Experts push for new law on forensics data

By Nelson Kiva

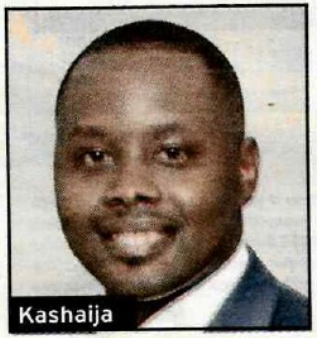
Cyber security and forensic experts have urged Parliament to fast-track the Forensic and Scientific Analytical Service Bill 2025, arguing that the current law does not match the fast-changing digital sector.

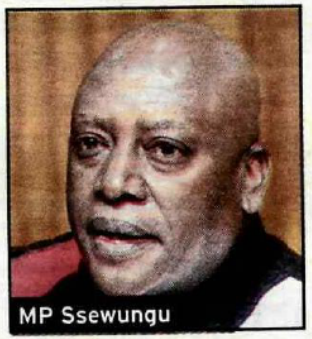
They said the law will strengthen the country's national security architecture and protect forensic data which is currently vulnerable.

"We cannot afford to operate a 21st-century justice system on 20th-century legislative foundations," Marvin Blessed Kashaija, the director of the Cyber Security and Forensics Association of Uganda (CSFAU), said.

Kashaija and other experts made the appeal while appearing before the Parliament's public accounts committee chaired by Mawogola South lawmaker Gorreth Namugga.


MP Namugga


Kashaija


MP Ssewungu

BETWEEN THE LINES

Forensic database aims at pointing out the actual people who were at the scene of crime during the occurrence, instead of the Police arresting 50 people over the same crime.

SAFEGUARDING FORENSICS

Also, present was a team from the Directorate of Government Analytical Laboratory (DGAL) on Wednesday.

The Bill aims at establishing a comprehensive legal framework governing forensic data, modernising investigations through DNA (Deoxyribonucleic acid), ballistics and toxicology databases.

The experts emphasised that the legislation goes beyond laboratory testing to safeguarding the integrity of forensic evidence.

They argue that it will improve investigative efficiency through a centralised database, which would enable investigators, especially the Police to identify actual suspects, instead of conducting sweeping arrests.

ANALYTICAL SERVICE BILL

"The Forensic and Scientific Analytical Service Bill 2025 is a critical shield. It ensures that every piece of evidence whether a DNA strand or a digital footprint is collected, stored and utilised under a gold-standard regulatory framework. My association is committed to ensuring that as we build these databases, they are fortified against cyber threats, making Uganda a continental leader in secure forensic science," Kashaija said.

The Bill also seeks to strengthen Uganda's forensic capacity, protect citizens' rights, and ensure scientific evidence is handled under clear legal standards.

The DGAL officials were appearing before PAC on issues raised by the Auditor General for financial year 2024/2025.

LEGAL USE

The commissioner in charge of criminalistics and laboratory services, Tarsisius Byamugisha, emphasised that the Bill will support the legal use of forensic data as evidence in investigations conducted at a national level.

He indicated that when the Police collect exhibits from a crime scene, many suspects are arrested, which often delays prosecution cases.

"With the database, instead of the Police arresting 50 people over the same crime, they can search the crime scene and give us the exhibits. We will test them and search through the database to point out the actual people who were at the scene. That is why we are pushing this Bill," Byamugisha told the committee.

MPS COMMENT

Kalungu West legislator Joseph Ssewungu said the law should be streamlined so that it guides the country on issues around safeguarding data and the law.

"All these are issues that must be addressed by the Bill, especially how evidence is produced, used and kept," Ssewungu said.

Mubende District Woman Hope Nakazibwe appealed to the officials to update the committee on the progress of generation of the national database.

"Parliament agreed that you prioritise database generation with financing of sh178.6b. Have you been receiving money for the same and what have you done in that regard?" Nakazibwe said.

In response, the chief chemist of DGAL, Kepher Kuchana Kateu, said: "We carried out this study across the Ugandan population from the east, west, south and central regions. We have generated the genetic profiles of our population which can be used in the future. Presently, we have been using databases generated by other people," Kateu said.