ISSUE BRIEF
AN OVERVIEW OF THE AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE OF THE
PARLIAMENT OF UGANDA ITS ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS

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1.0 Membership to the Committee on Agriculture

The committee is composed of 25 members with two members from the opposition, one independent and the rest from the ruling National Resistance Movement party. It has a chairman and vice chair person who administer the committee. It is also supported by technical staff under the office of the Clerk to parliament who includes: a Clerk, a Researcher, a Legal Counsel and Budget Officer.

2.0 The Role of The Committee

The role of the committee is derived from the role of Parliament enshrined in Article 79 of the 1995 Constitution of the republic of Uganda which empowers parliament to make laws on any matter for the peace, order, development and good governance of Uganda. It is from this article that Parliament plays its three functions i.e. legislative, representative and oversight. Through these functions, parliament influences policy, programs and legislation which have a direct bearing on the Economic development of the country. Therefore the functions of the committee are directly derived from those of Parliament.

2.1 Legislation

It is the duty of Parliament to ensure that appropriate laws to regulate and support the growth of the agricultural sector are passed expeditiously. The Parliament of Uganda receives bills mainly from the executive arm of government but sometimes from members of parliament normally referred to as private members bills. These bills are read in parliament and afterwards the speaker refers the bills to the technical committee for scrutiny in order to present a report to parliament within a given time. The bills from the agricultural sector and other areas of science and technology are always committed to the agriculture committee or the committee together with another relevant committee. For instance the proposed Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill was scrutinized by both the committee on science and technology and that of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries though Members of Parliament requested for its deferring pending consultations with their constituents. Several bills were scrutinized recently like the plant Variety Protection Bill 2010 and a report was presented by the committee to the plenary which resulted into the passing of this bill into law. Currently the committee is scrutinizing the

1 Personal Communication From Clerk to the Committee on Agriculture 27th February, 2014
plant Health Protection Bill, 2010. When these bills are passed then they result into the formulation of regulations by the relevant ministries and agencies to operationalize this law.

2.2 Appropriation

Parliament must also ensure that the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries and the agencies there in are granted enough resources in order for them to carry out their mandate efficiently. This is done through the scrutiny of policy statements of the ministry, formulation of questions and invitation of responsible officers to answer queries if any. When the committee is satisfied a report is prepared with the assistance of the technical staff. The members scrutinize the report and make necessary corrections after which they append signatures to the report which is then presented by the Chairman to the plenary. The report recommends to the ministry the necessary adjustment in the management of the ministry and its agencies to increase efficiency. It also recommends to the house the necessary resources that should be appropriated to the Ministry and its agencies which are then included in the appropriations bill of that financial year and then passed by the plenary together with those of other ministries.

2.3 Oversight

Parliament has got the mandate to supervise the ministries and agencies involved in agriculture and the other arms of the executive. In a bid to execute the oversight mandate the committee carries out a number of activities:

- Oversight visits to make on spot assessment of government programmes and projects and assess their success by interacting with the implementers’ and beneficiaries and also establish whether there was value for money.
- Public hearings on any issues of public concerns in its jurisdiction
- Summons witnesses to appear before it and give evidence on any issue under investigation.
- Commission an independent study by our research department to scrutinize government programmes and projects in a more scientific way.
2.4 Representation

Parliament as a body that represents the voices of the population must ensure that the concerns of the people about any issue are listened to by the various stakeholders and that consensus favorable to all of us is achieved. The committee on agriculture encourages its members to seek opinions of their constituents.

2.5 Effectiveness of the Committee

The methods used to carry our functions are quite reliable and efficient. The only set back is that some bills are delayed at the plenary stage. For instance the bill on Biotechnology and biosafety was shot down from the plenary recently and it was deferred by the speaker pending consultations between Members of Parliament and constituents.

References:
