
The Land Bill is all about the 2011 election after

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LAND BILL: Beti Kamy

The Land Bill is all about 2011, in case you haven't worked it out. Buganda Caucus in Parliament says "yes, there are unlawful evictions that have caused suffering, but there are gaps and contradictions in the Bill....." hence the John Kawanga Committee, tasked to churn the bill and report to the caucus, who would then take a position on whether to support it or not.

Buganda government has rejected the bill on grounds that it is intended to "steal our land and create disharmony amongst the Kabaka's people".

The Acholi and Lango parliamentary caucuses have rejected it on grounds that in the absence of a comprehensive Land Policy, it is premature – but all are naïve and fall short of knowing President Museveni.

He is a thorough, deliberate, patient, long range planner - usually 10 years ahead of everyone else, calculates his moves with precision and gets what he wants – and there are many people like that, only Museveni is gifted with rare cunning.

Museveni knows every aspect of the proposed bill, he knows the answers to the questions being asked about it – who is evicting, who is evicted, where the evictions are taking place, which community lives where within Buganda.

He knows that the Bill will not provide security of tenure to anybody, least of all the tenants, unless they are facilitated, through the land fund to buy their own bibanja and get titles; he knows that the bill will create disharmony between currently harmonious landlords and bibanja owners – he has worked out that it is that disharmony that will secure his 2011 electoral victory and life presidency – the Robert Mugabe way.

When Museveni says "I will not allow my people to be evicted by landlords....." the emphasis on "My People" should not be lost on anyone. It is intended to pit bibanja holders against landlords and to position himself as the former's champion.

If the President intends to protect bibanja holders, why does he not just put enough money in the land fund, already created by the Constitution, and encourage "His People" to buy land, given that there are many willing sellers, especially the landlords, who have always encouraged bibanja holders to redeem their pieces of land (okwegula)? When I hear Museveni talk about protecting "My people" and the Ugandan elite falling for it, I want to cry.

Shs256b went for Chogm

According to social scientists, the human hierarchy of needs consists of, in order of ranking - food, clothing, shelter, medicine etc. For a person who cares about "his people", His Excellency was quick to find and spend, in three months, Shs256b to host Chogm immediately after which he announced his urgent need of a new, top-of-the-range private jet which will cost "his people" Shs80b, when his people are dying of disease, in empty hospitals. "His people" in Teso have not seen a shilling of the Shs20b that government promised them as relief for the floods' devastation, nearly one year ago.

“His people” numbering about 24m (80 per cent of Uganda’s population), all employed in the agriculture sector get a budget allocation of 3 per cent per year, equivalent to the budget of State House and President’s Office which employ about 1,000 people. It is the starving of the agricultural sector that has kept “His people” in perpetual poverty, not landlessness!

For a person who cares about “His People”, Bonna bagaggawale programme, which requires only about Shs400b is sure taking its time, yet Chogm money was easily found and the new-jet funds will not be a problem. The bill is highly contentious, intended to be divisive for purposes of winning the 2011 elections for Mr Museveni, without achieving the objective of enhancing security of tenure of bibanja holders.

MPs from Buganda must not fall in the trap of “people are suffering through evictions.....” There are only two ways of evicting people – the lawful and unlawful – and there are enough laws to deal with unlawful evictions - laws on trespass, assault, malicious damage to property, loss of income, causing distress, disrepute and disaffection.

If Museveni cares about “His people”, he should increase the budget of agriculture to a minimum of 10 per cent as stipulated by the Maputo Protocol, of which Uganda is a signatory and increase the health budget to a level adequate to equip hospitals with the basics.

He should work on corruption, reduce public expenditure by reducing the number of ministers, MPs, RDCs, Presidential Advisors, State House employees and merge districts into more viable units.

He should put on hold buying a private jet. He will then have enough funds to set up a sustainable land fund from which people can borrow money to buy land, without causing a breakdown of the social order that villagers have enjoyed for decades.

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