

# Govt seeks sh780b for rural electrification

By Taddeo Bwambale

The Government is set to acquire a loan of \$212m (about sh780b) from Exim Bank of China for a new rural electrification programme through which 170,000 persons will be connected to the national power grid.

Cabinet on Monday approved the loan, which will be used to extend electricity to 287 sub-counties not yet connected to the national grid in order to boost economic activities and improve service delivery.

The new loan will help connect all rural growth centres, with focus on small and medium enterprises, government institutions, commercial centres and agro-businesses, according to Col Shaban Bantariza, the deputy director of the Uganda Media Centre.

About 80% of Ugandans still rely on biomass (charcoal and firewood) for their energy needs, although consumption of other sources of energy (solar, biogas) has been steadily rising in recent years.

With new power projects coming on board, more Ugandans are getting connected to the national grid. In 2016, power distributor Umeme made 157,270

## ON THE GROUND

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new connections, reflecting a 19.8% growth in customer numbers, according to the firm's 2016 annual report.

Altogether, about 16% of households in Uganda are connected to the electricity grid while 21% of households use electricity as a source of energy.

The Government intends to increase electricity access to household level to 40% by 2025, banking on ongoing projects including Karuma, Isimba and several other mini hydropower stations countrywide.

Uganda has invested heavily in electric power generation with the goal of boosting industrialisation, information

communication technology, health, housing, agriculture, education and business.

### 331 health centres to be upgraded

Cabinet also endorsed a loan of sh734b to upgrade 331 health centre IIs to health centre IIIs and construct 373 seed secondary schools in sub-counties that do not have any, within the next five years.

Under the government policy, each sub-county is supposed to have a health centre III, which should have about 18 staff led by a senior clinical officer, an outpatient clinic, maternity ward and laboratory.

Each parish is supposed to have a health centre II with nine government employees; an enrolled nurse, a midwife, two nursing assistants, two potters, two guards and a health assistant. However, in recent years, Government has mulled phasing out health centre IIs to cut costs. With about 7,000 parishes countrywide, recruiting medics and stocking the facilities was found to be costly.

The list of facilities to benefit from the loan was not available by press time. The loan will be sourced from the International Development Association (IDA), the financial arm of the World Bank.