



President Yoweri Museveni, the Japanese Ambassador to Uganda, ministers and local government officials at the commissioning of the road construction equipment in Bweyogerere, Wakiso on June 09, 2017

By Prossy Nandudu

Mechanical workshops support road maintenance

The cost of buying and maintaining heavy road equipment is no doubt costly. Not only is such equipment too expensive to procure, but even transporting it from the country of origin is equally expensive.

That is why on several occasions people complain of delayed road works or bad roads, especially in times of heavy rains. Where there is a broken road, there is inevitably poor access to social services such as access to medical care, schools and markets.

This was worse during times of insurgency until 1986, when the National Resistance Movement government came to power and embarked on infrastructure development. High on the agenda at that time was the need to rehabilitate the road network in the country.

It is against this background that the Government, through the works and transport ministry, decided to set up mechanical workshops in different parts of the country to maintain the existing road equipment.

Eng. Francis Keeya, the senior mechanical engineer with the works and transport ministry, says the government mechanical workshops are responsible for major repairs of road equipment allocated to districts and zonal centres. Keeya doubles as the Manager for Bugembe Regional Mechanical Workshop.

He says there are three major mechanical workshops in the country. These are situated in Gulu, Jinja and Mbarara. The one in Kampala serves the central region and doubles as the headquarters of the mechanical station in the country.

How they were established
Keeya says the workshops were established in 1986 because at that time the roads were in a bad state



Some of the road equipment supplied to districts

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across the country. With support from donors such as the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) and the International Labour Organisation, some equipment was procured to maintain road networks in the eastern and western regions of the country.

With funding from development partners, equipment was procured for each of the districts, but to maintain the equipment, there was need for qualified expertise at district level.

However, when these were phased out in 1990, the equipment and some of the trained engineers remained redundant.

In addition, the Government did not want to let the engineers go because of their expertise. That is why regional centres were set up to



Eng. Francis Keeya, the Manager for Bugembe Regional Mechanical Workshop

accommodate these people, but to also maintain the equipment that had been sent to the 120 districts.

Currently, there are different types of equipment in various parts of the country. The most recent batch was acquired in 2017 from Japan.

Challenges

Keeya, however, says they are constrained financially. For the four workshops to work well, they need about sh22b annually. However, in the last financial year, they were only allocated sh16b, of which only sh10b has so far been disbursed.

The set of equipment that was sent to districts includes graders, seven-tonne tippers, wheel loaders, rollers and water bowlers.

Equipment use

However, there have been concerns that most of the road equipment sent

to districts is idle and underutilised, while some officials claim they do not have enough fuel to run the machines – an issue that might affect their lifespan.

Keeya explained that the machinery may be under-utilised due to financial constraints. He, however, added that districts rely on funds meant for maintenance from the Uganda Road Fund, which sometimes may not be adequate.

“But if all the money was released as requested for, it would make a difference,” he said.

For the equipment to work efficiently per day, a motor grader requires about 100 litres of diesel, a wheel loader requires 120 litres of diesel, a roller takes 60 litres of diesel, while a water bowler requires 60 litres of diesel, he added. The tippers each require 150 litres of fuel for the districts to be able to carry out substantial works on the roads, Keeya added.