

PARLIAMENT EMPHASISING GOOD GOVERNANCE

By Moses Mulondo

Although many public and private institutions in Uganda still have a long way in having management that is anchored on best governance practices and principles, the Parliament of Uganda has intensified efforts to be a role model in setting the pace.

Corporate governance refers to the systems of rules, practices, and processes by which an institution/company is governed for better performance.

The leadership of Parliament is ensuring that Parliament runs an institution with systems that enhance corporate governance (institutionalism).

The key corporate governance principles emphasised for well governed companies/institutions are accountability, transparency, integrity, responsibility and excellence

The Clerk to Parliament, Hon Adolf Mwesige Kasajja, explained that Parliament ensures it promotes accountability through both holding other government entities accountable and also ensuring that it operates transparently internally.

“Parliament scrutinises the reports of the Auditor General on the audited accounts of the various government entities and Parliament follows up on what action has to be undertaken on entities which have not accounted for public funds,” Mwesige stated.

Mwesige, a former prominent legislator and cabinet minister, explained that through the Treasury Memorandum which is a statement of government in response to Parliament recommendations on the reports of the Auditor General, Parliament keeps the Executive accountable to the people of Uganda.

Regarding ensuring accountability within the institution of Parliament, the Clerk to Parliament said, “Like any other government institution, we have accountability systems. We are audited by the Auditor General and those reports are public. We also have an internal audit section within Parliament which keeps track of the expenditures on daily basis and they make quarterly reports.”

Mwesige elaborated that there is a mechanism to ensure that the funds given to committees to execute their duties are accounted for.

“Each Assistant Clerk to a committee is required to account for the funds allocated to the committee. Meanwhile, committees also carry out oversight roles in regard to the various government entities to ensure there is value for money in whatever they do,” the Clerk to Parliament explained.

On the accountability in terms of performance of committees, Mwesige



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said, “There are timeframes which have to be adhered to as committees do work given to them. For the first time, committees are now reporting reasonably on time. The leadership of Parliament has ensured that those committees report on time.”

Regarding integrity, the Clerk to Parliament said, “Committees are no longer allowed to convene meetings outside the precincts of Parliament. In the past, donors and government entities would convene meetings and there was a habit of providing facilitation to MPs which was causing suspicion in the public domain. There was a ruling by the Rt Hon. Speaker, Jacob Oulanyah, that all meetings must take place within Parliament and that is being adhered to. It was meant to edge out the possibility of compromising MPs through such meetings and also protect the integrity of Parliament as an assembly of representatives of the people.”

Mwesige noted that there is a strict code of conduct which governs legislators in the course of executing their work. This code is embedded in the Rules of Procedure of Parliament and there is a Standing Committee on Rules, Privileges and Discipline to enforce the code of conduct.

About the corporate governance principle of excellence, Mwesige said, “The Speaker will soon convene a special conference on working out means for ensuring that the

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deliberations in Parliament are research based. We have a research department with over 30 research officers who support our MPs. It is currently more active than ever before.”

The Clerk to Parliament also elucidated that MPs were given iPads and internet is provided to ensure that they can always research for relevant information to improve their deliberations in both committees and the House.

On adherence to the principle of transparency, Mwesige said, “It is an institutional policy that all meetings of Parliament are open to the public. Members of the public are allowed to attend. The civil society through

the media attends all the meetings and Parliament proceedings are always covered by the media for the public to follow.”

“Everything Parliament does is done transparently. Even meetings of accountability committees where public officials are called to account are always recorded by the media,” he explained.

In the various reports of the African Leadership Institute (AFLI) which always assesses the performance of Parliament, it has been noted that whereas bills are supposed to be processed within 45 days, committees are always taking more than a year to process bills.

Dr Gerald Werikhe Wanzala, the AFLI head of civic engagement and research, proposes the need for a retribution system for legislators who abscond from Parliament business.

Wanzala also proposes the need for Parliament to increase funding for the research department to generate data for individual legislators to widen their knowledge, improve quality of bills, and gain confidence to discuss a wide range of issues.

“In conclusion, I think the leadership of the 11th Parliament needs to reflect on weaknesses pointed out in various assessments and rethink how to make Parliament transparent, effective, and more accountable,” Dr Wanzala suggests.

The Executive Director of the Institute of Corporate Governance of Uganda, Dison Okumu, said, “Parliament is expected to lead in the practice of accountability and transparency, given its oversight mandate over other government entities. Legislators should also exhibit responsibility by attending meetings of committees and plenary in time and as frequently as required to do.”

Okumu implored Parliament to support and expedite the process of passing the Corporate Governance Bill which is aimed at enhancing the adherence to corporate governance principles and practices for better effectiveness of government and better service delivery.