

the Opposition also faulted what especially those in the informal sector. "In the 2017/2018 financial year, the expected to pass the budget.

Govt asked to halt recruitment of agricultural extension workers

By Henry Sekanjako

The parliamentary committee on agriculture has recommended that the Government halts recruitment of 1,968 agricultural extension workers to empower the already existing staff.

In its ministerial policy statement for the financial year 2018/2019, the agriculture ministry had committed to recruit 1,968 extension workers, to achieve the targeted 5,000 extension workers in the district local governments countrywide.

Appearing before the committee to defend the ministry's budget last week, agriculture minister Vincent

Ssempijja told MPs that the ministry needed sh97.35b for the exercise. Of this, sh71.6b has been availed, leaving a deficit of sh25.75b.

However, the committee chaired by Pader Woman MP Lowila Oketayot, said the money for the proposed recruitment could be diverted to facilitate the already existing workers to enable them deliver services to farmers in the country.

"These people are proposing recruiting more, but we are saying we have now recruited 65% (of the required extension workers). We have them in place, but we have not adequately facilitated them. Does it make sense to rush to

BETWEEN THE LINES

■ Ssempijja said the ministry wanted to recruit the workers to enable the Government attain the recommended extension worker-household ratio of 1:500.

recruit more extension workers who will come, sit and earn salary without doing any work? Why don't we first focus on adequately facilitating the ones who are already in place?" Oketayot asked.

The Pader Woman MP said the ministry should concentrate on procuring equipment such

as motorcycles needed by the workers to carry out their work.

Presenting its position paper on the agriculture ministry to the Parliament's committee on agriculture recently, the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG) urged the Government to provide the required resources for the recruitment of 1,968 extension workers to achieve the targeted 5,000 extension workers in the district local governments.

Budget cut

The MPs also urged the Government to increase the agriculture sector share of the national budget to 10% as provided under the Maputo Declaration, saying

the continued reduction was hurting the sector.

"Agriculture funding has reduced from 3.75% to 2.9% (of the budget) and this is what we would not want to see. The worst we can expect is to see it remain at the same percentage, but not going down. When shall we start working towards the 10% Maputo Declaration?" Oketayot asked.

Just like other sectors such as health, education and transport, the MPs said the agricultural sector is an equally important sector whose funding should be increased to support development of the economy.

According to the ministerial policy statement for the

agriculture ministry, the budget for the agricultural sector is to reduce from sh863b allocated in the current financial year to sh862b in the coming financial year 2018/2019.

"The agriculture sector contributes greatly to other sectors such as education. If students eat one meal a day, how do you expect them to perform at their best? We will automatically cut on the budget for the health sector if people are fed well," Oketayot noted.

The parliamentary committee also wants funding for sub-sectors such as research, water for production and more importantly the coffee sub-sector increased.