

Army given six months to build sh5b ICT centre

By David Lumu

Defence and veteran affairs state minister Col. Charles Okello Engola has given the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) engineering brigade six months to construct an information technology innovation hub.

"UPDF's engineering brigade has 2,452 professionals and we can take on any construction project. Unlike some people who say they will not work before they are paid, UPDF will do the work up to the end. President Yoweri Museveni said UPDF should construct the innovation hub, so you must deliver the project within six months," he said.

Okello said this during the breaking of the ground for the construction of Uganda's first innovation hub at the Uganda Institute of Information and Communication Technology in Nakawa. The ceremony, organised by the ICT ministry,

was presided over by Kirunda Kivejinja, the third Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of East African Community Affairs.

Speaking at the same event, ICT minister Frank Tumwebaze said by partnering with UPDF to construct the hub, the Government has cut down the budget from sh30b quoted by private construction firms to sh5.6b.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ Kirunda Kivejinja said the Government plans to build ICT innovation hubs in every region of the country.

"Working with UPDF offers two solutions. First, at sh5.6b, their engineering brigade will build and hand to us a fully-furnished innovation hub. The sh5.6b offer is a third of

the market price. Some of the private firms wanted to do the job at sh30b, while others wanted sh15b. Secondly, they are doing it so fast – in six months," he said.

Tumwebaze urged other government entities to engage the services of the UPDF engineering brigade in order to save money and deliver projects on time.

He, however, appealed to the army to build more capacity to take on most of the construction projects in the country.

Lt. Col. James Rwegaba, an architect who came up with the design for the hub, said the two-level building will have two halls, a conference centre, restaurant, boardroom and offices for supervisors. It will sit on two-and-a-half acres with a parking lot that can accommodate over 400 cars.

Kivejinja, who represented the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, said



Bulldozers grading the site where a sh5b ICT innovation hub will be built by the army's engineering brigade in Nakawa, Kampala. Photo by Shamim Saad



Frank Tumwebaze

the Government plans to build ICT innovation hubs in every region of the country

so that young people get an opportunity to use ICT as a transformation tool.

"ICT is one of the key pillars that will spur social-economic transformation of Uganda. Digital and knowledge centres such as this innovation hub will naturally increase productivity – by creating jobs and new products," he said. The ability of UPDF to execute the project is a result of the Government's persistent investment in the army, he said.

According to Tumwebaze, the goal of the innovation hubs is to enable Ugandans convert ideas into businesses.

Tumwebaze added that young people working on different ICT projects had always asked the Government to build for them centres and help them patent their products.

The innovation hub, Tumwebaze said, will be open to all Ugandan ICT innovators to get mentored and helped to promote their innovations.

Vincent Bagire, the permanent secretary of the ICT ministry, said the innovation hub will save young ICT personnel from the burden of paying for space where to innovate from.

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