

Anita Among probe: Why many Ugandans are calling it a big joke

In June 2024, I wrote an article for this newspaper with the headline: 'Always laugh at people who think NRM can fight corruption.' President Museveni had delivered his State-of-the-Nation Address and reiterated his "commitment" to fighting corruption.

That was the same year when former Speaker Anita Among was grabbing headlines, as she is now, over corruption allegations. My article mentioned corruption in the army decades before Ms Among became a politician and asked a pertinent question: How can we have prison wards with hardly anyone convicted of high-level corruption, yet there is large-scale evidence of high-level corruption?

Two years later, Uganda is dealing with corruption allegations involving the same person. This time, the government has launched a probe into how she acquired her assets. But many Ugandans — at least those who know how governments genuinely committed to fighting corruption behave — are not impressed. They are calling it a big joke.

Many are even laughing, not least because the so-called crackdown on Ms Among has "politics" written all over it in red capital letters. Unless she is prosecuted and jailed, if found guilty, there is little to suggest that the government is seriously fighting corruption.

One of the reasons many Ugandans have dismissed the crackdown as a joke is that it does not appear to target corruption impartially.

Consider this: Ms Among was not working alone at Parliament. She is not the only official there who has faced corruption allegations. A dossier from intelligence organisations cited by this newspaper

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Musaazi Namiti
Brutally Frank



last week mentioned people linked to Ms Among who should, by now, be on forced leave as investigations continue. There is no evidence that this has happened or that it will happen.

Ms Among's deputy, Thomas Tayebwa, has been re-elected to a new five-year term and publicly apologised on behalf of Parliament, although he stopped short of using the word "corruption". Video clips of the apology are circulating on social media. People do not apologise when there is zero evidence of wrongdoing.

Mr Tayebwa did not resign when allegations of corruption were first levelled against Parliament. If he is keeping his job, how can the government convince sceptical Ugandans that the investigation is impartial?

Even if evidence is found that Ms Among has a case to answer, the government would still need to investigate everyone in and outside Parliament to reassure Ugandans that the anti-corruption campaign is serious and not selective.

Otherwise, as things stand, the government has armed Ms Among with a powerful

argument. If the government is truly against corruption, she can rightly ask, why is it targeting only her?

Another reason why the probe has been derisively dismissed is the manner in which it has been conducted. Those behind it had time to plan. They had time to discuss what works and what does not. And if they are indeed investigators, as the media describes them, they should understand the importance of searching suspected crime scenes simultaneously.

Instead, searches have been conducted sequentially, potentially giving those under investigation time to move, conceal, destroy or tamper with evidence. Many Ugandans are asking a simple question: why would anyone serious about uncovering wrongdoing conduct investigations in this manner?

The last reason is perhaps the most important. It is an open secret that Ms Among had become politically powerful — perhaps too powerful for some people eyeing Uganda's top job after Mr Museveni.

One of them is army chief, Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, who is widely seen as the force behind the crackdown.

His Patriotic League of Uganda, a nascent political outfit presented as a pressure group, endorsed the new Speaker of Parliament, Jacob Marksons Oboth-Oboth. Many Ugandans now suspect that even if Ms Among has a case to answer, the timing and intensity of the crackdown may also be about eliminating a political obstacle.

Mr Namiti is a journalist and former
Al Jazeera digital editor in charge of the
Africa desk
musaazihnamiti@gmail.com