State spends K366bn on FSP

By NANCY MWAPU
ABOUT K361.1 billion has been spent on the Fertiliser Support Programme (FSP) in the last seven years.

During the period, Government distributed about 422,000 metric tonnes of fertiliser to 1,055,000 small-scale farmers.

Minister of Agriculture and Co-operatives, Brian Chituwo said this in Lusaka when he officiated at the stakeholders' consultative meeting.

The meeting, which was organised by the Agriculture and Consultative Forum (ACF) was called to review the FSP.

He said there had been various concerns raised over the FSP by various stakeholders, especially over beneficiaries, impact on household and national food security.

He said this was evident by the few farmers graduating from the programme.

Other concerns were its effects on private sector investment and long term sustainability.

Dr Chituwo said this was why Government decided to review the FSP to provide workable proposals and recommendations for effective and efficient implementation.

He urged cooperating partners and Non Governmental Organisations to explore ways to support Government either directly in the FSP implementation or other complementary activities.

He said the FSP was initiated in 2002/2003 season to rebuild the eroded resource base of small-scale farmers and contribute to improved household and national food security.

"Since Government has no immediate intention to discontinue the implementation of the programme, it is important that refinements aimed at improving the agriculture input distribution are made to the programme," he said.

And making a presentation on the proposed reforms, Zambia National Farmers Union, liaison officer, Collard Hamusimbi proposed that all FSP inputs be distributed through an electronic voucher system.

Mr Hamusimbi said the inputs voucher system would result in timely distribution of inputs, minimise the administrative burden and costs.

He also proposed reforms on procurement, distribution and package size. He said it was important that Government announced the quantities of fertiliser and seed to be procured under the subsidy programme by March 2009.
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