

Maize flour being loaded on a pickup for distribution in Kawempe Kampala last year

AUDITOR GENERAL EXPOSES ROT IN PROCUREMENT OF COVID-19 DEALS

By Vision Reporter

An audit of the Government's COVID-19 intervention funds has exposed the rot in the procurement and supply of COVID-19 goods and services worth sh143b.

The report raises serious concerns about the way the resources in the fight against COVID-19 have been managed. It has also emerged that many contractors hired by some government agencies did not deliver as expected.

Following reports of mismanagement of the COVID-19 funds, the Ministry of Finance asked the Auditor General to carry out a forensic audit of all expenditures by the government agencies involved in the procurement of COVID-19 items.

The audit report by Auditor General John Muwanga on the management of COVID-19 interventions for the financial year 2019/20 revealed that a total of 25 government entities made procurements worth sh143.84b using money received as part of the COVID-19 response without following the proper procurement guidelines issued.

The entities include Ministry of Health (sh100b), Ministry of Defence (sh16b), Uganda Police Force (sh21.2b), Uganda Prisons Services (sh3.4b), Office of the President (sh123m), Buikwe District Local Government (DLG) (sh2.4b), Lira DLG (sh21m), Kween DLG (sh76m), Dokolo DLG (sh63m), Butebo DLG (sh54,4m) among others entities.

"Non-compliance with the procurement regulations exposes public funds to misuse and impairs the achievement of value for money. I advised accounting officers to adhere to the procurement guidelines even in cases of emergencies," Muwanga said in the report.

The report was sent to the Speaker of Parliament and signed by the Muwanga on March 26, 2021.

After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Parliament approved a supplementary budget of sh284b for multi-sectoral interventions, to enable the Government respond to and manage the pandemic.

The approved funds were disbursed by the Treasury to 134 districts and 11 ministries, departments and agencies for the purpose. COVID-19 was detected in the country in March 2020.

Muwanga said according to the guidelines issued by the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Finance on the receipt and accountability for COVID-19 procurements, accounting officers were required to follow the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act (PPDA) regulations which guide on how procurements should be undertaken under emergency conditions.

However, a review of the procurements revealed several anomalies which the entities will have to respond to in Parliament when summoned to account for the funds.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

In the Ministry of Defence, Muwanga noted the following procurement anomalies: unjustified use of single sourcing for procurements worth sh14.724b, contract to NEC Luwero Industries for the procurement of medical requirements worth sh826m was signed on July 30, 2020 after delivery of items on May 6, 2020 and payment to supplier on June 26, 2020.

Muwanga further noted that the ministry signed a contract with a medical company for the supply of medical requirements worth sh495m. It was signed on August 13, 2020 after the delivery of items on May 18, 2020 and payment to supplier on June 22, 2020.

He also noted that there was delayed delivery of procured items in some of the procurements for example procurement of pick-up trucks from Toyota Uganda.

UGANDA POLICE FORCE

Muwanga further accused the force of inflating the budget/work plan for the COVID-19 intervention by sh14.9b.

According to the audit report, the inflating of the budget was done by irregularly increasing the unit costs and/or the total quantities of items.

"I observed that the budget/work plan for the COVID-19 intervention for the Uganda Police was inflated by sh14.9b by irregularly increasing the unit costs of items," Muwanga said in the report.

The report further revealed that the supply of foodstuffs worth sh2.7b was made based on call-off orders.

"However, the entity did not have a framework contract for the supply of foodstuffs," Muwanga revealed.

The force also reportedly contracted a contractor for the supply of 95,507 bottles (750ml) Sodium hydrochloride worth sh1.9b and irregularly paid an advance payment yet it was not provided for in the contract.

It also reportedly fully paid sh1.7b to the contractor for the supply of 19,000 20-litre jerrycans before the supplier delivered all the jerrycans.

"The force procured both small (350ml) and large (500ml) of hand pocket sanitisers at sh1.3b but there was no evidence that procurement procedures were followed," the report states.

The report further states that the Police force's procurement files worth sh5.9b were not availed for auditing.

The accounting officer of Uganda Police, Aggrey Wunyu, however told *New Vision* that the issues were discussed in the management letter with the Auditor General, responded to and all dropped.

"Nothing of this kind has ever happened in the Uganda Police. All those issues were responded to and were subsequently dropped," he said.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

The audit of the procurement records revealed that there was a delay in the delivery of intensive care equipment worth sh26b and delivery and installation of intensive care equipment worth sh26b.

The report also states that six million masks were delivered before the procurement evaluation report was approved and that the procured masks were not certified by Uganda National Bureau Standards (UNBS).

It further revealed that 38 emergency ambulances worth sh11b were delivered late, by more than five months.

The report also states that intensive care unit (ICU) equipment for 17 referral hospitals worth sh11b was delivered late and up to 70 pieces had not been installed by the time of audit in November 2020.

"There was no space to accommodate beds bought for the ICUs at the referral hospitals," the auditors said in the report.

The report further revealed that the supplier of COVID-19 lab testing kits was overpaid by sh5.7m and the consignment was not inspected on arrival by an inspector of drugs, hence kits may not have met specifications. Efforts to get a comment from the Ministry of Health were futile. But the health ministry's permanent secretary had in an earlier statement explained that all the monies given to the ministry for matters related to COVID-19 had been accounted for.

UGANDA PRISONS SERVICES

It was revealed that three procurements worth sh239m were conducted outside the revised procurement plan. This is in addition to procuring goods and supplies such as detergents, gloves and sanitisers worth sh976m using the direct procurement method without justification.

"I noted that procurements amounting to sh429m were retrospectively awarded to the suppliers after delivery of the items," Muwanga said.

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

The report states that the entity undertook procurements worth sh123m using direct procurement method to procure food.

"This method was not justified. I was not provided with the contracts committee minutes to justify the procurement," Muwanga said.

BUIKWE DISTRICT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The audit revealed that the supply of COVID-19 protective gear, supplies worth sh384m were sourced using the request for quotation as opposed to open domestic bidding required by the PPDA regulations.

The auditors, however, said they unable to audit the procurement for the supply of foodstuffs worth sh2b because at the time of reporting, the food stuffs had not been delivered to the district or to the beneficiary schools.

Other districts that had procurement anomalies are Nakaseke, Lira, Kole, Masindi, Kagadi, Kyankwanzi, Kiboga, Buliisa, Bugweri, Kassanda, Butebo, Kween, Abim, Moroto, Karenga, Amolatar, Soroti, Kumi and Dokolo.

Kampala traders praise decongestion drive, 25 more succumb to COVID-19

By Juliet Waiswa

Traders in downtown Kampala have lauded the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) for their move to decongest Kikuubo, one of the busiest and most congested streets, to ensure adherence to measures meant to prevent COVID-19.

KCCA in a joint operation, with the Police, on Monday, raided Kikuubo, destroying all the makeshift stalls on the streets so as to reduce congestion and ensure social distancing, handwashing and the wearing of face masks.

This is one of the fresh campaigns by stakeholders to avert the spread of COVID-19. After the Monday operation by KCCA and the Police, traders have placed handwashing facilities at the entrances to their shops, strings in front of those entrances so as to create a distance between them and the customers. The street now has less human traffic.

The traders operating shops in adjacent arcades welcomed the move by KCCA and Police, saying that they have been making low sales since those trading on the streets would hijack buyers.

"We have complained for long but now that COVID-19 guidelines are in place we want this area to remain free," Annette Nakintu, a shop attendant, said.

The publicity secretary for the Kikuubo traders, Sam Muyomba, yesterday revealed that they were carrying out modalities to ensure that the traders are relocated to another available space.

UPDATE

As Uganda recorded 25 more deaths of persons who succumbed to the virus in one day, Kampala and Wakiso continue to record the highest number of cases .

According to the latest Ministry of Health report, Kampala and Wakiso have the highest number of cases at 1,043 and 162 respectively, followed by Luwero with 63 new cases.

Results of COVID-19 tests done last Sunday confirmed 1,422 new cases bringing the cumulative confirmed cases to 64,251 of the 1,210,114 tested persons.

ALL IS NOT LOST

The ministry has also reported that 48,480 persons have recovered, while 920 are receiving treatment. Deaths in Uganda stand at 459.

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