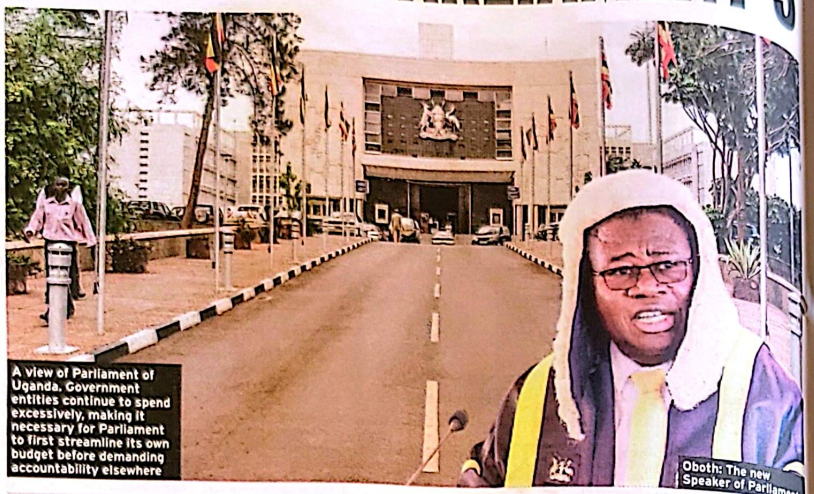
CAN OBOTH TAME PARLIAMENT'S

Parliament has for years faced criticism over spending on convoys, travel, donations, allowances and other administrative costs. The election of the new Speaker, Jacob Marksons Oboth, is now raising expectations that the 12th Parliament could finally rein in what many Ugandans see as a growing appetite for expenditure. But will Oboth tame Parliament's appetite for exorbitant spending? **Sarah Nabakooza** writes.



A view of Parliament of Uganda. Government entities continue to spend excessively, making it necessary for Parliament to first streamline its own budget before demanding accountability elsewhere

Oboth: The new Speaker of Parliament

In his maiden speech shortly after taking over the Speaker's chair on Monday at the Kololo Independence Grounds, Jacob Marksons Oboth signalled a tougher approach to accountability and budgeting, saying: "Budgeting and appropriation will no longer be an exercise in financial engineering and distortion, but a results-driven endeavour to deliver services to our people."

Oboth also warned that parliamentary oversight should no longer wait until public money has already been lost, promising stronger scrutiny over government expenditure and greater accountability within Parliament itself.

"Oversight should not be a post-mortem. We must not wait for public funds to be lost. Under my leadership, we will cultivate a culture of integrity and accountability," he said, pledging a corruption-free Parliament.

He added that Parliament must focus on legislation and budgeting that directly improves the lives of ordinary Ugandans.

"Every Bill, motion and decision must directly respond to the needs of the ordinary citizen. Results must guide our work," Oboth said.

With Oboth promising that Parliament must lead by example, attention is now turning to whether the 12th Parliament will translate those promises into actual spending reforms and tighter accountability within the institution.

Julius Mukunda, the executive director of the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG), urged the Speaker to focus on improving research capacity within Parliament rather than simply cutting the institution's budget.

Mukunda said Parliament would make better and more informed decisions if MPs and committees are supported with adequate research, especially when handling major financial and policy matters.

"I would not want to say cut the budget, but I think we should put more money in research, especially for MPs," Mukunda said, noting that stronger research support would help legislators make evidence-based decisions and improve Parliament's oversight role.

At the same time, Mukunda said there is room for Parliament to reduce what he described as unnecessary expenditure on travel, outreach activities and donations.

"But also, we have a little extravagance in terms of travel, outreach and donations," he added.

For his part, Paul Kyarimpa, a development and policy analyst, said a review of previous parliamentary budgets shows that expenditure under recent speakers increased significantly despite many of the budget items remaining largely unchanged.

He particularly criticised the growing allocations towards welfare, donations and social activities linked to the office of the Speaker.

"The major items that we need to cut are the social activities, including donations, which are the core budget lines for the speakership," he said.

A review of budget reports for the last five years indicates an increase in the recurrent budget for the offices of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker to sh32b, with the Speaker's office alone receiving sh13b.

The Speaker's travel budget has also swelled over the years from sh1b to sh6.6b. Kyarimpa said Parliament should establish clear and specific budget lines indicating which activities qualify for support and the exact amount allocated to them. He argued that loosely structured expenditure creates room for misuse of public resources.

"If you want to cut the budget, you do not cut the amount — you become very clear on which activities you are to spend on," he said.

Kyarimpa also criticised the creation of unplanned expenditures such as appreciation awards and donations that are not clearly provided for in the budget, saying vague allocations encourage unnecessary spending and weaken accountability mechanisms.

He further called for reforms in committee operations to reduce expenditure on sittings and allowances. He said Parliament should rely more on technical experts and research staff to analyse issues before they reach MPs, enabling committees to handle business faster and at lower cost.

"Parliament needs to utilise these experts to analyse most of these issues," he said.

LEGISLATORS WEIGH IN

So, what approach will new Speaker of Parliament Jacob Marksons Oboth take? This is the question put to MPs.

Karim Masaba (Mbale City Industrial Division, independent), who served on Parliament's budget committee during the 11th Parliament, said many government entities continue to spend excessively, making it necessary for Parliament to first streamline its own budget before demanding accountability elsewhere.

"As Parliament, I think it is high time that we set an example. We need to lead on this reduction in our budget," he said.

Masaba also questioned the amount of money Parliament spends on publicity and image promotion, arguing that legislators should build the institution's public image through their conduct and service rather than expensive campaigns.

"We have a lot of money that we are wasting in promoting Parliament and its image," he said, adding that large sums allocated to advertisements and community publicity activities could instead be reduced to ease pressure on the parliamentary budget.

Masaba also questioned why top officials are allocated additional vehicles and large convoys after already receiving facilitation to purchase official cars.

He said MPs should shoulder some operational costs, such as office supplies and equipment, instead of relying entirely on Parliament. Masaba added that reducing such expenditures would help restore public confidence and give Parliament the moral authority to demand similar cuts from ministries, departments and agencies.

Asinansi Nyakato (Hoima City Woman MP, People's Front for Freedom), who was backed by the opposition in the recent Deputy Speaker race, said Parliament has repeatedly passed budgets whose allocations do not fully reach implementing entities on the ground.

"Parliament has been passing budgets here, but the unfortunate part of it is that the figures we endorse as Parliament are not the ones that reach those different ministries and local governments," she said.

"Most of the time, what reaches them is less than what we passed," Nyakato added.

She argued that these inconsistencies have affected public service delivery in districts and local governments, despite Parliament approving funds intended to support government programmes.

Nyakato said the 12th Parliament should prioritise accountability in budgeting and ensure that approved funds reach their intended beneficiaries.

She also condemned what she described as exaggerated budget figures and alleged collusion among some officials involved in the budgeting process.

"That we condemn and we do not expect it to happen again in the 12th Parliament," Nyakato said.

Adrine Katusiime Mwebesa (Sheema District Woman MP, National Resistance Movement) said: "As a new MP, I believe the House must keep the ordinary Ugandan at the centre of every decision. We should cut wasteful spending, strengthen oversight and make sure public money goes where it is needed most."

APPETITE FOR SPENDING?



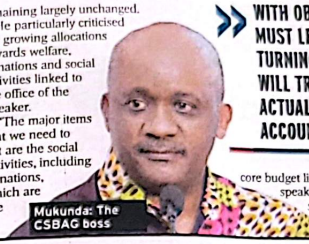
MP Masaba



MP Nyakato



MP Katusiime



Mukunda: The CSBAG boss

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MRS HONOURABLE

How Honourable lost out in new Oboth arrangement

Honourable will never forget the day police vans snaked into the parliamentary grounds, one by one, until they numbered about seven. Somehow, the innocent blue and white minibuses sparked an intimidating rumour that pierced Honourable's thick skin, sending him scampering for hiding places within Parliament.

The rumour had it that police had come for MPs who were on the list of former Speaker Anita Among's close associates, for questioning. Honourable was certain he was wanted because he had been ordered by police not to leave Kampala until cleared to do so. He called me from his hiding place, swearing that his end had come and almost directing me to where his will was.

His voice was trembling and made me so alarmed that I dropped everything and took a bodaboda, for the first time in a long while. When I arrived at Parliament, the vehicles were still there but there had been no arrests.

Apparently, the vehicles had only delivered investigators to search Triple A's office. But instead of appreciating my effort, Honourable accused me of exaggerating everything and threatened never to call me again if I was going to misunderstand him in that manner. How many times had he dealt with police before? Who were the police to frighten a man with the people's mandate? Men can certainly pretend to be strong.

Still, Honourable is not happy with the developments. He says he has no problem with the new Speaker, Oboth and, in fact, praised his boldness in being publicly polygamous. For that alone, Oboth is his hero. However, he laments the difficulty of accessing him. The problem is that MPs were so accustomed to a benevolent Triple A that they now expect Oboth to follow the same approach.

Those who were close to Triple A now crowd out others from penetrating his space. Honourable says it may take some time and effort to work his way closer. The problem is that almost everybody is attempting to do the same.



Already, Honourable is plotting how to become an active member of the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU). He says any politician worth the name must identify where power is gravitating — and it is heading towards PLU. Being in the National Resistance Movement, he said, is no longer as promising as being in PLU. It is no wonder the new Speaker thanked the party for endorsing him. Anyone who wants to shine must seek the attention and endorsement of PLU.

The new Speaker has promised a leadership of accountability, a scandal-free and zero-corruption House, but a few MPs take him seriously. For as long as the same conditions persist, pressure from above prevails and the need for strategic survival remains — no individual can remain untainted in the Speaker's chair. Let us wait and see.

Among's investigation has kept Honourable nearby and vulnerable. It has been my opportunity to speak with him at length and learn a few things. I have learnt that when you pretend not to be too clever, show understanding of the challenges men face and refrain from criticising, a man opens up easily. I have, for example, learnt that his relationship — which he insists is merely a friendship — with the woman from the US has hit some difficulties. He even refuses to answer her calls. I am yet to find out why. Honourable, however, remains tight-lipped about the number of children he now has.

During his swearing-in party in Kampala, I noticed that the known mothers of his children did not show up. I took every opportunity to scan the audience for familiar faces — known rivals, women from Honourable's campaign team and alleged partners. My greatest surprise was the young woman who used to head Honourable's campaign information technology unit. I may recall that he bought her a car and later took it back when she married another man — a dispute that spilled into public forums, leading many to believe Honourable's reputation damaged. She was the only one who attended the party, suggesting they had since settled their differences.

As the party progressed, I developed the feeling that I was present was perhaps implicated than those who show up. For instance, information technology unit whom Honourable's former girlfriend was. She is a lecturer at people told me he was with Honourable. I sensed something because when I about their relationship stopped appearing attended. She was present, cover did not show my suspicion