MPs want farming inputs distribution style revised

By Times Reporter

MEMBERS of Parliament have challenged the Government to devise a better mechanism for distribution of agro inputs under the Fertiliser Support Programme (FSP) so that it reaches intended beneficiaries.

Contributing to the policy debate for the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, members complained that as much as the programme was essential, most beneficiaries were not able to access the inputs.

Monze MP, Jack Mwiimbu (UPND), said because of the haphazard distribution of fertiliser through the FSP, some people had managed to swindle Government out of huge quantities of the commodity and had still managed to go scot-free.

Mr Mwiimbu said if no proper distribution mechanism was put in place, the Government would continue losing huge amounts of money on a project that was not benefiting the citizens.

Katuba MP, Jonas Shakafuswa (MMD), said the FSP was a tool that could be used to alleviate poverty but regrettably, the programme was not well administered. This, he said, was despite the Government investing huge sums of money in the programme.

"We have to revisit the FSP because at the rate we are moving, everyone is politicising it," Mr Shakafuswa said.

Mr Shakafuswa also said it was important that the ministry thoroughly supervised the operations of the Food Reserve Agency (FRA).

Dundumwezi MP, Edgar Singombe (independent), said if the Government was serious about diversifying the economy to agriculture, it should be sending fertiliser and agricultural inputs on time.

In many rural areas, he said, the Government was sending wrong fertiliser at a wrong time and in some instances after the planting season was long over.

Lusaka Central MP, Guy Scott (PF), said prices of mealie meal were high because small-scale farmers were neglected through the FSP.

Dr Scott said if the FSP was well coordinated, small-scale farmers...
would be able to produce abundantly, thereby reducing the prices of mealie meal.

In his policy statement, Agriculture and Cooperatives Minister, Brian Chituwo, said following the decrease in the budgetary allocation in the previous year; numerous challenges were faced in the implementation of programmes.

Despite the challenges, during the 2007/2008-agriculture season, the country recorded a food surplus of 43,000 tonnes.

Dr Chituwo also said that the FSP, although a well intended programme, had been operating with serious challenges. This year, he said, the Government would promote increased investment in the agriculture sector.

“We are committed to agricultural diversification through promotion of production and marketing of other primary agricultural commodities,” Dr Chituwo said.

In his policy statement, Agriculture and Cooperatives Minister in charge of Fisheries and Livestock, Bradford Machila, said the Government this year allocated K75 billion to livestock development.

He said this year, fisheries development was the area that would be promoted with the view of increasing fish production as well as revenue.

Mr Machila said fishery infrastructures in Chembe, Itezhi-Tezhi, Sinazongwe and Mpolungu, among others, would be rehabilitated. He said Government had made strides in combating many livestock diseases.

In the previous year, he said, the major livestock diseases were foot and mouth disease (FMD) and the contagious bovine pleuropneumonia (CBPP).

In order to control the two diseases, he said that the Government spent K4.5 billion on the purchase of doses, vaccines and veterinary materials.