr Stephen Kizito, test a two-wheel tractor during the launch of the agricultural equipment in Jinja District. FILE PHOTO