

Eight firms probed over sh4b agric inputs

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MPs on the committee of commissions, statutory authorities and state Enterprises have instituted a special audit into eight companies which received sh3.9b to supply agricultural inputs to the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) countrywide.

NAADS is a government agency created in 2001 to improve livelihoods by increasing agricultural productivity and profitability.

The money was advanced to companies during financial years 2012/2013 and 2013/2014, but according to the Auditor General (AG), the firms have failed to avail accountability for the said funds.

According to the AG's report, at the time of the audit, the accounting officers had not availed accountability documents for the sh3.9b funds. They also lacked goods delivery notes, invoices, local purchasing orders, vouchers, supporting documents and signatures for the recipients of the inputs.

The companies subjected to the audit are: Ssembeguya Estates, Equator

Seeds Ltd, Victoria Seeds, Grow More Seeds and Chemicals, Pearl Seeds Limited, Tropical Agro and Advisory Services, Farm Inputs Care Center (FICA) Ltd, Raj General and Balton Uganda Ltd.

Victoria Seeds got sh996m for supplying 150,000kg of maize seeds, Ssembeguya Estates received sh194m for supplying 250 motorised sprayers to army veterans, Equator Seeds got sh131m for supplying 36,000kg of beans.

Pearl Seeds got sh1.2m for supplying 158,000kg of maize seeds, Tropical Agro and Advisory Services got sh125m for supplying cassava cuttings, FICA got sh567m for supplying maize seeds. Pearl Seeds got sh610m for supplying 140,000kg of maize seeds and Raj General got sh178m for supplying cassava cuttings to army veterans.

The owners of above firms appeared before the committee yesterday to respond to queries raised by the AG's report.

The committee chairperson, Abdu Katuntu (Bugweri County MP), said the value for money audit will go beyond deliveries of the inputs, but

SUPPLIERS

- Ssembeguya Estates
- Equator Seeds Ltd
- Victoria Seeds
- Grow More Seeds and Chemicals
- Pearl Seeds Limited
- Tropical Agro and Advisory Services
- Farm Inputs Care Centre (FICA) Ltd
- Raj General and
- Balton Uganda Ltd

the committee has to visit areas where the agricultural inputs were supplied and if the recipients got them.

Citing the law of 'veil lifting' Katuntu warned the owners of companies under audit. "We are disregarding the corporate personality, the committee is looking behind the real persons who are in control of the companies. In other words, where a fraudulent and dishonest use is made of the legal entity, the individuals concerned will not be allowed to take shelter behind the corporate personality," Katuntu

said.

Anita Among, (Bukedea Woman MP), told the owners of the companies that if found guilty, will have to refund the taxpayers' money.

"Another condition is that the money must be refunded to the consolidated fund and you should avail us with evidence of repayment," Among said.

During the audit, the proprietor of Victoria Seeds, Josephine Okot, did not furnish the committee with delivery notes. She had a balance of 50 tonnes of maize seeds not supplied to Bulinda villages in Masindi district, yet she had been fully paid sh996m.

The Katikamu North MP, James Abraham Byandala, pointed out one delivery note by Victoria Seeds that was made on October 9, 2013. "Do government offices work on Independence Day?" Byandala asked.

The committee discovered that Balton Uganda supplied 24 open field irrigation systems to Uganda People's Defence Forces army officers in different army barracks countrywide. However, the suppliers claimed that wives of the army officers refused to sign the delivery notes, saying they lacked the official stamps.