16 DISTRICTS CHOSEN ARE 200KM AWAY FROM ENTEBBE FORECASTING CENTRE

UGANDA GETS SH22B TO INSTALL WEATHER STATIONS IN DISTRICTS

By Juliet Kasirye

Uganda has received a $6.4m (sh22.82b) grant from the World Meteorological Organisation to install new and upgrade weather stations in 16 districts.

These global basic observing networks will be installed in Arua, Gulu, Lira, Kitgum, Kotido, Soroti, Masindi, Tororo, Jinja, Makerere, Entebbe, Mbarara, Mubende, Kamuli, Kasese and Kabale.

The assistant commissioner for meteorological services at the Ministry of Water and Environment, Milton Michael Waiswa, said the districts were chosen because they have existing stations, which need to be upgraded, and are also 200km away from the forecasting centre in Entebbe.

"We are embracing automatic weather stations because they can log and produce data hourly or more frequently on a 24/7 basis without human intervention. Currently, we have manual weather stations which require people to record data every hour," he said.

"The current stations use mobile phones to communicate, but since this is an international station, we are going to add to it a communication tool whereby what the station has recorded reaches the global centre straightaway."

An automatic weather station is a meteorological station that automatically records, measures and transmits data including wind, humidity, temperature and rainfall without human intervention.

Waiswa said there are only 211 weather stations across the country. But to provide real time data, he said Uganda needs about 500 weather stations, and each district should have at least three automatic weather stations.

He made the remarks during the launch of the systematic observations financing facility (SOFF) project at the environment ministry headquarters in Kampala on Friday.

The four-year project is expected to enhance weather monitoring capabilities in compliance with the Global Basic Observing Network.

Metrologists say this will be achieved through the installation of automatic weather stations, establishment and rehabilitation of upper air stations and capacity building at different levels among others.

TEMPERATURE CHANGES

Addressing stakeholders, the permanent secretary at the water ministry, Dr Alfred Okidi, said in the recent years, they have noted a profound change in Uganda's weather patterns.

"The onset and cessation of seasonal rainfall have changed; temperatures are gradually rising in all regions of the country. The extreme weather-related occurrences such as floods, drought and landslides are on the rise in terms of frequency and intensity, and these have always resulted in devastating impacts such as loss of lives and livelihoods, and destruction of infrastructure," he said.

Okidi said although reliable, timely and sustained observations of the earth system are fundamental for early warning services, these observations remain unevenly distributed across Uganda.

"This project will contribute to the implementation of the Early Warnings for All initiative in Uganda, as well as the implementation of the developed National Framework for Weather and Climate Services. This will ensure that every Ugandan is protected by an early warning system that ensures prompt and early actions," Okidi emphasised.

"For instance, these days, you find it is raining in Bunga, but there is no rain in Kikubamutwe and Kyambogo. With these kinds of weather stations, we shall be able to provide more accurate data, avail localised weather information and improve forecasting for specific areas."

Okidi lauded the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), which enabled Uganda to get the grant.

Through the SOFF project, the commissioner in the department of meteorological services, Dr Bob Alex Ogwang, said: "We shall have two functional upper air stations. So far, we have only one at Entebbe Airport VVIP section, which will be revamped, and another one is expected to be in northern Uganda, either in Lira, Gulu or Kitgum. Data will be collected from everywhere, taken to a global centre and ingested in global models which most of the countries use as input into their local models."

To have accurate forecasts, he emphasised the need to progressively increase the number of observation points across the country to capture timely variations in the weather.

The regional hub manager at IsDB, Dr Issahaq Umar Iddrisu, said the project marks an important step in Uganda's commitment to strengthening weather and climate resilience.

PHOTO BY JULIET KASIRYE

Iddrisu (left) and Okidi (right) launch the systematic observations financing facility (SOFF) project at the water ministry headquarters in Luzira, Kampala, recently

BETWEEN THE LINES

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