

Monitor Time Delivery

# Machines to track absentee teachers, medics acquired

By Apollo Mubiru

The Government has acquired biometric machines to capture arrival and departure times for health workers in 221 health facilities in eastern Uganda.

In a pilot project, the equipment will also track teachers' absenteeism in government-aided primary schools in 40 districts.

The gadgets, which include phone-like handsets, computers and monitors are a grant from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID).

Adrian Green DFID's head of growth and economic management in Uganda, handed over the equipment to Prof. Ezra Suruma, the head of the Prime Minister's Office delivery unit, in Kampala yesterday.

The delivery unit facilitates faster and better implementation of national priorities.

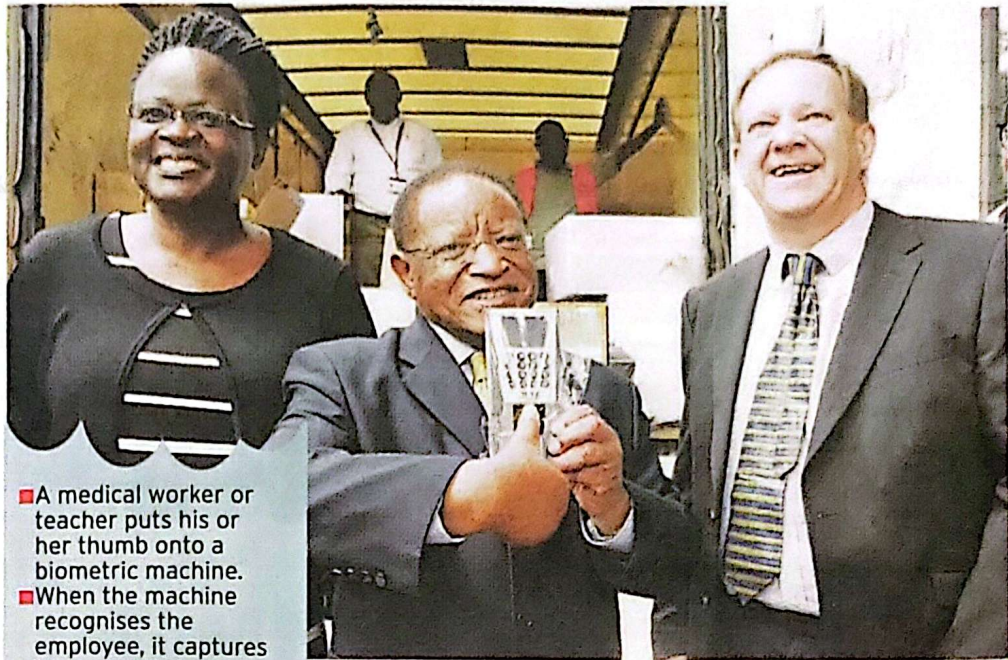
Suruma was optimistic that the equipment would improve teacher presence at schools and medical workers' attendance in health centre IIs and IIIs.

The former finance minister warned of dire repercussions for anyone absconding from duty.

"It is not a magic solution to absenteeism in schools and hospitals, but a step in the right direction. We know that there are other problems, but we shall solve them one by one," Suruma said.

He said the Office of the Prime Minister, ministries of education, health and public service would work closely with local governments, resident district commissioners, district education officers and district health officers to ensure that action is taken against absentee teachers and medics.

Suruma said health workers who had signed contracts with the Government had to be



Suruma (centre) and his executive assistant, Roselyn Alyeka, with Green displaying one of the biometric data gadgets at the Prime Minister's office in Kampala yesterday. Photo by Roderick Ahimbazwe

- A medical worker or teacher puts his or her thumb onto a biometric machine.
- When the machine recognises the employee, it captures his or her details, time of arrival and departure and sends it to the central computer for the time worked.
- The machine records and validates data, which is picked by supervisors, headteachers or hospital superintendents.
- The information is made available to the education and health ministries and public service.

## HOW THE MACHINE WORKS

present at their duty stations in order to improve healthcare.

"If you sign up to work,

you must work. We shall be monitoring in real time. When this happens in every sector, we shall see a change in service delivery."

Suruma said in Pallisa and Serere districts where the biometric machines were tested, zero absenteeism was registered in schools.

Districts where the biometric project has been rolled out in eastern Uganda are Bududa, Bugiri, Bukwo, Bulambuli, Buvuma, Buyende, Kaliro, Kapchorwa, Kayunga, Kween, Luuka, Manafwa, Mayuge, Mbale, Namutumba, Pallisa, Serere, Sironko, Soroti and Tororo.

Filbert Baguma, the general secretary of the Uganda National Teachers Union, yesterday said they did not have any problem with the machines, as long as they were used for the

intended purpose but not blame games.

"The best way to solve teacher absenteeism is to have systems in place not machines. The money used to procure the machines should be used to support and motivate teachers to do their work well," Baguma said.

He said it is the pupil absenteeism which is high not that of teachers.

Countries that have used biometric finger technology to curb teacher absenteeism include South Africa, Ghana, India and Indonesia.

A recent report by Transparency International ranks Uganda second after Kenya among African countries where teacher absenteeism is still a big problem. Ghana, Senegal, Gambia and Tanzania follow.