Shakas urges govt to open fertiliser market

By Ernest Chanda

KATUBA MMD member of parliament Jonas Shafakufwewa (right) on Wednesday asked the government to open the fertiliser market to other importers.

And Kabwata UPND member of parliament Rentius Muntanga lamented what he called confusion in the agriculture ministry because of having two ministers.

Debating the estimates of expenditure for the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Shafakufwewa said it was not good to have the same suppliers of the commodity every year.

"...Every year we spend K500 billion to bring in fertiliser and the commodity comes late. Why do we use suppliers who bring the commodity late? Please let us check the procurement process. Let us open the fertiliser market by engaging other players on the market. It is not good to have the same two importers of fertiliser whom we know year in year out. Let us save government money by getting the best price," Shafakufwewa said. "We have some suppliers who are selling fertiliser cheaply and yet they didn't win the tender. Let us sell for 400,000 peasant farmers and perhaps 200,000 of those who can also sell the product. We need to see a change in the ministry."

Muntanga also wondered where the Food Reserve Agency (FRA) takes its annual allocation from the treasury, which is meant for the purchase of maize.

"Every year the Food Reserve Agency is given K400 billion to purchase maize from farmers, and before that money finishes we give them another the following year. But what have they done to previous money that we gave them? We should look into the deals of the Food Reserve Agency because if we took K40 billion toCDF (Constituency Development Fund) it would be a lot to improve all our wards in the constituency," Shafakufwewa said.

And Muntanga expressed concern over the confusion in the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives.

"The President promised to create a new ministry, but what are we seeing is an appointment of two ministers to run one ministry. When a parliamentary committee was appointed to propose a ministry, the committee did not propose this configuration, but a ministry. We did not propose to have a ministry where one minister runs a department and the other minister runs the entire agriculture ministry. This same ministry has two permanent secretaries and we don't know which permanent secretary to approach when we have problems," Muntanga said.

He accused the MMD government of distorting the cooperative system in the agriculture sector.

"During the UNIP era, agriculture cooperatives were running very well. In fact, cooperatives were engine of development in rural areas. When the MMD came into power they destroyed everything. They destroyed the idea that UNIP left because they did not want to have anything to do with UNIP. You [the Executive] destroyed cooperatives because [with] you anything cooperative was UNIP," said Muntanga.