

Ugandans to the rescue.



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How could Shs200b lie idle as roads rot in Uganda?

POSTED BY MUSA



Passengers stranded on the Soroti -Moroto Road after Sunday's downpour. PHOTO BY STEVEN ARIONG

Who is fooling who? Do these cronies really think that we the tax payers are gona praise them for honesty? These people in positions of power are well known for embezzlement and absolute corruption, so when one tells you that funds intended for construction have been returned to the treasury unused, you pause and wonder why and how could this be..

They return the funds to their boss who is the “treasury” and split the theft. With roads looking like this all over the country, how can one say that funds intended for that very purpose are returned unused? Anyway that’s how they get reach and afford their families abroad to give birth or children for further education “ at your expense” Do not believe this wasted parliamentary inquiry, the out come is always the same.

Over Shs220 billion was returned unspent to the Treasury while many national roads, whose repair the money was supposed to fund, continued to fall apart, MPs heard yesterday. The Public Accounts Committee of Parliament heard yesterday that the Uganda National Roads Authority returned Shs226 billion to the Treasury after failing to spend all the money allocated to it.

HELP IS ON WAY

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PAC chairman Nandala Mafabi said it was “unacceptable” to return money unspent when there are potholes “in every part of the country”. He said: “They told us that they lacked capacity to use the money. We cannot tolerate incompetence when our people are suffering with potholes. This is unacceptable.”

Appearing before the committee to answer to queries raised by the Auditor General, UNRA Executive Director Eng Peter Ssebanakitta said they had failed to find roads on which to spend the money. “It’s true a sizable amount was not utilised and was returned to the Consolidated Fund; we didn’t have the projects to absorb the money,” he told MPs. “We found ourselves with money without projects and this caused the problem.”

The unspent money was allocated to UNRA in the 2008/9 financial year. The Authority was set up in July 2008 to take responsibility over an estimated 20,000 kilometres of national roads. The unspent money was part of Shs745.7 billion that UNRA received in its first year of operation.

The government has identified infrastructure as a key driver of economic growth and has allocated a large portion of the national budget to roadworks. However, the latest revelations will raise questions about the efficiency in planning and executing government projects.

They will particularly annoy Kampala City residents who have some of the worst roads in the country – but who do not benefit from money allocated to UNRA because most city roads are under the cash-strapped City Council.

Inflated prices

UNRA officials also came under scrutiny yesterday over glaring variances in the amount of money different roadworks contractors charge to do similar work.

Shadow Finance Minister Oduman Okello (Bukedea) told MPs that while it costs about \$400,000 (about Shs800,000) to build a kilometre of road in Sub-Saharan Africa, in Uganda the cost is about \$1m (about Shs2b).

The Auditor General’s report also noted that, “costs of construction for a number of (road) projects were noted to be on the higher side. Comparison of project costs against the cost of other similar works indicates that the rates of constructing a kilometre of a road vary by great margins.”

The AG noted that Soroti–Dokolo Road cost Shs1.1b per kilometre while Dokolo–Lira cost Shs1.4b. Maintaining Kyapa–Kasensero Road cost Shs29m yet Masaka–Bukakata Road cost Shs50m.

Also noted were the significant variances of unit rates being quoted by contractors for same work items for similar projects. Unit costs differ, in some cases, up to 300 per cent, the AG noted.

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For instance, installing a culvert on Rakai-Mbarara Road is Shs186,000 but the same culvert on Hoima-Kizirafumbi road costs Shs705,000, or 279 per cent higher. UNRA officials said most of the roads projects in question were awarded under the Road Agency Formation Unit, which was replaced by UNRA.

Meanwhile, residents of Katakwi district say passengers, stranded when their buses get stuck in the mud on Soroti-Moroto Road, are stealing cassava from their gardens.

Ms Jane Akol, who like many of her neighbours in Orungo village, Ngariam Sub-County Katakwi District, is trying to replant her roots after returning from an internally-displaced person's camp, said stranded and hungry passengers have eaten all the cassava from her one-acre garden in the last week.

"I do not know how my family will survive during the rest of the year," she said. Heavy rains have made the road impassable. In neighbouring Nakapiripirit District, the road to Muyembe has been temporary cut off after being submerged by floodwater.

Mr John Nangiro, the Nakapiripirit district chairman, said travel had become very difficult in and out of the area. "We are cut off completely, for you to leave Nakapiripirit to Kampala; you must prepare to sleep on the road for three days."

Additional reporting by Steven Ariong in Moroto