

Last week, President Yoweri Museveni joined thousands of Ugandans at the *Yogayoga Jajja* victory celebration at Kololo Independence Grounds. The jubilant mood at the gathering was a vivid reflection of the deep confidence many Ugandans continue to place in his leadership.

Yet, true to his long-standing commitment to improving the livelihoods of ordinary citizens, the President used the occasion not merely for celebration, but also to remind leaders and the public about a mission that has defined his leadership for decades: lifting Ugandans out of subsistence living and into the money economy.

Central to that mission today is the Parish Development Model (PDM), the Government's flagship poverty-alleviation initiative designed to ensure that economic transformation begins at the grassroots parish level.

#### WHY PDM MATTERS

Uganda's journey towards economic transformation has been progressive. Over the years, the Government has rolled out a series of wealth-creation initiatives aimed at empowering households to engage in productive economic activity. Among these have been programmes such as Operation Wealth Creation and Emyooga.

These interventions have produced measurable results. Government records indicate that in 2013, only about 32% of Ugandan households were participating in the money economy, while a staggering 68% were largely engaged in subsistence production.

With the introduction of programmes like Operation Wealth Creation, which distributed improved agricultural inputs across the country, the situation improved significantly. By 2019, the proportion of Ugandans engaged in the money economy had risen to 61%, leaving 39% still outside it.

The introduction of PDM has accelerated this progress even further. Since its rollout, government data shows that nearly 70% of Ugandan households are now participating in the money economy, with only about 30% still operating largely at subsistence level. This progress is directly aligned with Uganda's long-term development blueprint, the Uganda Vision 2040, which seeks to transform the country into a prosperous upper-middle-income society.

# PDM: Why leaders, citizens must heed the President's call



During his address at Kololo, President Museveni urged incoming MPs and other leaders to prioritise the livelihoods of Ugandans when considering the national budget. Rather than focusing on salary increments or the creation of more administrative units, he advised that greater attention be directed towards strengthening wealth-creation initiatives such as PDM.

The President also tasked the National Resistance Movement Secretariat with intensifying public sensitisation about government programmes so that citizens fully understand how to benefit from them.

Particular emphasis was placed on the youth aged 18 years and above, who were encouraged to organise themselves through parish-level committees to actively participate in the programme.

This emphasis on awareness is critical. Government programmes can only succeed when the intended beneficiaries clearly understand their purpose, structure and opportunities.

#### LESSONS FROM PAST

It is important to acknowledge that some earlier poverty-alleviation initiatives were not implemented as effectively as intended.

In some cases, weak oversight allowed funds to be diverted or monopolised by a few individuals, leading to public frustration and the unfortunate perception

that such programmes were "*beegabira bokka*" – benefits reserved for a privileged few.

The PDM was specifically designed to address these shortcomings by strengthening community participation, improving monitoring systems and ensuring that funds reach the intended beneficiaries.

#### SAFEGUARDING THE PROGRAMME

The good news is that the Government is moving to improve oversight around the PDM even further through introducing the Parish Development Management Information System (PDMIS), a digital platform being developed by the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance in collaboration with other government agencies. Once rolled out, the system will help to track beneficiaries, monitor the disbursement of funds and measure the programme's impact at the parish level. This will greatly enhance transparency, accountability and performance monitoring of the PDM.

But we must bear in mind that whilst technological systems will improve oversight, the success of the PDM ultimately depends on the integrity and vigilance of leaders at all levels.

Local leaders must remain alert to any cases of diversion of funds, favouritism or monopolisation of resources by individuals. Such practices undermine the spirit and purpose of the programme and must be reported promptly for appropriate action.

Indeed, it is regrettable that some officials have already been arrested and prosecuted for misusing funds meant to uplift their own communities. These incidents serve as a stark reminder that PDM

resources are not personal rewards or political tokens.

Museveni has repeatedly emphasised that the funds under PDM are not *kasiimo* for voting, but rather capital meant to help households engage in productive economic activity. Anyone who attempts to divert these funds is not only committing a crime, but also sabotaging Uganda's collective development agenda.

#### STRENGTHENING THE PROGRAMME

Encouragingly, the President recently indicated that the Government is considering amendments to PDM guidelines to further strengthen the initiative. Among the proposals under consideration is increasing funding allocations to urban parishes, where populations tend to be larger. In such areas, the Government is considering raising allocations to between sh300m and sh400m per parish to ensure adequate support for all eligible beneficiaries. This demonstrates the Government's commitment to continuously improving the programme based on emerging realities. The PDM represents one of the most ambitious grassroots economic transformation programmes ever implemented in Uganda. Its success, however, cannot depend on Government alone.

Leaders must play their oversight role diligently, ensuring transparency and accountability. Citizens must also remain actively involved, participating in parish structures, monitoring implementation and safeguarding the resources meant for their communities.

If all stakeholders heed the President's call, the PDM will not only lift millions more Ugandans into the money economy, but also accelerate our journey towards national prosperity. The responsibility to protect and sustain this progress belongs to all of us.



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