Voucher proposed for fertilizer aid
By NANCY MWAPE

THE Government’s Fertilizer Support Programme (FSP) will in future be implemented through an electronic voucher scheme if current proposals for a change aimed at improving its effectiveness and efficiency are accepted.

A study team engaged by Government to review the FSP has also proposed that the scheme’s name changes to Farmer Input Training Support.

The Government introduced the FSP in 2002 by Government to improve household and national food security, incomes, accessibility to agriculture inputs by small-scale farmers through subsidy and build capacity of the private sector to participate in the supply of agriculture inputs.

According to the latest report issued by Agriculture Consultative Forum (ACF) and FSP study team, on the performance of fertilizer programme, recommended for an electronic voucher scheme because a paper voucher is sometimes duplicated, thus facilitating corruption of the system.

The team also recommended that the programme be flexible and implemented immediately.

The team however notes that poor monitoring of the programme has made it difficult to measure achievements against objectives.

It states that this would benefit farmers through upgraded extension services as well as agro-dealer training in yield enhancing technologies such as conservation farming technologies and appropriate input application practices.

The team said continuation of the FSP status quo was unlikely to trigger the expected agriculture sector performance increases and would continue inhibiting the availability of affordable and improved use of farm inputs at the farm level.

The report states that Government will continue incurring large investments on subsidies with limited pay-offs and at the expenses of other important developmental works to promote growth in the agriculture sector.

The team adds that the voucher scheme would improve accountability and enhance monitoring of the entire programme.

“Subsidised seed and fertilizer will yield better results if accompanied by effective extension services and agricultural training as well as monitoring,” reads the report.