

UEDCL bosses probed over theft

By Simon Masaba

Police are investigating allegations of theft of transformers, conductors and network equipment worth millions of shillings said to have been sold off by senior managers at the country's power distribution company.

Sources privy to the probe said the Inspector General of Police, Gen. Kale Kayihura, ordered Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) to launch an enquiry into the alleged fraudulent disposal of the items following a whistleblower's letter to President Yoweri Museveni. The letter names some top bosses at the of the Uganda Electricity Distribution Company Limited (UEDCL).

The letter, a copy of which *New Vision* has seen, names Franklin Oidu, UEDCL's technical services manager, as one of those to be probed. The CID detectives attached to the Criminal Cases Tracking Task Team (CCTTT), headed by Senior Superintendent of Police, Mark Odong, have opened general inquiries under case reference number: CID/CCTTT/GEF/6/2017.

It is alleged that Oidu sold off assets of Moroto district power grid without consulting his bosses.

Moroto is one of the recent beneficiaries of a power grid expansion project that covered Moyo, Adjumani and Kalangala districts. Moroto is linked to a 150km 33Kv electricity distribution network that also connects Soroti to the Karamoja sub-region. The new network was commissioned



Entrance to UEDCL Lugogo Yard and central stores in Industrial Area, Second Street, where the materials were to be kept

in 2013 and is managed by UEDCL, which is mandated to manage the distribution network in Uganda on behalf of government.

Fraud

Preliminary Police investigations trace the illegal sale of the assets to construction of a 33KV network in Moroto, which replaced the old one of 11KV. Formerly, Moroto was powered by a 750kVA generator, with an 11KV electricity network. The new 33KV

network resulted into the removal of all existing transformers, conductors, insulators and other gear.

According to the report, considering that the old network was approximately 7km long, the removed accessories could construct another 11KV network of nearly the same length.

All the materials removed from the previous 11KV network were stored at Moroto office yard and needed to be returned to UEDCL central stores at Lugogo, for safe custody, as per policy.

Oidu is reported to have sold off the assets against the advice of Louis Banya, the then Moroto off-grid manager. The network materials illegally withdrawn and sold off include 13 transformers, conductors and other network accessories.

According to the Police, the correct procedure would have involved returning the materials to the company's stores in Lugogo, Kampala, against which a 'goods received note' would have been raised by the store manager, Protaz Tibyakina.

Preliminary investigations indicate that around May/June 2013, Oidu dispatched a self-loader truck and a team to Moroto to collect all the transformers and conductors recovered from the old 11KV network.

He claimed that he was under instruction to take them to UEDCL central stores at Lugogo, Kampala, but failed to present a written notice and Moroto staff declined to release the items.

"The Moroto staff immediately called their immediate supervisor, Michael Malika, also the principal ICT officer at UEDCL. He was the acting principal technical services officers then. They briefed him of the events unfolding in their district and he promised to call them back after consulting Oidu," reads an account from one of UEDCL's managers who has recorded a statement with the Police.

According to the statement, the consultation between Malika and Oidu did not yield much and Malika

advised the staff to deal directly with Oidu because he did not understand the events.

When contacted, Oidu faulted *New Vision* for taking on duties of the Police. "I will report you to CID, Inspectorate of Government and Internal Security Organisation and we shall not give *New Vision* business," he threatened in a telephone interview.

According to CID detectives, Moroto staff insisted on at least having an email authorising the release.

"Oidu threatened not to renew the employment contracts of all staff who do not follow his instructions. He called each staff individually, asking them to write a letter authorising the release of the transformers and conductors so that his 'men' could transport the network materials to the central stores, for safe custody," said the whistleblower in the report.

However, all Moroto office staff declined to write the letter, including the Moroto facility manager, but after a lot of pressure on all the staff, one official, Roy Amos Okullo, allegedly drafted the letter and released the transformers, conductors and various network accessories from Moroto storage yard. All network materials that were illegally released from Moroto office under the orders of Oidu are said never to have reached UEDCL central stores.

By press time, CID detectives had written to UEDCL, seeking an explanation in the dealings. "We have written to them (UEDCL) to furnish us with information."