

Plan to keep extension vehicles on the road

THE GOVERNMENT'S handover of 109 double-cabin pick-up trucks and 1,043 motorcycles to district extension officers across 69 districts on Tuesday marked a decisive step toward fulfilling Uganda's commitment to achieve food security, harness its agricultural potential, and adopt climate-resilient farming practices.

The consignment comes under the Uganda Climate Smart Agricultural Transformation Project, a \$354m (about sh1.3 trillion) programme which is financed by the World Bank and targets 3.9 million direct beneficiaries.

Crucially, several of the 69 districts host refugees, communities whose food security and livelihoods are tightly bound to how well Uganda's farming systems work.

For them, and for millions of smallholders, the sight of an extension officer arriving on time can be the difference between a failed season and a harvest.

This is good news, and it is necessary news. For too long, Uganda's extension system has been asked to run on foot while serving farmers scattered across hills,



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wetlands; and plains. The bottlenecks are well known: low mechanisation, inadequate water for production, persistent pests and diseases, weak seed and breeding infrastructure, market access barriers, and overstretched, poorly equipped extension services.

A motorcycle for a sub-county officer or a pick-up for a district team does not, by itself, solve these problems. But mobility is the foundation on which every other solution moves. Advice on drought-tolerant varieties, early warning on fall armyworm, training on soil and water conservation, inspection of irrigation sites – none of it happens if the expert cannot reach the farm.

Extension officers are the bridge between research stations, weather data, markets, and the farmer's hoe. However, with district budgets already thin, without ring-fenced allocations for servicing, insurance, tyres, and fuel, these new pick-up trucks and bikes will be parked.

The agriculture ministry together with local governments, must publish a clear operations and maintenance plan, with tracking and accountability. A vehicle off the road is a farmer unserved.

Relatedly, Parliament should demand quarterly reports detailing how many farmers were reached, what practices were adopted and what yields changed? This will ensure accountability and value for this investment.