

No money for January LC elections

Shortfall. According to EC, of the Shs37.4b required to conduct LC1 and LC2 polls, government provided only Shs7b in the current financial year's Budget, creating a deficit of sh30.4b.

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KAMPALA. Next month's Local Council elections hang in the balance after ministry of Finance officials announced that there is no money for the activity in the 2016/17 Budget.

Although some candidates had started complaining even before the Electoral Commission released the electoral roadmap, Secretary to the Treasury Keith Muhakanizi told Daily Monitor yesterday that the government does not have Shs37.4b EC requested for the polls.

"Ask Finance minister Matia Kasaija where they will get the funds for this exercise because ministry of Finance does not have this money in the Budget," said Mr Muhakanizi. He did not, however, explain whether EC will be given a supplementary budget to hold the polls.

The Budget director, Mr Kenneth Kabagambe, said ministry of Finance in August wrote a letter to EC and other relevant government agencies explaining the lack of money before he requested that Mr Muhakanizi explains the way forward.

On August 8, Mr Muhakanizi wrote to EC informing them that there are no funds in the 2016/2017 financial year to cater for the Local Council 1 and 2 elections. The same letter was read before the Parliament's Public Service and Local Government Committee members who insisted that government finds money to hold the delayed polls.

"I wish to reiterate that the Budget for 2016/2017 is constrained and we are not in position to provide additional resources required. You are advised to rationalise this expenditure within the resources appropriated under your vote's budget for 2016/2017," Mr Muhakanizi wrote in a letter addressed to EC secretary, Mr Sam Rwakoojo.

Although Mr Rwakoojo was not available to comment on the lack of funds, EC deputy spokesperson, Mr Paul Bukenya, said without the funds,

their hands are tied and that they will only come up with the roadmap and guidelines for LC polls when adequate funding is available.

Mr Bukenya said although EC submitted the budget to government for consideration and it is yet to be approved for the exercise to start in January due to failure to agree on a common position. This means the anticipated polls are likely to delay again.

"Government wants this money revised downwards, which requires several amendments in the law governing these elections" Mr Bukenya said. "Now that the amendments have not been done, funds have not been approved. We can't have the programme and guidelines to carry out the elections without the funds."

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State minister for Housing Chris Baryomunsi, while speaking at the Lands, Housing and Urban Development Joint Sector Review workshop last month, said government had an-

nounced January 2017 as the time elections for holding LC 1 and 2 elections. He also announced that they had resolved that people line behind the candidates as a way of reducing the costs.

"We are waiting for Cabinet to give us their stand on the funds requested for and as soon as this is done, we shall then release a programme and guidelines for the exercise, but for now, there is no exercise until funds are availed to us,"

PAUL BUKENYA, EC DEPUTY SPOKESPERSON

Uganda has not conducted elections for LC1 (village) and LC2 (parish) for the last 15 years, the last one having been held in 2001 before the country shifted from the one-party Movement system to the multiparty system of governance.

But the FDC secretary general, Mr Nathan Nandala Mafabi, said Finance ministry should find money for the LC elections because what they are doing in the villages is illegal now.

"These people are signing documents for land purchase and house

purchases and once in future one is dragged to court over the same, it will bear high costs than what we are thinking about spending today. Government has not held LC1 and LC2 election for over 15 years and it is unfortunate that they are claiming there is no money," said Mr Mafabi.

The ruling party NRM secretary general, Ms Justine Lumumba, said government will find money to hold the LC1 and LC2 elections next year because the lower councils are important in the day-to-day administration of the people.

The Democratic Party leader Nobert Mao said the current LCs are invalid and cannot preside over any case or even pass a legally binding document.

Mr Yusuf Mutembuli, a lawyer, said: "Article 181(4) of the Constitution says all local government councils shall be elected every five years, we have not held elections for close to 15 years."

He added: "There has been a leadership vacuum due to the absence of effective LCs and the people have been disempowered, there is a lot of lawlessness in the villages. I think it is time government to looked for money to avoid litigation in future." Uganda has 7431 parishes and 57,842 villages in 1,403 sub-counties in the 112 districts.