

The Minister of Energy and Mineral Development Ms Ruth Nankabirwa (2nd left), Government Chief Whip Thomas Tayebwa (3rd right), and other legislators celebrate after Parliament passed the East African Crude Oil Bill 2021.

PHOTO/COURTESY



11th Parliament: Three bills passed in six months

It took close to four months for the legislators to pass their maiden bill, but also set the stage for a flurry of other bills to follow. *Daily Monitor's Franklin Draku* writes.

On October 5, 2021, Parliament passed the Administration of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, making it the maiden bill of the 11th Parliament.

Less than a month later, the President assented to the bill, making it a law.

It took close to four months for the legislators to pass their maiden bill, but also set the stage for a flurry of other bills to follow.

On November 24, 2021, the legislators passed the National Social Security Fund Amendment Bill, allowing mid-term access to those who are 45 years and above and have saved for 10 years and more.

The Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Jacob Oulanyah, called the passing of the bill a “relief” to him, saying “I can now breathe,” shortly after the bill sailed through. Several workers hailed the passing of the bill say-

ing they had been struggling to sustain their families after a number of them lost their jobs during the Covid-19 induced lockdown when the economy took a thorough beating.

According to the amended bill, employers who do not remit their worker's contributions to NSSF face a five-year jail term on top of having to pay all the arrears.

In the bill, workers can now have mid-term access to 20 per cent of their savings.

On December 9, 2021, Parliament passed the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP), Special provisions) Bill into an Act of Parliament, now awaiting President Museveni's signature.

The bill will facilitate the implementation of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline project in Uganda, domesticating an existing treaty between Uganda and Tanzania before the EACOP Company can embark on the pipeline construction.

When and if Museveni assents to it, the bill will facilitate certain provisions of the Inter-governmental Agreement (IGA) signed between Uganda and Tanzania and the Host Government Agreement (HGA) signed between Uganda and the East African Crude Oil Pipeline Company. It will also fully implement the obligations of Uganda under the two agreements, kick starting the commercialisation of Uganda's oil and gas resources.

While these have been passed, they were not initiated by the 11th Parliament, but a rundown of bills left by

the 10th Parliament.

Several other bills are at various stages either before different committees of parliament or are ready for second readings.

Several legislators say while they would have loved to move faster, the Covid-19 pandemic and the funding challenges have had to put a brake on their progress.

Ms Sarah Opendi, the Tororo District Woman Member of Parliament said while they have been slowed down by the Covid-19 pandemic, the 11th parliament has so far done fairly well.

“We have done fairly well amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions. We have to transact business despite the threats of infections. We have passed three bills so far and many motions have been presented,” she said.

“The committees have been limited to undertake their oversight roles which is critical due to funding challenges. None the less work has been done and reports are ready for presentation hopefully before we break off,” she added.

Mr Richard Sebamala, the Bukoto Central Member of Parliament, said the 11th Parliament has taken a longer time in settling because of the larger number of new entrants. He said accomplishing business left by the previous parliament was low and that more can still be achieved going forward.

“Truth be told, there has been a lot of settling in having been a majority new lot. The leadership, adminis-

tration and management of parliament has also taken shape. Our lot has not introduced anything new that much, running affairs on a constrained budget is not good, imagine passing a pipeline bill without ever benchmarking on one,” he said.

“If it's not for the engineering experience, some don't know what

they legislated about. I would rate us at 60 percent performance and I believe by January we shall all be ready for business,” he added.

Whatever the situation is, the 11th Parliament has a huge task ahead to accomplish, with focus on taking Uganda to the middle-income status.

MAIDEN Assented to

President Museveni assented to the Administration of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which was passed by Parliament on 5 October 2021. The Private Members' Bill was tabled by Kilak North County MP, Anthony Akol. During the plenary sitting on Thursday, 18 November 2021, the Deputy Speaker, Anita Among, confirmed to the MPs that the President had assented to the House's maiden Bill.



Speaker Jacob Oulanyah at the Kololo Ceremonial Grounds where he chaired the first sitting of the House. PHOTO/COURTESY

Parliament makes bold steps on Emyooga funds

The legislators have in the past faulted the government for the systemic failure in the implementation of the presidential Initiative rolled out in October 2020, **Nelson Naturinda** writes.

After reports of abuse and misuse of funds appropriated by Parliament for emyooga, an initiative rolled out in October 2020, the 11th Parliament took steps to investigate and direct on the proper use of the funds for the benefit of the people of Uganda.

In August 2021, the MPs went out to investigate how the multi-million poverty alleviation project, part of a presidential initiative for wealth and job creation, was being used in their constituencies as they planned to embark on the discussion on the Parish Development Model (PDM), according to deputy speaker Anita Among.

"We have decided that we shall give members a short recess from 5th to 17th August 2021, we expect all MPs to go back to their constituencies and find out if the money reached the districts. We must take Parliament to the People to appreciate what we are doing," said Among as she sent them out.

The 10th Parliament approved Shs170 billion for Emyooga funds as part of the Shs3.7 trillion supplementary budget, which was passed and released to districts, but MPs felt the fund was not doing what it was meant to do.

"We cannot implement the Parish Model before knowing what the Emyooga funds have done. That will be a continuous waste of money, which presents the government as not doing anything," she added.

The fund, with over 5 million registered members, focused on 17 specific SACCOS, including bodaboda riders, taxi drivers, restaurants owners, welders, market vendors, women entrepreneurs, youth, people with disabilities, journalists, performing artists, veterans, fishermen, and elected leaders and each was supposed to receive sh30m.

"We expect you to do some work; for instance, establish the criteria used for disbursing the money to the beneficiaries. Find out if the beneficiaries were genuine or ghost and whether there are businesses established by beneficiaries using this money," said Among.

She told the legislators that each sub-region was expected to present a report to Parliament on their findings and the way forward and called upon the MPs to assist the government in service delivery.

"That will be a continuous waste of money and then you say the government is not doing anything to help the people. Let us help the government to help the people," the Deputy Speaker



Group leaders of different SACCOS display their receipts. Below, Deputy Speaker Anita Among. PHOTO BY MUDANGHA KOLYANGHA



of Parliament, Anita Among, told the House sitting on Tuesday, 3 August 2021.

After the tour of the constituencies and different projects, Members of Parliament agreed that the programme was poorly implemented. The legislators faulted the government for the systemic failure in the implementation of the presidential Initiative rolled out in October 2020.

Hurriedly formed associations

In sub-regional reports presented on the Floor of Parliament, MPs discovered that the implementation design of the Emyooga was marred by several inconsistencies and mishaps which affected the results.

The major problems highlighted in almost all the reports included associations being formed hurriedly to get the money. It was found that most

of these SACCOS had no shared vision, objectives, or goals establishing them, coupled with political interference as RDCs, who are ordinarily seen as the face of the central government and representatives of the ruling party took a direct role in the implementation. Some of the beneficiaries, the legislators discovered, took the money to be a token of appreciation from the Government for voting it in power over time, especially in places where people have always overwhelmingly supported President Yoweri Museveni and the NRM party.

Drawing board

Faced with Covid-19, legislators discovered that not only did the people fail to meet and discuss the way to use the funds, but some people used the money as fall back when pressed by loss of business occasioned by Covid-19

and its control measures such as the lockdowns as well as limitations on congregations and travels.

Hon. Lilian Aber (MP Kitgum district) observed that it was a lesson to us to take our time to implement government programmes of such a magnitude, while Omoro Woman MP, Catherine Lamwaka, said most of the training was being done by the Microfinance Support Centre, yet they cannot reinforce the SACCOS and associations under these SACCOS.

"The government needs to anchor the Microfinance Support Centre to build the capacity in training and supervision of the disbursement of such funds," Lamwaka added.

Hon. Sarah Najjuma (NRM, Nakaseke district) queried the programme being under the Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) when the districts have various accounting officers.

Hon. Rachel Magoola (NRM, Bugweri district) said the Emyooga programme was not a total failure because there are beneficiary groups that are flourishing.

However, she said systemic problems are the Achilles' heel of the programme and asked the government to go back to a drawing board and use the cooperative mentality to run the association.

Parliament promotes grassroots devt through Parishes

On January 30, 2020, Parliament approved the National Development Plan 3 with the aim of increasing household incomes and improving the quality of life of Ugandans, with a specific focus on building internal and external markets, which are important for industrialization.

The Parish Development Model was adopted as the vehicle for achieving this after the Budget committee presented the report to the House.

The report by Ntenjeru South MP Amos Lugoloobi had the majority of committee members recommend that Parliament adopts 253 Billion Shillings for implementation of the Parish Development Model for the 2021/2022 financial year, although the existing wealth funds, such as Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP) and Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP), were maintained.

The Parish Development Model (PDM) is a strategy for organizing and delivering public and private sector interventions for wealth creation and employment at the parish level as the lowest economic planning unit.

Under the model, the government aims to graduate the 39 percent of households in the subsistence economy into agents of wealth creation in the monetised economy.

Although some committee members such as Butambala County MP Muwanga Kivumbi and Dokolo Woman MP Cecilia Ogwal recommended that the proposed 200 billion shillings be allocated towards reviving cooperative movement across the country, Parliament adopted the main committee report hence approving the implementation of the Parish Development Model.

The parish development model is meant to transform the 3,299,700 households out of subsistence economy into the commercial economy.

In August, while speaking to the members of the NRM caucus of 11th Parliament at Kololo Ceremonial Grounds in Kampala, President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni requested them to support the government's decision to put more money in the Parish development model to fast track economic transformation at the grass root.

"I appeal to this Parliament to support the Parish development model because we are shifting from deciding for the people to the people deciding for themselves". President Museveni said.

"I am here again to address you on the issues of social,

economic transformation of Ugandans. We can give them the money in their SACCOS and we just monitor and supervise them. I appeal to you all to support the Parish Development model. All kinds of people are there in the Parish including the women, youth, disabled and old people".

Improved community roads

According to the Prime Minister Hon. Robinah Nabbanja, the government sent a technical person to work with the parish chiefs.

"We have put aside money to train Parish chiefs and the technical persons plus a Seven-member committee headed by the local council 2 chairperson," she said.

Under this model, the government will focus on improving the community roads in the parish, including bridges,



We have put aside money to train Parish chiefs and the technical persons plus a seven-member committee,"

Prime Minister
Robinah Nabbanja.

provision of internet connectivity, etc to facilitate the effective implementation of Parish Development Model system, according to local government minister Mr. Raphael Magyezi.

Magyezi said the model is based on seven pillars – production, infrastructure, and economic services, financial inclusion, community data governance, administration, and mindset change, adding that the model will have parish SACCOS lending money at affordable interest rates.

When Parliament approved the model, the key activities included the recruitment of Parish Chiefs, establishment and training of Parish Development Committees, set up of the Community Information System (CIS), and mobilization of the masses at national and local government level.

This was supposed to have been finalised by the end of September where 5,600 chiefs were to be recruited to fill the vacant positions existing in the 10,594 parishes across the country.

Despite the challenges of lack of district service commissions and delays by the public service commissions, 4,000 parish chiefs have been recruited, and by the end of December, more 1,600 will have been recruited to complete the recruitment exer-



Government Chief Whip Thomas Tayebwa moves a motion to approve the appointment of Ms Jessica Alupo (centre) as Vice President. PHOTO/FILE

A ray of hope for women leadership

President Museveni appointed Ms Jessica Alupo as Vice President and Ms Robinah Nabbanja as Prime Minister on June 8, 2021. *Daily Monitor's Franklin Draku* writes.

June 14, 2021, will forever remain a memorable day for the 11th Parliament.

This is when the House approved Katakwi Woman MP, Jessica Alupo, and Kakumiro Woman MP, Robinah Nabbanja as Vice President and Prime Minister respectively.

The approval by the House followed their appointment to the positions by President Museveni on June 8, 2021.

Moving a motion for the approval of Ms Alupo was Government chief whip and Ruhinda North MP Thomas Tayebwa and seconded by workers' MP Mr Charles Bakkabulindi.

The motion to approve Ms Nabbanja as Prime Minister was moved by ICT and National Guidance minister and Kinkizi East MP Chris Baryomunsi and seconded by Oyam County South MP Betty Amongi.

The parliamentary approval set precedence, confirming that the two top positions are in hands of women for the first time in the history of Uganda.

While Dr Wandira Kazibwe was the first female Vice President, no woman had ever held the position of the Prime Minister, until Ms Nabbanja was appointed.

Mr Tayebwa said President Museveni is one of the leaders in the world to recognise the special abilities of women.

He credited Ms Alupo with several achievements, including holding the docket of education and sports, chairperson of Defence Committee from 2006 to 2009 among other roles.

"The illustrious service that Ms Alupo has rendered in the various ministries has given her vital experience in handling matters of the State. The training and experience she has got have prepared her well for this position," Mr Tayebwa said.

He also described Ms Alupo as a publisher, who has written extensively on areas of education and integration of East Africa, employee motivation and employee performance in the telecommunication sector, as well as the plight of refugee women in Uganda.

Mr Charles Bakkabulindi, said he had seen the quality, character, nature and the type of person that deserves to serve as Vice-President.

Ms Alupo thanked the President for appointing her to the position and expressed gratitude to MPs for approving her.

HISTORICAL

Women participation

With the approval of the Prime Minister and Vice President, the 11th Parliament went on to approve 30 more female ministers, making it the highest representation of women in the Cabinet since independence.



MPs vote to approve the appointment of Ms Robinah Nabbanja as Prime Minister. PHOTO/FILE

"I will not spare any energy in me while serving this country on this appointment. I will work closely with Parliament as a team to ensure service delivery to Ugandans," said Alupo.

Dr Baryomunsi while moving the motion to approve Ms Nabbanja described her as a dynamic and distinguished person. He said while a state minister of health, she waged a war against the sale of Government drugs by health workers.

"She made impromptu visits to hospitals during the day and night to curb the habit of extortion of patients in need of services. She directed health workers to put on uniforms while on duty, for ease of identification and she has been very instrumental in ensuring that the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are observed in the era of Covid-19," Dr Baryomunsi said.

Ms Amongi said both appointments

show that women are set for bigger offices and responsibilities in the government.

"I'm proud that Ms Nabbanja will be the first female Prime Minister in the history of this country since independence. What does this show? What is the significance of this appointment? That is what I would like to dwell on," she said.

Ms Amongi said Ms Nabbanja's ascent to the highest Cabinet position is a clear testimony that anyone can rise from scrap to become a leader in this country.

While accepting the position, Ms Nabbanja promised to continue on the foundation laid by her predecessors.

She promised to strengthen the link between the Executive and Parliament, ensure availability of government business in Parliament on time, together with the Government Chief Whip.

WHAT THEY SAID



"I have mobilized my constituents to enhance their productivity levels by engaging in a productive lifestyle and giving them information about where to get government services. I raised issues that affected my people on the floor of Parliament like poor roads, floods, safe water, and lack of electricity which relevant government ministries, departments, and agencies were now some are being worked on, others starting to be worked on and others will be worked on next financial year.

Ms Jisca Ababiku, Woman MP, Adjumani



"Ugandans will have a Prime Minister who reflects them, knows their problems, understands them and knows what to do in effecting her duties as a good mobilizer. I'm proud that Ms Nabbanja will be the first female country since independence,"

Ms Betty Amongi, Oyam South MP



"Ms Alupo is accessible and dependable and has walked the talk for others to see and not to simply command. She was my senior minister when I worked in the Education and Sports Ministry and we could coordinate,"

Mr Charles Bakkabulindi, workers' MP



MPs on the Parliamentary Taskforce on the National Covid-19 Response (Central Region) touring Mulago Hospital during their oversight visit to assess their preparedness to handle the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country. PHOTO/COURTESY

How Parliamentary taskforce unearthed discrepancies in Covid-19 expenditure

On July 19, the Parliament Covid-19 National taskforce presented its report to the Parliament, raising several queries on different expenditures the government incurred while responding to the pandemic. **Franklin Draku** writes.

On June 30, 2021, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Anita Among instituted a parliamentary committee to investigate the Covid-19 response ex-

penditure by different government agencies across the country.

The move follows numerous allegations of bloated expenditure by different agencies.

On November 10, 2021, another select committee was instituted to investigate corruption allegations against Dr Monica Musenero, the Minister of Science, Technology, and Innovations.

This followed the accusations made on the floor of Parliament by the Ntungamo Member of Parliament, Mr Yona Musinguzi in which he asked for accountability of funds so far released towards the development of a vaccine un-

der the Presidential Scientific Initiative on Epidemics (PRESIDE).

Mr Musinguzi accused Dr Musenero of embezzling up to Shs31 billion meant for vaccine manufacturing in Uganda.

In both instances, those accused were implicated in mismanaging the Covid-19 response funds meant to tame the pandemic.

While the team investigating Dr Musenero is yet to present its findings to the Parliament, the

one that investigated the Ministry of Health and other government Ministries, Agencies, and Departments (MDAs) presented its report in July, calling for a forensic audit and other punitive measures.

The select team headed by Hon. Abdu Katuntu, the Bugweri County Member of Parliament combed different MDAs and different regions for two weeks, assessing what was on the ground and picking valuable documents for scrutiny.

On July 19, the team presented its report to the Parliament, raising several queries on different expenditures the government incurred while responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The team as one of their recommendations directed the Auditor General to institute a forensic audit into all Covid-19 expenditures by the Ministry of Health to ascertain how more than Shs2.3 trillion it appropriated to the ministry was spent.

It had discovered several inconsistencies between the sum of money Parliament approved for the Covid-19 response and the amount spent by the Ministry of Health between 2019 and 2021.

While presenting the report, Mr Katuntu indicated that Parliament appropriated Shs22.1 billion during the Financial Year 2019/2020 to support the establishment of 20 isolation centres in each district



FINDINGS

Queries raised

While on field visits to various districts, the committee teams established that in most of the districts, not a single isolation centre ever existed.

The MPs report also showed a discrepancy in the purchase of masks where the Health ministry spent more money than what it was allocated.

The report says a total of 36.7 million masks at Shs2,400 per mask were procured and distributed to 135 districts and to all candidate classes. The total cost for 36.7 million fabric masks amounts to only Shs88b.

The report revealed that after the Parliamentary task force reviewed the Health ministry's accountability for March 2020 to June, a total of Shs90.9b was spent on procuring 37.9 million masks.

and undertake surveillance to slow down the disease transmission. The Health ministry spent more money than what it was allocated.

The report says a total of 36.7 million masks at Shs2,400 per mask were procured and distributed to 135 districts and to all candidate classes. The total cost for 36.7 million fabric masks amounts to only Shs88b.

The report revealed that after the Parliamentary task force reviewed the Health ministry's accountability for March 2020 to June, a total of Shs90.9b was spent on procuring 37.9 million masks.

The report said this does not conform to the figure submitted by the Minister of Health in her report dated July 7.

"The minister should explain the observed discrepancy arising from her report titled, 'Update to Parliamentary Taskforce Committee on Covid-19 in Uganda', dated July 7, and another titled, 'Accountability for the government of Uganda Covid-19 funding to MOH, dated March 2020 to June 2021,' the report reads in part.

While on field visits to various districts, the committee teams established that in most of the districts, not a single isolation centre ever existed.

The MPs report also showed a discrepancy

Variances in supplementary

While Parliament appropriated a total of Shs94.1 billion under the supplementary budget, the Ministry of Health submission to the task force indicated that by end of Financial Year 2019/2020, a total of Shs92.4b had been spent, leaving a balance of Shs1.5b unspent and reportedly sent back to Consolidated Fund.

The task force review of the detailed breakdown of the actual expenditure submitted revealed a total of Shs99b having been spent instead of Shs92.4 billion, raising further questions on possible corruption syndicate.

The task force noted that this figure is over and above the appropriated amount by Shs4.8b and the source of extra Shs4.8 remains unknown.

The Health ministry said the Shs99b was used as allowances and recruiting 546 staff on contract, procuring medical supplies, and installing Intensive Care Unit (ICU) equipment.

The ministry officials said other sums were used to procure 11 ambulances, paid accommodation, water, electricity, cleaning and sanitation, fuel, and procured ICT equipment.

External financing

The task force accused the Ministry of Health of multiple accountabilities after it established that most of the items funded by Shs389.1 billion, the ministry received from external funders were also funded by the government budget.

The committee report said the Ministry of Health reported a total of Shs389.1 billion was received from the external financing between March 2019 and June, including from the Global Fund, the World Bank's emergency response component, the Islamic Development Bank, and Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI).

However, the Health ministry said these funds were spent on coordination, risk communication, CT innovation, case management, mental health and psychosocial support, ambulances, motorcycles, PPEs, surveillance, and tests kits among others, which items the committee members said were funded by the national budget.

Whereas the Health ministry said they used some of the funds to procure

PPEs, the Parliamentary Taskforce on the National Covid-19 Response reported that the PPE that are primary guards against infections were grossly inadequate in most of the hospitals posing a high risk of exposure to infections of frontline health workers while on duty.

"When the committee reviewed external financing accountabilities submitted by the MOH, it was found that most of the items that were funded were similar in nature and purpose as those funded using government budget. It is not possible to establish whether there was no duplication therefore multiple accountabilities," the report reads.

Donations

The report also revealed that Shs29.6 billion was collected as cash donation out of which Shs23.9 billion was earmarked for the procurement of 282 pickup vehicles, Shs3.3 billion towards the construction of blood bank, Shs2.4 billion was spent on construction of border post health units at Vurra and Cyanika.

Discrepancy in Shs1.7 trillion resurgence plan

The Parliamentary task force also noted discrepancies in budget deficits for the Shs1.7 trillion for the Covid-19 resurgence plan.

The task force noted that the budget estimated to deliver the Covid-19 resurgence plan amounts to Shs1.7 trillion of which Shs445.9b is slated to procure vaccines while Shs808.4b was set aside for logistics.

The committee observed that whereas the Ministry of Health indicated they have a deficit of Shs1.3 trillion after Shs461.7b had been released, the Ministry of Finance noted a deficit of Shs996.6 billion less by Shs767.1 billion.

Shs1 trillion stimulus package

Parliament asked the government to submit full accountability backed by an authentic list of beneficiaries of the fund appropriated to re-capitalisation of Uganda Development Bank totaling Shs558.1 billion as a stimulus package.

Parliament also asked for the beneficiaries of Shs77.7b money for SACCO support allocated to Uganda Microfinance Support Centre, Emyooga (Shs260b), Youth Fund (Shs130b), and UWEP (Shs29.5 billion).

**SHS 94.188
BILLION
APPROVED BY
PARLIAMENT TO
FIGHT COVID-19**

ACCUSED

Accountability issues

The Parliamentary Taskforce on the National Covid-19 Response accused the Ministry of Health of multiple accountabilities after it established that most of the items funded by Shs389.1 billion, the ministry received from external funders were also funded by the government budget.

The committee report said the Ministry of Health reported a total of Shs389.1 billion was received from the external financing between March 2019 and June, including from the Global Fund, the World Bank's emergency response component, the Islamic Development Bank, and Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI).

However, the Health ministry said these funds were spent on coordination, risk communication, CT innovation, case management, mental health and psychosocial support, ambulances, motorcycles, PPEs, surveillance, and tests kits among others, which items the committee members said were funded by the national budget.



Health Minister, Dr Ruth Aceng, State Minister for Health in charge of General Duties Ms Hanifa Kawooya and other officials appear before the Parliamentary Covid-19 National taskforce. PHOTO/FILE

Parliament gets budget framework for 2022/23



State minister for Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Planning), Hon Henry Musasizi, PHOTO/COURTESY

The Parliament on Tuesday received the National Budget Framework Paper (NBFP) for Financial Year 2022/23.

The National Budget Framework Paper is the Government's overall strategy document for the budget, and provides the link between the Government's overall policies (identified in the National Development Plan) and the annual budget.

The law provides that the revenue and expenditure estimates for a given year, is prepared, approved, executed, and audited in a certain process and the presentation of the framework is one of the processes.

Section 9 (3) and (5) of the law requires the Minister of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to prepare a National Budget

Framework Paper and, upon approval by Cabinet, submit it to Parliament by 31st December.

Minister of State for Finance, Planning and Economic Development in charge of planning, Hon Henry Musasizi, presented the framework paper after which the Speaker of Parliament, Jacob Oulanyah, prior to adjourning the House sine die, directed the Committee of Finance to scrutinize the NBFP when Parliament returns from its Christmas recess in January 2022.

Trade deficits registered

The framework paper highlights Uganda's dwindling trade with East African partner states. Uganda traded at a deficit of US\$ 835 million with EAC Partner States in 2020/21 after registering export re-

ceipts worth US\$ 1,271 million and imports worth US\$ 2,107 million. Trade deficits were registered with Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda - at US\$ 1.09 billion, US\$ 230 million and US\$ 19 million, respectively. Imports from Tanzania increased to US\$ 1,214.3 million in 2020/21 from US\$ 458.3 million in 2019/20, thereby leading to a higher trade deficit with the nation.

In the budget framework, the government lists the short and long term activities with the objective of restoring economic activity to pre-pandemic levels and subsequently accelerating the pace of Socio-economic Transformation by boosting household incomes and eliminating poverty through the Parish Development model.

Workers cleared for mid-term access as Parliament passes NSSF Bill

Parliament passed the National Social Security Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which will among others provide midterm access to the contributors and remove restrictions on access for voluntary savings. *Daily Monitor's Franklin Draku* writes.

Parliament on November 24, 2021, passed the NSSF Amendment Bill, presenting workers in Uganda who are 45 years and above and have saved for a minimum of 10 years a chance to access up to 20 percent of their savings before retirement.

The passing of the bill followed back and forth engagements between the Parliament and other stakeholders. One of the issues raised was if NSSF would be able to pay the savers their 20 percent and its likely impact on the investments.

With several meetings between President Yoweri Museveni, workers' representatives, and other stakeholders, the bill finally streamlined the supervision of the Shs15 trillion fund between the ministries of Gender and Finance.

All the concerned parties reached a consensus that the Ministry of Gender supervises the social security aspect, while the Finance Ministry will be in charge of the finance and investment aspects.

This marked the first time in the history of NSSF that workers can access part of their savings before their retirement, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic that hit every sector of the economy with many losing their jobs.

After passing the bill, the Speaker of Parliament, Jacob Oulanyah said he was a relieved man.

"Today, I will breathe. I have been getting many phone calls from the workers of this country about this issue. Parliament has delivered on the bill and the workers can now have mid-term access of 20 percent of their savings," Mr Oulanyah said.

The run-up to the bill had pitted the NSSF board against the workers, with the fund management objecting to mid-term access, while the workers would not have any of the explanations being advanced.

The bill also provided for voluntary savings and made it mandatory for employers to remit NSSF savings for workers irrespective of the number of employees. The bill that was first passed by the 10th Parliament was returned to the House after President Museveni refused to assent to it and sent it back to the Parliament.

The Minister of Gender, Labour, and



Tororo District Woman Sarah Opendi (left), talks to State Defence Minister Jacob Oboth (right), after the passing of the NSSF Bill. PHOTO/COURTESY

Social Development, Ms Betty Amongi under whose docket the social security falls could not hide her excitement. She said she was glad that the bill was passed and Ugandans can now get midterm savings.

"It is an achievement for workers. Many workers have problems accessing money from the banks. The interest rates are too high but this is their money that they will access without interest and be able to sustain themselves within this short period. So for us, it is working in the interest of the workers," Ms Amongi said.

The Committee Chairperson, Ms Flavia Kabahenda, said with the passing of the bill, all the interested parties have a chance to work as a team.

She said the earlier fears by the different ministries over the management have been sorted.

"The Ministry of Finance is ably represented on the Board of Directors of NSSF and the entire retirement benefits sector. Placing social security under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance would compromise the effective running of the scheme," she said.

The Budadiri West MP, Hon. Nathan Nandala-Mafabi, however, said placing the fund under two different ministries without clearly defining their roles would be disastrous.

He tasked the House to streamline the roles of the two ministries in managing NSSF noting that for a long time, it has been a source of discontent.

"We need to put interpretations stating what each minister is supposed to



Mandate.
We need to put interpretations stating what each minister is supposed to do," Mr Nandala- Mafabi, Budadiri County West MP

do," he said.

For James Ombedra, who has been saving with NSSF for over 30 years, it is a dream come true. Ombedra lost his job with a national NGO operating in the humanitarian field.

"I am the happiest because I have received my Christmas gift. I lost my job last year and it has been tough. At my age, looking for jobs is hard, so the only chance is to access my savings and start an income-generating activity," he said.

The Amended NSSF Bill also offers up to 50 percent access to their savings for Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) at the age of 40.

Ms Laura Kanushu Opori, the national representative for PWDs, said this will enable them to improve their standards of living.

"As PWDs, we are the biggest winners in this bill though the 10th Parliament had proposed that we take 75 percent of our savings as midterm but the President in his wisdom said this was very high and therefore we would exhaust our savings. So we reconsidered his view and we requested for 50 percent," she said. She said at 40 years, it is very

difficult for a PWD to look for a job.

Mr Usher Wilson Owere, the Chairperson of the National Organisation of Trade Union (NOTU), one of those who have been at the forefront of championing the move for the amendment of the bill, said finally the dreams of the struggling workers had come true.

Mr David Stephen Mugole, the Kabweri County Member of Parliament, said the NSSF midterm access is great news, especially for members who are in the informal sector.



Speaker Oulanyah chaired the House which passed the bill at Third Reading. PHOTO/COURTESY

**20%
MID-TERM
ACCESS WAS
PASSED LAST
MONTH**



Ugandan Parliament passed the EACOP Bill on December 10. When assented to, the bill will fully implement the country's obligations, kick starting the commercialisation of Uganda's oil and gas resources. PHOTO/COURTESY

The full implementation of the oil pipeline project in Uganda has been boosted by the passing into law of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) [Special Provisions] Bill, 2021. **Jonathan Kamoga** writes.

Parliament on December 10, passed the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) Bill, 2021 into an Act of Parliament.

The bill is now awaiting President Museveni to assent to it thus bringing the country's oil dream closer to reality.

The bill will facilitate the implementation of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline project in Uganda, domesticating an existing treaty between Uganda and Tanzania before the EACOP Company can embark on the pipeline construction.

In August this year, the Tanzania Parliament passed the same law.

The 1,443km long pipeline running from Hoima in Uganda to Tanga Port in Tanzania is a key infrastructure project for Uganda's realisation of first oil and has four joint venture partners, including Total Energies (62 percent), Uganda (15 percent), Tanzania (15 percent), and China's CNOOC (8 percent).

Uganda's (UNOC) total financing requirement to EACOP is \$293 million and the government has advanced US\$130 million for the first cash call obligation.

The project is poised to cost about \$3.5 billion but still faces financing challenges.

When President Museveni assents to it, the bill will activate certain provisions of the Inter-governmental Agreement (IGA) signed between Uganda and Tanzania and the Host Government Agree-

Parliament passes bill to kick-start oil pipeline project



Energy minister Ruth Nankabirwa on the Floor of Parliament. PHOTO/COURTESY

ment (HGA) signed between Uganda & the East African Crude Oil Pipeline Company.

It will also fully implement the obligations of Uganda under the two agreements, kick-starting the commercialisation of Uganda's oil and gas resources and facilitating the upstream partners on the Final Investment Decision (FID).

After the FID, the two oil companies Total and CNOOC will invest between \$15 billion to \$20 billion in the country's oil sector for the next five years.

The bill, with 46 clauses that was passed by Parliament seeks to facilitate the execution of Uganda's obligations



Environment and Natural Resources Committee Chair, Dr Emmanuel Otaala makes a submission during the passing of the EACOP Bill, 2021 recently. PHOTO/COURTESY

under the Inter-governmental Agreement and the Host Government Agreement.

Members of Parliament made several amendments to the bill that touch on key areas like the Decommissioning Fund.

The legislators and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development were boxed into reaching a consensus by Deputy Speaker Anita Among in regard to among others, the recommendation by the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources charged with handling the bill that in Clause 36 of the bill, the Minister would annual-

ly report to Parliament on the status of the Decommissioning Fund.

The committee chairperson, Dr Emmanuel Otaala, said this was intended to support the oversight role of Parliament over the Fund which is essentially a public fund.

The MPs further amended the bill giving the National Oil Company the authority to construct infrastructure that is supportive to the functioning of the oil pipeline after consultations with the host state.

The Act which will have the force of law after the President assents to it, will provide for the tariff regime applicable to the project during the different phases of operation including the construction and operation period.

It will also empower government and the Uganda National Oil Company to pay the transportation tariff in kind, ensure that the project obtains required authorisations in a timely manner, as well as grant and protect land rights of the project including land acquisition.

Additionally, the law will define the local content regime applicable to the EACOP and ensure that Ugandan citizens and enterprises benefit from the project. It will also guarantee third party access to the pipeline and define the tariff to be paid.

Earlier, MPs had raised concern about the failure to compensate Ugandans affected by the construction of the US\$5 billion oil pipeline despite the project kicking off.

During debate of the bill, it emerged that the project affected persons are supposed to be compensated to the tune of Shs 45 billion, had not been paid.

OIL PIPELINE PROJECT

The EACOP is a 1,443km, 24-inch diameter heated and buried crude oil pipeline that will start from Kabaale, Hoima in Uganda to Chongoleani, Tanga in Tanzania.

The pipeline will have a manifold in Kabaale, Hoima, six pumping stations (two of which will be located in Uganda), 27 heating stations and two pressure reduction stations.

The development of this pipeline is being led by the licensed upstream oil companies in Uganda, with participating interests by the Governments of Uganda and Tanzania.

Energy minister Ruth Nankabirwa told the House on December 8, 2021, that whereas there have been some activities carried out in preparation for the project, no land has been acquired in Uganda.

Uganda expects to begin pumping crude oil in 2025 and the petro-dollars it will earn will also be used to help revive the economy hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic.

Government geologists estimated total crude reserves discovered in the Albertine rift basin at 6 billion barrels.

Inside the Opposition's legislative agenda

The Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Mr Mathias Mpuuga launched a 17-point legislative agenda focused and intended to eliminate wastage in public expenditure. *Daily Monitor's Franklin Draku* writes.

The Opposition in Parliament in August this year, launched a 17-point legislative agenda aimed at offering alternative policy directions.

Key on the agenda are proposals for constitutional amendment, deepening decentralisation, and health services sector review. Others include National Health Insurance coverage, education, and infrastructure.

While launching the legislative agenda, Leader of Opposition, Mr Mathias Mpuuga, said they will make a comprehensive review of all the laws and policies and introduce appropriate reforms.

"The party in power can afford the luxury of being general and relaxed but the opposition does not have that space, we must act contemplatively and purposively to deserve the confidence of Ugandans with their affairs by being the team that sounds assured and acting with imagination," he said.

"These talking points are not conclusive, they will need to be reshuffled, re-modeled, and re-thought for the opposition to speak the language that offers a desperate population, new meaning to leadership," he added.

Legislative agenda

While it remains to be seen whether the proposed reforms in different sectors will be acceptable to the majority ruling NRM party members, Mr Mpuuga said the opposition pursuits will not necessarily be based on scoreboard mentality since such approach may negate the constructive outcomes that would accrue from the legislative pursuits.

He said the focus will be placed on raising issues that would otherwise be neglected and stimulate debate within the public domain, which in turn would enable the citizens to have a say in the running of government and delivery of services.

Electoral reforms

The opposition hope to reignite the debate on the key electoral reforms that started way back in 2014. Mr Mpuuga said the Citizens Compact that informed the electoral reform demand will form the key tenets of what the opposition aspires to champion.

He said the private Member's Bill will be developed to include registration of Ugandans in the diaspora and prisons, competitive recruitment of leaders of constitutional bodies and fixing terms of office for commissioners in the Independent Electoral Commission.

Others include reduction of the size of parliament, reduction of special interest groups, restrictions of supplementary expenditures during election periods, the role of security organs in elections, relinquishing public assets during campaigns, media coverage of can-



The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Mathias Mpuuga (left), and Speaker of Parliament Mr Jacob Oulanyah (right), during the launch of the 17-point legislative agenda at parliament House in August 2021. PHOTO/COURTESY

didates and transmission of election results.

"The country lacks a clearly defined transitional procedure for both leadership and operations of government. For instance, there is no defined time frame for end-of-office holding. It is only presumed under actions such as swearing-in and approval of appointments," he said.

According to Mr Mpuuga, both the President and ministers have continued to occupy their positions during elections and use their positions to influence the Electoral Commission (EC) to their advantage, while opposition spaces are curtailed.

"Consequently, the Presidential Transition Bill that was presented by Dr Bayigga Michael Lulume in 2014 will be reviewed with the intent of broadening its scope. Subsequently, a holistic Bill that seeks to address transition management within the government will be developed to ensconce an incumbent and his/her agent from elections management and organisation," he said.

Another major electoral reform, according to Mr Mpuuga relates to key amendments to the Electoral Commission Act, with a view of empowering it to play its constitutional mandate during the transition process, and empowering it to have powers over an incumbent President.

He said to further guarantee the independence of EC, the opposition shall pursue amendments that will ensure public selection of its members through a process initiated by the Judicial Service Commission.

All pending constitutional reforms, according to Mr Mpuuga, that seek to perfect the constitutional framework, including those which have been pointed out by the courts will be proposed in a comprehensive Constitutional Amendment Bill.

Among these include proposals that seek to review special interest groups' representation, army representation in Parliament, procedure for presidential appointments, modalities for creation of constituencies and the mechanism of restricting the military to its primary roles and obligations.

National Health Universal coverage

The opposition legislative agenda

points accusing fingers at the government for failing to adequately finance the health sector, noting that reviews of the health sector indicate that the sector is plagued by the challenges of financing, infrastructure, staffing, and accountability.

The Leader of the Opposition said Parliament enacted the National Health Insurance Scheme Act, which provides that the funding of the scheme is supposed to be largely private and market-led, as opposed to State-led service provision, which he says in effect defeats the Act's intention of universalising health care coverage.

Education financing and access

On education reforms, in accordance with the NUP commitment to education for all, the party intends to propose a review of the Education Act to clarify the responsibility of government and parents or guardians in the education

sector beyond the abstract by providing for the specifics based on the realistic assessment of the conditions in the country.

Section 5 of the Education Act as amended in 2008 provides that government, through its relevant agencies, shall be responsible for among others, the provision of learning and instructional materials, structural development and teachers' welfare.

However, according to opposition, the government's commitment to instructional materials also referred to as capitation grant has been capped at a meager Shs10,000 for primary pupils and Shs40,000 for secondary Students and the responsibility towards structural development has been left to donor budget support and community initiatives.

The opposition said there is a need to review the law to introduce an annual percentage commitment towards instructional materials and structural development.

"The rationale for the aforesaid amendment will address the funding mechanism and overall management of education and training at lower levels. Similarly, there will be a review of the Higher Education Students Financing Act, 2014 to ease access to the loan, and introduce transparency and equity in the management and administration of the scheme. On the same note, there will be a revision of the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act

to promote graduate training and research, which are foundational to innovation and technology," the agenda reads in part.

Amendments to the Public Finance Management Act will also be considered to address gaps related to appropriation, raising of supplementary expenditures, debt financing, and scrutiny of classified expenditures, which it says is intended to link appropriation to expenditure and absorption to avoid wastage and abuse of public resources.

In the last Parliament, Kira Municipality MP, Mr Ssemujju Ibrahim Nganda presented a motion on the need to review provision of vehicles to public officials.

Corruption

The government over the years has continued to lose huge amounts of money to corruption, while the government has created oversight institutions such as the Auditor-General and the Inspectorate of Government to supplement the role played by other institutions like the Criminal Investigations Department of the police, the situation seems far from ending.

According to the legislative agenda, while the existence of these institutions shows a determination to fight corruption, the little progress that has been achieved, has been undermined by poor governance.

Measures will be taken to promote public oversight of public expenditure and in addition to the right to request the Auditor General for a special investigation, they will push through legislation to permit members of the public and civil society to carry out public audits where they suspect corruption and incompetence in service delivery.

Media freedoms and regulations to communications

The media freedom space in Uganda is shrinking day by day, with dissenting views curtailed and denied space by the powers-that-be. In 2013, the Uganda Parliament enacted the Uganda Communications Act to consolidate and harmonise the Uganda Communications Act and the Electronic Media Act; to dissolve the Uganda Communications Commission and the Broadcasting Council and reconstitute them as one body known as the Uganda Communications Commission; and to provide for related matters.

The opposition said the enacting of the Act was not informed by a comprehensive consultative and participatory process, which led to the establishment of an overbearing regulator working within the controlled interests of the political executive and market, contra-

ENVIRONMENT Agenda

The agenda reads that in pursuit of NUP's commitment to restore ownership of the environment and biodiversity to the people of Uganda, it shall be geared towards advocacy for the implementation of progressive natural resources laws and policies.



Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Mr Mathias Mpuuga (in red tie), with other members during the launch of the legislative agenda.

PHOTO/FILE