

By Mikaili Sseppuya\*

In a widely leaked forensic report about National Social Security Fund (NSSF), the Inspector General of Government (IGG) revealed that suspended Managing Director David Chandi Jamwa charged personal expenditures for Shs72.9 million (US\$37,392) to the Fund.

Of that money, at least Shs15.9 million (US\$8,271) was spent in Casinos in Las Vegas; Shs16.3 million (US\$8,488) was spent on clothing and Shs471,625 (US\$244) was spent in a gun shop, among other places.

The report went on to say that by January 2008, Jamwa received salary advances for over Shs244 million (US\$127,083) plus gratuities, all totalling Shs330.5 million (US\$172,172), even though he was not supposed to receive such advances because he was not a contributor to the Fund.

If that money was to be paid during the remaining part of his contract (valid until January 2010) at his basic salary rate of Shs18 million per month, he would have had to make payments of Shs8 million per month to the Fund, instead of it paying him.

The NSSF, worth over four trillion Uganda shillings, has seen scandal after scandal in the last decade, as its top managers misuse it for purposes that do not seem to be in the interest of the workers.

Last year, an IGG report to the President said that members were discouraged to continue remitting their money because of the rampant mismanagement of the Fund.

The report itself was triggered by a previous scandal that involved an attempt to purchase several hundred acres in Temangalo. The land belonged to Security Minister Amama Mbabazi and some friends, who allegedly inflated the prices.

The Cabinet exonerated Amama Mbabazi of any wrongdoing; however, the process ended in the investigations that revealed the foregoing scandals instead.

A long way to go

Though President Yoweri Museveni has on several occasions declared “war” on corruption, it seems there is still a very long way to go before the fight is won.

“The war now is on corruption,” he said at a time when the country had been rated the third highest in corruption by an international body.

The national integrity survey by the IGG in 2008 said the police and the judiciary were the most corrupt public institutions, and that the public glorified corruption.

“More than eight out of 10 people named the police force as the most corrupt, followed by the Judiciary (79 percent), URA (77 percent), district service commissions (74 percent), Umeme (73 percent) and Public Pension Service (71 percent),” the report said.

“Members of society known to have acquired their wealth through corrupt means are regarded as heroes,” said the report. “On the other hand, those with little wealth but with integrity are regarded as failures.”

“This is the highest form of societal betrayal regarding building moral character, natural value and a just society,” the IGG said.

The report was based on public surveys and said that most people were losing confidence in the bodies commissioned to fight corruption and nepotism, in large part because of perceived impunity.

### A pervasive grid of bribes

Bribery and corruption practices are highly pervasive and extend to the very top of many organisations. An example of this pervasiveness is the case of Umeme, the national power distributor. Almost everyone in the country has paid bribes to get connected to the national grid.

In November 2008, the author was forced to pay Shs50,000 to a company official because the electrician who wired the house said that without the bribe, Umeme personnel would say “it was poorly wired” and the expensive application process would have to be redone from scratch.

Because there is a shortage of electrical technicians and it takes so long for the Umeme personnel to connect people to the grid, there is practically no alternative. Everest Kayondo, a tour operator, says he paid Shs5,000 to

Umeme officials to fix his meter, which seemed to be counting the units too fast, forcing him to pay too much.

“I know they are waiting for me to pay a personal tip Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) to one of them to do the work. Otherwise, why take so long over such a simple thing?” he said.

The General Salim Saleh Committee investigating Umeme is also investigating reports that the meters are calibrated to trip at higher speeds than the industrial benchmarks, measuring more energy consumed than was actually used. So far, nothing has happened.

Umeme recently announced it plans to give up wiring inspections to private operators because the consumer backlash experienced gives the company a bad name.

### Corruption in the Fourth Estate and beyond

In my own experience as a journalist I have come across cases where those who do not give some sort of kickback to their superiors are deprived of assignments that have a travel element, even when the story falls within their beat.

It is impossible to report such cases because the system emphasizes reporting to a superior who directly benefits from these practices and who would call the reporter “uncooperative” — an euphemism for refusing to take part in a corrupt practice.

Bodies that provide public service, including revenue collectors, are notorious for holding their clients at ransom.

The Anti-Corruption Court, set up in May 2008, convicted four minor officials who had been involved in the Global Fund scandal, where millions of dollars meant to help AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria victims were misused. Ethics and Integrity Minister Dr. Nsaba Buturo said this was a measure of the government to get rid of corruption.

But the Global Fund scandal took place in 2007, so it's evident how slowly the wheels of justice grind in Uganda. Many people will remain skeptical until ministers who are allegedly involved in corruption schemes appear in court. Otherwise, it will be very difficult to have any reason to believe that the political will to fight corruption applies equally to all people.

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