



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

Ministry of Works and Transport Regional Workshops: How responsive are they?

Overview

Regional Mechanical Workshops (RMWs) were established in the Financial Year 1999/2000. This was after identifying a technical gap to undertake major repairs and maintenance of district feeder road equipment at the district and urban local governments.

Three RMWs were established and these are: Bugembe (Jinja), Gulu and Mbarara. They were to: carryout specialized repair and maintenance of road equipment; offer technical support and advice to districts, municipalities and town councils; and offer transport for regional equipment such as bull dozers, wheel loaders, motor graders and excavators to areas of operation.

This policy brief highlights the extent to which these regional workshops have served the district and urban local governments, and how to improve their performance.

Introduction

RMWs were established to provide on-job training to district mechanical staff and promote the retention of the trained staff to facilitate bulk purchase of tools and spares for the district equipment. They also carry out equipment inventories and advise the district local governments on the condition of their equipment; undertake monitoring and evaluation of equipment usage on behalf of Ministry of Works and Transport (MoWT) and provide technical advice as necessary.

Key Issues

- **Wide coverage of the regional workshops** that leaves them overwhelmed with work.
- **Inadequate funding:** This is especially a problem with no budget increment to cater for the expanding equipment base. A fleet of 1,425 new road equipments was acquired and distributed to Local Governments (LGs) with no additional funding for maintenance.
- **Unsatisfactory status of workshops** in terms of equipment and tools; as well as the capacity of mechanical engineers, technicians, machine operators and artisans.

Mbarara Regional Mechanical workshop - 29 districts.

The workshops have a big scope of coverage with Bugembe having 53 districts, Gulu -30 and Despite the wide coverage, the workshops have inadequate funding. The Mbarara workshop received Ug shs 900 million in Q4, FY 2014/15 against a budget of Ug shs 2 billion, representing a shortfall of 55%. This is likely to cause a maintenance backlog.

The appalling funding status of Bugembe Regional Mechanical Workshop's annual work plan is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Annual workplan for Bugembe Regional workshop

<i>Item</i>	<i>Amount (Ug shs) '000'</i>	<i>Comment</i>
General Repair of old/ existing equipment	7,347,632	Financed
Rehabilitation of old existing equipment	5,116,000	Not financed
General Repair of new equipment for LGs, DRRU and URRU plus training of operators and mechanical staff	4,080,000	Not financed
Rehabilitation and re-equipping the workshop and construction of a classroom block	4,080,000	Not financed

Source: MoWT

This is set to increase the maintenance backlog and further deterioration of the equipment.

Views from Beneficiary districts

A survey was done in eight districts that are served by the three regional workshops and the results indicated the following:

- The districts have not benefited from the regional workshops as the procedures to access their services are too bureaucratic. They therefore, resort to alternative means of resolving the mechanical problems especially in cases of an emergency.
- The districts lack the basic tools to carry out minor repairs as required by MoWT. Hence, they have to join the long queues waiting for

regional workshops to even solve a minor mechanical problem.

- The workshops are very far from most districts they serve (more than 100 km).
- There is a technical gap at the districts as the mechanical departments at LGs are headed by individuals who are Higher Diploma holders. Hence, there is need for capacity building to bridge the gap.

Key Implementation Challenges

a) Human resource issues

- **High labour turnover:** The salaries offered by private companies to mechanical engineers, technicians, machine operators and artisans are much better than what is provided by MoWT. Therefore, the MoWT does not retain its staff.
- **Limited staff:** The current staff establishment of the regional workshops is partially filled. For instance at Mbarara Regional Mechanical workshop, only 59% of the required staff are in place.
- **Limited technical capacity:** The 2-3 day trainings given by MoWT to the local government staff in handling the newly supplied equipment were reported to be inadequate.

b) Inadequate equipment/machinery and tools

The workshops lack the basic sets of equipment and tools to carry out maintenance activities. This is because the existing equipment is dilapidated while the new stock also suffers frequent breakdowns.

c) Financing

Inadequate budget: the budget for the workshops has not been revised to match the increasing operational costs of oil, fuel and new equipment acquired in June 2012. This brought about a clash of prioritization as the equipment from various districts compete for the limited resources. As a result, a maintenance backlog is created.

Initiatives adopted by Regional Mechanical Workshops to improve service delivery

These are categorized into three project profiles namely:

- i. *Institutional support to Regional Mechanical Workshops for repair of the new road equipment acquired in 2012 through the US\$ 100 million loan from China.*

In line with a need to achieve the objective of maintaining the 1,425 pieces of road equipment at 90% availability, a project estimated at Ug shs 8.16 billion per year was initiated. The project was expected to start in FY 2014/15 however, by the end of December 2014; no funds had been released for the purpose.

- ii. *Institutional support to Regional Mechanical Workshops-Rehabilitation of Regional Mechanical Workshops*

The project started in June 2014 and is expected to end in June 2018. The project is expected to cost a total of Ug shs 7 billion of which 2.2 billion (31.42%) was allocated in FY 2014/15. A total of Ug shs 1.08 billion was released to Bugembe and Ug shs 0.97 billion expended by 31st December 2014.

- iii. *Rehabilitation and re-deployment of the existing/old road equipment in District Local Governments (DLGs)*

To mitigate the shortfalls of the new equipment, a proposal to rehabilitate a total of 279 pieces of existing/old equipment in DLGs was approved. These will be redeployed to the zonal centres or to new ones. This project in DLGs is estimated to cost Ug shs 28.3610 billion. It will begin in 2015 and end in 2018.

Conclusion

Establishment of Regional Mechanical Workshops was meant to be a relief to LGs in repairing and maintenance of roads.

- However, they have not been well prepared to take on the above tasks because of the inadequate budget allocations in relation to demands, wide coverage of each workshop, and the unsatisfactory status of the workshops in terms of structures, equipment and tools. This has limited their effectiveness on the ground.

Making regional workshops more responsive

- ***Upgrade of the regional workshops should be expedited:*** The campaign kicked off in FY 2014/15 and hence, a great initiative. The workshops should be provided with good administrative offices, workshop equipment and tools.



Upgrading of the yard at Gulu Regional Mechanical Workshop

- **Create more workshops/ zonal centres:** More zonal centres under the workshops should be instituted such that each zone undertakes at most 15 districts and is fully equipped with technical personnel and modern tools for maintenance works. This will reduce the workload at the regional workshops; improve accessibility to equipment and services hence, reducing long term costs such as transportation.

In addition to the above, the thin budgets to the districts could be channeled as a pool fund to the zonal centers which will have more capacity to undertake repairs and maintenance of road equipment.

- **Purchase appropriate equipment:** The Government of Uganda through MoWT should expedite the purchase of heavy equipment to enhance the mechanised maintenance of roads by force account. Light weight interventions being carried out presently are insufficient for the district roads that require rehabilitation.
- **MoWT should increase financial support** to take care of operation and maintenance of the new machines as there was no provision for this when the equipment from China was acquired.
- **Training and employing qualified personnel:** The mechanical engineers, operators and artisans should be facilitated to address the technical gap at both the regional mechanical workshops and LGs.
- **Motivate the Human Resource:** The Ministry of Local Government should accommodate the mechanical staff in their structure and Ministry of Public Service should set appropriate salaries and benefits to improve human resource retention at the RMWs.

References:

1. Semi-Annual Budget Monitoring Report, FY 2014/15
2. MoWT Quarter Two (Q2) Performance Report, FY 2014/15
3. Q2, FY 2014/15 progress for Bugembe, Gulu, and Mbarara Regional Mechanical workshops.
4. Questionnaires to all Regional workshop managers and 8 District Engineers

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