

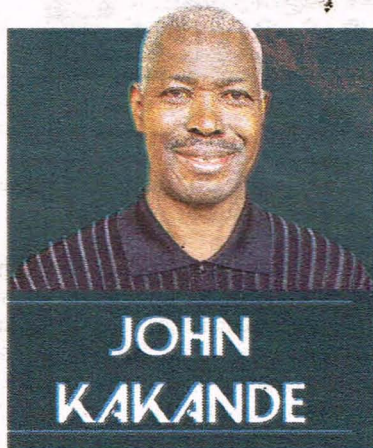
How will the Sovereignty Bill impact journalism?

A month ago, I wrote about the Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2026. The Bill had not been published in the Gazette and I had not seen and read through the Bill. I relied largely on the media reports.

A lot of water has since flowed below the bridge. The Bill is now under consideration in Parliament whose term is due to expire within two weeks. I know Parliament may decide to dispose of the Sovereignty Bill in haste before its term runs out, but it will be a big mistake to rush such a sensitive and controversial Bill.

In my earlier discourse, I expressed fears that the proposed legislation would restrict or control the flow of foreign funding to the civil society organisations and the political opposition. I was worried the legislation has a high potential for abuse.

I have now seen a copy of the Bill under consideration and, as a journalist, I am even more unsettled. It is not surprising that many professional organisations and



universities have voiced legitimate concerns. Nonetheless, there is no sign the Government intends to change course.

For me, as a journalist, selfishly I am bothered by the proposed legislation because it appears it might impact the journalism profession in many respects.

In my long journalism career spanning decades, I have travelled widely outside the country. Virtually all my foreign trips, except two or

three, were sponsored by foreign governments or organisations. My training in 1991 in Cardiff, Wales was fully funded by the Commonwealth. My first foreign trip was in 1988 to the headquarters of the European Union, sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (foundation) of Germany. The trip was solicited by the late James Namakajjo, then the President of Uganda Journalists Association (UJA) for Ugandan journalists to acquaint themselves with the workings of the European Union

I know for a fact that many Ugandan journalists have received foreign funding to train or to carry out projects. The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung was for years the leading donor to journalists to undertake training in Uganda and abroad. I was also a beneficiary of the KAF's generosity. I know many NRM leaders and trade unionists were equally beneficiaries of the FES' funding. KAF was for a longtime a key donor for the Foundation for African Development (FAD), an organisation that was closely linked to the Democratic Party.

Both the FES and the KAF are political foundations aligned to the major political parties in Germany. FES is a left-leaning foundation, the reason it supported Uganda People's Congress in the 1960s and National Resistance Movement lately. KAF is a right-wing foundation, which in Uganda, associated closely with the DP, though it also sponsored numerous media-related activities. The organisation was named in honour of Konrad Hermann Joseph Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany after the Second World War. Being political foundations, it is no secret that they seek to impact politics wherever they operate. I will not speculate about their fate if the Sovereignty Bill becomes law.

I know for a fact many mainstream media houses in this country have published numerous investigative stories generated with foreign funding or in collaboration with journalists in other countries. I know for a fact that there are radio stations in Uganda that were started with foreign

funding. There were not-for-profit radio stations fully funded by outside donors. I know the law does not apply retrospectively. However, for argument's sake, would I, under this proposed legislation, be considered an "agent of a foreigner" on account of being a beneficiary of foreign sponsorship? Would the journalists be categorised as "agent of a foreigner" on account of receiving foreign funding? Many Ugandan media houses subscribe to foreign news agencies, such as the Reuters and the AFP for news content. Some of the content, it can be argued, could overtly or covertly promote foreign interests or disadvantage Uganda's economic interests. Would publishing or broadcasting such content amount to "economic sabotage"? Would a journalist or media house that publishes such content risk facing criminal charges and jail term under the Protection of Sovereignty law? Where does all this leave journalism in Uganda?

The writer is a veteran journalist