

Sh40b earmarked for extension workers, fertilisers

By Moses Mufondo
and David Lumu

The agriculture ministry has asked sh10b to procure vehicles and motorcycles for extension workers, according to the proposed 2018/2019 budget framework paper.

The agriculture minister, Vincent Ssempijja, said this is intended to help 3,800 extension workers in different parts of the country to reach out to many farmers and advise them on best farming practices.

Buying tractors, fertilisers and water for production facilities are the other key plans that agricultural officials in the country have set their eyes on in the next financial year.

The other grand plan, Ssempijja, said is to roll out the distribution of fertilisers to farmers in order to boost production. The Government has proposed sh30b to facilitate the fertiliser distribution chain to farmers.

"Irrigation goes in hand with the use of fertilisers. Fertiliser

usage has been low in Uganda. We have requested sh50b for provision of fertilisers. We hope it will be given to us," he said.

Minister on NAADS

Meanwhile, Ssempijja has protested the decision by the finance ministry to cut the budget for NAADS.

According to the budget framework paper, the budget for NAADS has been cut by sh26b from the sh280b allocated in the current financial year to sh254b for the 2018/2019 financial year.

The proposed total budget for agriculture is sh831b, which is 3.8% of the total national budget of sh29 trillion. It is slightly higher than sh828.5b the sector was allocated in the current financial year.

The budget for the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) has also been reduced from sh84b to sh63b.

The NAADS budget among other things includes money used for buying seedlings and animals, which the Government



Minister Vincent Ssempijja

distributes to farmers.

"I still have a war with the people in the Ministry of Finance who have continued to cut the budget for NAADS. As a sector, we are not happy that the budget has been cut, instead of increasing it. It is certainly a very bad thing to move away from the President's promise of allocating sh1,000b (sh1 trillion) to NAADS," Ssempijja said.

During the 2016 general elections campaigns, President Yoweri Museveni pledged to

increase funding to NAADS from sh200b to sh1 trillion.

Ssempijja explained that with such cuts, their capacity to deliver on the task of moving Ugandans from subsistence to commercial farming is undermined.

"Even in the previous financial year, we were not able to provide tractors, hoes and many other things we had planned because our budget was cut. We need more funding to help our citizens the majority of whom depend on agriculture," he explained.

According to the budget performance report for 2016/2017 financial year, the agriculture budget was cut by sh108b.

Free hoes for farmers

On why the 2016 presidential pledge of 10 million hoes is yet to be fulfilled, the minister said: "We have not yet given out hoes because our budget which was meant for hoes was cut. But we shall distribute them when we get the money."

Makerere University Business School (MUBS) finance lecturer Dr Sulait Tumwine, who teaches budgeting, said returns on government investments in agriculture are so high and, therefore, the sector deserves more funding.

"The high rate of unemployment, the need to improve our balance of payments (increasing exports), and the need for industrialisation would all be addressed through increased funding of agriculture. That way, the majority of our youth will get jobs and government revenue will increase. A rational government would, therefore, in the current circumstances increase the agriculture budget to 7%," he elaborated.

Tumwine argued that since government has resolved to downsize and eliminate wasteful expenditures, the NAADS secretariat, which spends money on workshops and administrative costs should be scrapped and more resources put in having an

effective extension service system which is not only providing guidance to farmers but also fighting diseases.

"Extension services would help in fighting diseases affecting both animals and crops. For instance, Bushenyi farmers have been hit by banana bacterial wilt and suffered losses because NAADS has not helped them," Dr. Tumwine explained.

The shadow minister for agriculture, Francis Gonahasa, said he will be pushing for increased funding to the sector to invest in mechanisation, have an efficient extension service system and irrigation schemes, which cannot be done with the current small budget allocated to the sector.

"African governments committed to allocate 10% of their budgets to agriculture in the 2003 Maputo Protocol. But it is unfortunate that Uganda has not obliged. The other year agriculture was given only 2% of the national budget," Gonahasa said.