

# Govt mechanical workshop rotting away

**Purpose.** The Central Mechanical Workshop under Ministry of Works was meant to handle specialised mechanical engineering works for all the government fleet of more than 27,000 vehicles and motorcycles.

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**KAMPALA.** A multi-billion government centralised infrastructural facility that was meant to repair and maintain government vehicles and motorcycles, among other things, has been abandoned, and as a result of mismanagement and lack of funding, the facility is rotting away.

The Central Mechanical Workshop (CMW) under Ministry of Works is located at the ministry headquarters on old Port bell Road. This facility was meant to handle specialised mechanical engineering works for all the government fleet of more than 27,000 vehicles and motorcycles, as well as road equipment and office furniture in an attempt to cut on the costs.

Since the facility was abandoned, sources told *Sunday Monitor* that most of the government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) repair their vehicles from private garages and regularly import office furniture or buy from the private dealers at exaggerated prices.

*Sunday Monitor* visited the facility last week and found the workshop abandoned, dusty and cobwebbed.



Abandoned. The carpentry section where government furniture used to be made lies in ruins at the government Central Mechanical Workshop at the Ministry of Works headquarters in Kampala. PHOTOS BY ALEX ESAGALA.

## Shs100b

THE LEAST AMOUNT GOVERNMENT SPENDS ON VEHICLE MAINTENANCE ALONE ANNUALLY, ACCORDING TO RECENT AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORTS. THE REPORTS ALSO INDICATE THAT SOME GOVERNMENT VEHICLES REMAIN IN PRIVATE GARAGES WITH VITAL SPARE PARTS MISSING.

At the carpentry section, where government furniture used to be made, only one carpenter was found on duty as opposed to the 400 artisans who used to be employed in the well-equipped facility.

Part of the workshop buildings had also been converted into offices to house State ministers and other ministry's support staff.

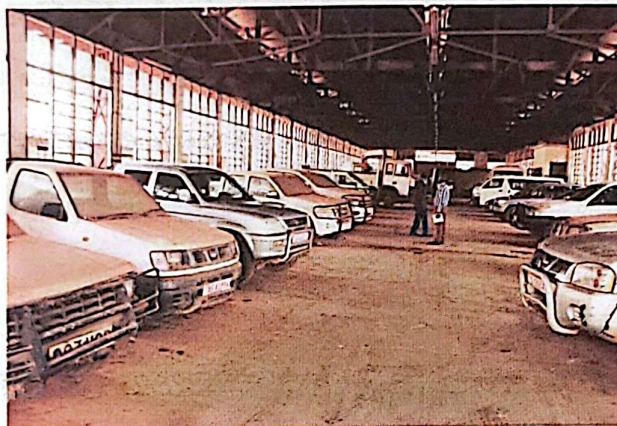
Due to what officials at the ministry called poor maintenance, some of the equipment at the workshop have since broken down, and those that are still functional, remain redundant with no manpower to operate them.

"We make any furniture here but the challenge is manpower," Mr Charles Ayela, an artisan, said.

"We don't have the timber to make some of the products. But we have some of the best equipment which you can't find anywhere else," he added.

*Sunday Monitor* also confirmed that the band saw machine, the dovetail furniture and the tenon machines had all broken down.

The situation at the fabrication and welding sections is equally bleak. For instance, equipment remains idle with about two to three men doing minor welding works.



Grounded. Some of the broken down government vehicles parked at the workshop.

At the foundry, a factory that produces metal castings, pouring the metal in a mold, and removing the mold material, most of the furnaces were found corroded and some coal deposits used in the heating process could be seen.

Mr Tony Bafirawala Kavuma, the government's chief mechanical engineer, on Friday told this newspaper that despite the current state of the government mechanical workshop, some sections of the facility remain operational despite operating below capacity. He said 30 years ago, all aspects of vehicle repairs were being handled at the facility as opposed to private garages.

Mr Kavuma, who took the job in February this year, explained that the facility degenerated to its current state due to a cocktail of institutional challenges such as inadequate finances, limited manpower, poor management, inadequate technology and policy shift.

"The facility needs to be revamped. When I joined 30 years ago, right from Total to the current Electoral Commission headquarters, the entire area used to be called the chief mechanical engineers office (CME) under the Ministry of Works, Transport and Hosing," Mr Kavuma said.

The CME's office, according to Mr Kavuma, used to cater for all government institutions in terms of spares, repair for all the vehicles, production of furniture, including making coffins for deceased public servants.

"But overtime, government policy has evolved to suit needs and the economic situation in that at some time in early 2000, the system was decentralised to have every government ministry repair its vehicles," he added.

Mr Kavuma insists that there has been a high level of mismanagement and abuse to the extent that government was

### Voices



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GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF  
MECHANICAL ENGINEER

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not getting value for money, which has called for a revision in the policy such that the CME examines the defects on a vehicle before it's repaired.

He also explained that because the workshop is in ominous state, some government vehicles, including a Station Wagon (Land cruiser), that used to be driven by the former Works minister Abraham Byandala has since remained grounded after being involved in a 'slight accident'.

Mr Kavuma also explained that the vehicle whose engine is in a good mechanical condition requires about Shs60m for panel beating, something that could be done by government engineers if the workshop had the required manpower and technology.

He revealed that all government vehicles and equipment were previously repaired at the main station, and some other 22 upcountry stations have been taken over by the Uganda National Roads Authority (Unra) after its inception in 2008 to handle all civil works.

### Presidential directive

"In March, the President issued a directive to my office requesting that we develop standard operating procedures to guide in handling of government fleet and this will empower my office to do its supervisory role for government and public vehicles," Mr Kavuma said.

He added that the standard operating procedures should be ready by end of year and should enable his office to deliver its mandate. The entity is responsible for motor-vehicle inspection, a role currently rented out to SGS, a private firm.

Last month, this newspaper revealed how the Ministry of Health was spending roughly Shs6.5b each year to maintain its fleet of 295 vehicles, some of which were in the hands of unauthorised officers.