

Complaint. District leaders say the equipment was delivered without making the necessary increases in provisions for fuel, manpower and other requirements.

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KAMPALA. Numerous tracts of feeder and district roads in various parts of the country remain in disrepair despite the government giving multi-billion road construction and maintenance equipment to districts only last year.

A dozen district leaders we talked to for this story say most of the districts are ill-equipped to maximally utilise the equipment to maintain roads chiefly because the equipment was delivered without making the necessary increases in provisions for fuel, manpower and other requirements.

The districts are also yet to get all the equipment, more than seven months since they were purchased and cleared for delivery to the intended users.

President Museveni in June last year commissioned the road equipment worth more than Shs500 billion to be distributed to the 121 districts.

Each district was to receive a full unit of equipment consisting of one motor grader, one wheel loader, one vibro roller, one water bowser and two dump trucks. Each unit was valued at Shs 2.7 billion.

In 2012, the government distributed Chinese-made road units to the districts but they lay disused in district yards after they broke down. The district leaders we spoke to say.

Designated regional centres were each to receive more expensive equipment, including a bulldozer and an excavator to be shared within the respective districts making up the region when need arises.

None of the districts Saturday Monitor sampled had received all the equipment as per the government promise.

Majority of the districts had received the motor grader, the wheel loader, the vibro roller, and a water bowser, but none had got the two dump trucks.

Others lacked some of the items the other districts have received.

"All the equipment has not arrived. The equipment was supposed to be delivered over a year ago and so whatever comes, we distribute. All the equipment will have been delivered by March," Ms Monica Azuba Ntege, the minister of Works and Transport, told this newspaper.

Fears on the ground

The new equipment purchased from Japan could also suffer a similar fate as that purchased about five



Inauguration. President Museveni commissions road equipment last year. The government procured more than 1,000 road equipment for 121 districts last year. PHOTO BY STEPHEN KAFERO

District roads in disrepair as new equipment lay idle

years ago from China at a cost of more than \$100 million (Shs355 billion). User districts said the equipment was substandard and have since broken down.

To avoid a repeat, the Ministry of Works and Transport centralised the servicing of the new equipment.

While the move is aimed at having qualified specialists handle the equipment, it is already causing delays with officials having to park the equipment pending servicing from the ministry appointed agents.

"Modalities for timely servicing of the machines are not in place yet the districts are banned from doing any servicing or repairs on the road equipment," a district engineer, who requested not to be named, said.

Ms Ntege says the ministry is learning from past incidents and is, therefore, leaving nothing to chance.

"We had an agreement with the supplier and they have appointed an agent—Victoria Motors—to do the servicing of the equipment. When we leave it to the districts to do the servicing, they put poor quality spares. The supplier's agent is already establishing centres across the country," she said.

Budgets strains

With the introduction of the new equipment, the resource envelope of the districts to facilitate their use in terms of purchasing fuel and facilitating the operators has not been increased.

Shs500b

THE COST OF EQUIPMENT BOUGHT BY GOVERNMENT TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN DISTRICT ROADS

Some districts that are already using the available machinery say they cannot deploy them optimally because of resource constraints.

Communities that can afford, in some districts, provide fuel and districts officials deploy the equipment to work on their roads.

In Mpigi, this partnership is already at play, according to Peter Claver Mutuluza, the district chairperson.

"For community roads, if people are willing to provide fuel, I have in-

structed my engineers to go ahead and work on their roads," Mr Mutuluza said.

Works in Mpigi, Mr Mutuluza says, have already commenced with the only challenge being fuel. He says the Uganda Road Fund needs to raise the allocations for fuel.

Leaders of some districts such as Rubanda and Wakiso say the Works and Transport ministry should also address the uniqueness of their areas in determining what they should get instead of the current uniform process irrespective of terrain, size, population and other factors.

Mr Kenneth Jogo Biryabarema, the Rubanda District chairperson, says the government should, for example, consider the hilly terrain of his district compared to neighbours such as Mbarama and Ntungamo.

For now, he says, the district still depends on the previous budget to run the new machines.

"The equipment are underutilised because of budget constraints. Our roads budget is too small. We consumed Shs400 million using just a grader in the previous financial year but now we have all these machines. If the budget remains the same we shall

still not achieve much," he says.

Ideally, Mr Biryabarema says, the district needs at least Shs1 billion to properly run the equipment and maintain the district's road network of more than 700km.

One unit of road equipment is not enough, says Mr Samuel Mwesigwa, the Wakiso District engineer, given the size of Wakiso District.

For example, he says, the district cannot address requests of communities willing to buy fuel and have their roads worked on given the overwhelming demand.

Wakiso District has a road network of more than 3000km. A promise by the Office of the Prime Minister to the district to get a second unit is yet to materialise.

In the current financial year the district has earmarked 270km under mechanised network to be worked on, with 50 per cent of that already completed. The output, Mr Mwesigwa says, is tagged on quarterly releases by the Uganda Road Fund.

The challenge of fuel aside, Kabale District chairperson Richard Rwabuhinga says the budget should also be increased to enable the districts acquire murrum. "The money put in murrum is insufficient. What we are doing is opening, grading and shaping but these can easily be washed away without murrum."

Other issues

Some sub-counties have a budget of Shs5 million per year to do this work and it cannot do anything," he said.

"We expect the district to use the available resources to run the programme for now. From next financial year, starting July, we are going to increase the fund for fuel," Ms Ntege said.

Another issue of contention is the failure of the authorities to match the machinery with the required staff.

District leaders have appealed to the Ministry of Works and Transport and that of Public Service to find solutions to the problem.

In deploying the machinery, the Works and Transport ministry requested districts to send their personnel who are undertaking training.

"Some operators are not on the government payroll. Staffing levels are not in line with the new equipment. Operators are poorly paid with many earning less than Shs300,000 with the highest allowance they can get being the Shs1,000 safari day allowance," a district leader said.

Also, many districts do not have supervision vehicles and this implies the operators have to, at their own cost, move to the areas of operation, which is a challenge.

"We have trained the district operators. It is the districts to plan for the staff," Ms Ntege said.