

# MPs defend Shs 1bn iPad deal

News

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Five carefully chosen lawmakers offered strong arguments for government's decision to buy MPs iPads at a cost of Shs 1bn. However, the MPs, appeared on the BBC's World Have Your Say programme, struggled to convince students at Makerere University why taxpayers should spend money on the MPs' ipads.

The MPs were part of the BBC's week long science festival at Makerere University last week and included Abdu Katuntu (Bugweri), Joseph Ssewungu (Kalungu West), Monicah Amoding (National Youth), Cecilia Ogwal (Dokolo woman) and Chris Baryomunsi (Kikinzi East) as participants. The MPs had been invited to speak about how politicians are coping with science innovations among other things.

"We are spending too much on stationery," said Katuntu.

"Agreed: But why don't you purchase these iPads yourselves?" Christine Nafuna, a student shouted from the back.

The students argued that the lawmakers can afford the iPads.

"These MPs are paid enough to be able to save and buy the iPads if they want to keep abreast with technology," said Joel Ogwang, an MA candidate.

Katuntu said iPads would help reduce on government expenditure on stationery—and that is why it is footing the bill. This justification of cost-cutting had also been highlighted by Parliament's Public Relations Officer Helen Kawesa, who explained that the house was spending over Shs 1bn in stationery for the MPs in currently in the 2012/2013 financial year.

"On realizing this, the [Parliamentary] commission made a decision to replace the bulky and expensive paper with iPads," Kawesa recently wrote—defending the controversial iPad deal.

Baryomunsi, a Parliamentary Commissioner, told BBC that indeed the focus of Parliament is on "...making Parliament paperless."

With the purchase of iPads, it is estimated that about Shs 16bn will be saved in five years as a result of cutting costs on computer supplies, printing, stationery,photocopying, binding, and courier among others. However, students criticized government's decision to purchase the items.

But the debate got more interesting when participants wondered whether MPs know how to use the iPads. At the beginning of the 9th Parliament in 2011, Maria Kiwanuka sent the ministry of Finance policy statement via parliamentary e-mails to all lawmakers and this caused quite a stir in the House. The MPs insisted on having hard copies of the statement.

When Kiwanuka insisted that the statement was earlier sent on their e-mails, the lawmakers ran amok—and debate was suspended until the hard copies were availed. However, Amoding and Ogwal told BBC listeners that there is hope MPs will learn how to use iPads.

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