

# Increased funding to boost road maintenance

By Ali Twaha

**P**roper road maintenance contributes to reliable transport. This is because, there is a direct link between a road's condition and transport fares. But a badly maintained road can also mean more safety hazards to users.

The state of Uganda's roads is improving although at a low pace. The poor quality roads and relatively weak transport infrastructure has been a challenge for both traders and travellers engaged in cross-border trade.

As a priority sector, the budget for roads was raised by the Government from sh398b over the years to sh3.4 trillion in the 2017/18 financial year. Its current budget now stands at sh4.7 trillion. For instance, according to information obtained from the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA), between 2008/09, funds allocated to the construction of national and paved roads hit sh2.5 trillion in financial year 2017/18 up, from sh588b in 2009/10.

As a result, at least, 1,480km of unpaved roads were upgraded compared to a target of 1,600km. Government plans to increase the number of paved roads to nearly 6,000km by 2019/20 according to National Development Plan II. Pavement of these roads ultimately reduces road maintenance cost by three times.

Worth noting is that, road maintenance remains an essential part in order to preserve both new and old roads in their constructed condition, protect adjacent resources and user safety, provide efficient, and convenient travel for road users.

Unfortunately, maintenance is often neglected or improperly performed by agencies largely due to thin budgets, lack of capacity or negligence by community leaders such as members of Parliament to ensure that allocated funds are put to their rightful purposes.

This has resulted in rapid deterioration of some roads and eventual failure from both climatic and vehicle use impact. For instance, some district organs in charge of monitoring such as roads committees are either not in existence or not fully functioning.

Uganda Road Fund (URF),



Some of the road equipment that was given to districts to improve roads upcountry

a Government agency in charge of financing routine and periodic maintenance of public roads, still grapples with these constraints. The executive director, Michael Odongo said the Government is aware of the problems hampering maintenance of roads.

"We have been raising it [funding challenges] to Government and parliament that maintenance is taking only about sh400b out of the sh4 trillion. The percentage is very low for the kind of work that needs to be done. We want to have a fair balance in allocation, were 70% is development of new national roads and 30% maintenance," Odongo said.

The Fund has a duty to finance the implementation of annual road maintenance programmes that are carried out by the UNRA, Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), and other agencies for Districts, Urban and Community Access Roads (DUCAR).

## Funding boost

With a new tax introduced on each litre of fuel this financial year, Government increased funding to road maintenance from sh417b to sh527b, representing a 27% jump. According to URF, there has been a modest increase in funding to all agencies across the board.

"KCCA used to get sh19b

**THE BUDGET FOR ROADS WAS RAISED BY THE GOVERNMENT FROM SH398B OVER THE YEARS TO SH3.4 TRILLION IN THE 2017/18 FINANCIAL YEAR.**

per year, now it has moved to sh30b. We appeal to the city authorities to make sure that the money is put to proper use especially in fighting dust and floods which still inconveniences city dwellers," Odongo said.

The road maintenance budget had stagnated at sh417b per year from 2015/16. Its funds are still sourced from the consolidated fund contrary to intentions set out in the URF Act, 2008. URF gets funds from taxes Government levies on fuel, fines for over loading, road licenses among others to finance maintenance of roads in poor state.

The increased funding has seen at least six newly created districts including: Nabilatuk, Bugweri, Kassanda, Kwania, Kapelebyong and Kikuube receive a combined sh594m for roads maintenance.

Overall, the URF released sh130.5b for quarter 1 of financial year 2018/19 to its designated agencies and sub-agencies for routine and periodic maintenance of various categories of public



Eng. Dr. Michael Odongo

roads.

UNRA still emerges as the biggest recipient of road maintenance funds at sh312.5b followed by districts at sh76b, while municipalities received sh37bn this financial year.

KCCA will receive sh30.5b, town councils sh31b, sh11.9b has been earmarked for tarmacking of selected town councils, distressed areas that comprise agencies that cover hilly areas, Islands and, Swamp crossings among others shall receive sh1.4b.

The bridges on district urban community access roads network will be financed to a tune of sh1.7b and sh781m will

be spent on technical service units that will support capacity improvements and enhance efficiency in the Northern region.

## How it will be spent

UNRA plans to maintain a total of 17,803km under routine manual maintenance, 479km under routine mechanical maintenance, 118km under periodic maintenance and 273km shall be maintained using low cost seals.

Others works include operating and maintaining 13 ferries, 10 fixed and 10 mobile bridges, 12km of street lighting, 273km of road marking, demarcating 52.5km of reserved roads and maintenance of 132 bridges.

Meanwhile, KCCA will focus on 234km under routine manual and mechanical maintenance, 0.15km under periodic maintenance. For the funds released this quarter, KCCA said it shall undertake road safety activities such as road marking, traffic management works and maintenance of street lights.

Local Government, on the other hand, consisting of 127 districts, 14 municipalities, 214 town councils will be maintaining a combined scope of 39,846km under routine manual and mechanical maintenance, as well as periodic maintenance of

DUCAR.

## New equipment

In June last year, President Museveni commissioned over 1,000 road equipment worth nearly sh500b. The equipment including bulldozers, graders, tippers, compactors, road roller and low loaders.

The equipment was distributed to 121 districts to enhance road maintenance works and cut on Government spending on contracting private firms. It was purchased from Japan on a loan concession from the Japanese International Corporation.

"I want to call upon the ministry of Works, to strengthen the mechanical workshops and empower them to fully provide mechanical services to these districts so that we don't get breakdowns. That would disrupt our equipment," Odongo said.

While highlighting Unra's performance for the year ended, Allen Kagina, the executive director said currently 22 road projects totalling 1,311.7km which include upgrading from unpaved to paved and new roads are being developed.

2017/18 performance

In the 2017/18 financial year, URF released sh406b to all the implementing Government agencies for routine and periodic maintenance, bridge maintenance, road safety, plant and equipment repairs, transport studies, ferry operations, axle load operations and maintenance among others. Out of the total budget allocation to URF, UNRA received sh267b, districts got sh48b while municipalities were given sh25b. KCCA received sh19b and sh7.8b went to community access roads.

Town councils received sh19b and another sh1.1b was spent on a special intervention project for tarmacking new selected town councils. Sh11b was spent on mechanical imprest.

Overall, districts registered a 75% improvement on paved roads and 59% on unpaved roads while Urban roads registered a 66% development paved roads and 49.7% on unpaved roads.

On the flip side, community access roads recorded the lowest progress with only 24% improvement on unpaved roads, KCCA 49% paved and 61% unpaved. UNRA registered a 60% improvement on paved and 70% on unpaved, data from URF indicates.