

The problem with Sovereignty Bill

Sovereignty of a nation has essentially two perspectives, external and internal. In substance, the adoption of the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in May 1987 was a surrender of our external sovereignty by the NRM government to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which descended on our internal sovereignty with their blueprint demanding privatisation and relinquishing of national control over our exploitable resources.

International borrowing, regulation and promotion of foreign direct investment (FDI), international grants and developmental assistance through local financial and credit institutions were tools employed to destroy the external aspect of our sovereignty. Domestically, financial facilities have been manipulated by the IMF and World Bank to stabilise and disorient our financial system through multinational companies which we furnish with endless tax holidays, concessions and subsidies while they milk the country dry and then migrate elsewhere.

We live in a world where trillions of dollars move electronically around the world without borders. Therefore, the proposal in the Sovereignty Bill that "international monetary trans-

actions be subject to the criteria and limitations specified by the Bill" is a mere mantra which cannot be effectively enforced because technically we have no sovereignty left to preserve. The Bill suggests that obtaining funds from Ugandans in the diaspora is tantamount to concluding a treaty with a foreign state, technically declaring 8 percent of our population stateless. All citizens should be afforded equal rights and access to resources such as land, labour and capital, with equitable distribution of social products. The proposed Bill would violate the constitutional right to access national resources by denying the people access to the fruits of our labour force toiling in the diaspora, which is now our biggest export and increasingly our largest foreign exchange earner ahead of tourism and coffee combined. The large-scale annual repatriation of funds north of \$3 billion by the 4 million Ugandans in the diaspora has boosted the local economy by increasing available capital and tax revenue, thereby strengthening the Uganda shilling. Foreign nationals have equally contributed to investment capital. The prohibitive measures proposed in the Bill will cripple business operations, forcing capital outflow that could weaken the shilling.

The Bill also does not anticipate that Uganda's ability to access foreign financial markets would be filled with pitfalls. It is likely that more developed member countries of the East African Community (EAC) will attract more foreign aid, accentuating inequality. This would lead to continued underdevelopment and migration of Ugandans to those countries.

There has been talk of Parliament grabbing the civic duty of citizens to elect their president without public consent by way of referendum. We have to challenge that political culture where politicians assume governance is too complex for the common man, holding consultations after decisions are made, which in itself is a violation of sovereignty.

A day in the life of a Ugandan is beginning to feel like everyone is on their own and the government is removed from reality. What then might be the remedy to a failing state where separation of power is replaced with separation of the state from the people?

Think about a government limited by guarantee; a community-based system of governance in which representatives are held to account for their participation in the design and delivery of change. Citizens would not be personally liable for government debts beyond their agreed guarantee, hence protecting individual sovereignty. Communities would manage common resources collaboratively, which is more fair and sustainable than top-down regulation or privatisation.

The solution to the challenges of sovereignty doesn't lie in political will, but in the will of the people. We must zero governance down to self-rule at a personal level, then to community level before advancing to national sovereignty.

We should concern ourselves with the quality of occupants of Parliament not only because it has become a breeding ground for bad ideas, but because those men and women are an existential threat to the dignity of the common man and the destiny

The prohibitive measures proposed in the Bill will cripple business operations.



Arafat Engena-Nekyon
Sovereignty Bill

actions be subject to the criteria and limitations specified by the Bill" is a mere mantra which cannot be effectively enforced because technically we have no sovereignty left to preserve.

The Bill suggests that obtaining funds from Ugandans in the diaspora is tantamount to concluding a treaty with a foreign state, technically declaring 8 percent of our population stateless. All citizens should be afforded equal rights and access to resources such as land, labour and capital, with equitable distribution of social products. The proposed Bill would violate the constitutional right to access national resources by denying the people access to the fruits

Arafat Engena-Nekyon is a Fellow of UPC School of Ideology.

The Editor welcomes 600-word comments on topical issues. Prof...