

Obituary

Karangwa: A man loved, loathed in equal measure

Despite critics on social media openly celebrating his death over his alleged involvement in land disputes, speakers at his burial described him as a humble man who was compassionate and a dedicated supporter of the ruling NRM party.

BY FRED MUZAALÉ

Hundreds of mourners on May 21 gathered at Moses Karangwa's ancestral home in Budaali Village, Bbaale Sub-county, Kayunga District to bury him.

The mourners, who included peasants, senior government officials and members of Opposition parties, braved the afternoon heat to bid farewell to a man who seemed both loved and hated in equal measure.

Despite critics on social media openly celebrating his death over his alleged involvement in land disputes, speakers at his burial described him as a humble man, who was compassionate and dedicated to the ruling NRM party.

His daughter, Ms Jacklyn Birungi, the former Buvuma Resident District Commissioner, said in an emotional speech at his funeral that she was surprised by the people celebrating his death despite the fact that he had helped many people in times of need.

"Despite all that the people are alleging about my father, I know that all his deeds will enable him to go to heaven. As a family, we have, however, forgiven all those who are celebrating the death of a man who was friendly and never held grudges against anyone," Ms Birungi said.

Mr Richard Todwong, the NRM secretary general, said: "The man we are laying to rest today has been showing love to all the people, not only in Kayunga, but even outside the district."

His generosity has seen many people who were in dire need of financial assistance receive it."

Mr Todwong, who said Karangwa was a personal friend, added: "In Karangwa, the people of Kayunga had gold, which some didn't know."

Rev Fr Emmanuel Walakira, the parish priest of Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church in Kayunga, said Karangwa was always ready to support church development projects and loved his Catholic faith.

He also took a swipe at critics of the deceased, saying that the late Karangwa, like any other human being, was bound to make mistakes.

Similarly during the requiem Mass at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church, Mr Amos Lugolobi, the Ntenjeru North MP, said: "He (Karangwa) was not an angel. Whoever has never made a mistake should be the only one to throw stones at him."



Mr Moses Karangwa addresses NRM supporters in Kayunga District in 2023. PHOTO/FILE



The casket containing the body of Moses Karangwa is lowered into the grave during burial in Budaali Village, Bbaale Sub-county, Kayunga District on May 21. PHOTO/FRED MUZAALÉ

Background

The late Karangwa was born in 1970. He is the second last born of nine children. His parents were cattle keepers.

His father, who was only identified as Ssenushumba, died when he was still in Primary Five.

The demise of his father left the family under the sole care of their mother, Maria Nyiramutanga, whose income was not enough to educate all her children.

During the Bush War in the early 1980s in Luweero District, the family was forced to seek refuge in Kayunga (then still part of Mukono District).

At 15, Karangwa engaged in odd jobs to earn a living to fend for his ageing mother and siblings.

His younger brother, Mr Augustine Tumwine, said Karangwa vendored milk in cans on an old bicycle in Kayunga Town.

"Every morning buses from Bbaale Sub-county brought milk, which he bought and vendored on a bicycle," Mr Tumwine said.

Karangwa later settled in the Kasawo area, but later moved to Kayunga Town after realising there was a large market

for his milk.

Years later, Karangwa, using savings from his milk business, opened a retail shop in Kayunga Town. Luckily, the shop prospered, prompting the deceased to expand to Jinja City.

While in Jinja, he ventured into other businesses, including cattle keeping. Karangwa slowly became a prosperous businessman and built a magnificent home.

Karangwa made many friends, among them powerful personalities in business and political circles.

As he carried on the management of a string of businesses, he furthered his education until he completed secondary education.

Although he resided in Jinja City, Karangwa's heart remained in Kayunga District, where he had wielded a lot of political influence.

Generosity

In the early 2000s, Karangwa joined politics, subscribing to the ruling NRM party.

Until his death, Mr Karangwa served as the Kayunga District NRM chairperson,

CHURCH PROJECT

At the time of his death, Karangwa was constructing a church in his ancestral village of Budaali, where he was also buried. The church was yet to be roofed, but his family and friends have pledged to contribute towards its completion to fulfil his wish.

Among those who pledged support were Gen Salim Saleh, the chief coordinator of Operation Wealth Creation, who committed to donate Shs40 million, and outgoing State Minister for Youth and Children Affairs Balaam Barugahara Ateenyi, who pledged Shs5 million.

a position he held for 15 years.

During his tenure, he facilitated mobilisation activities for NRM leaders and provided free office space for the party in one of his commercial buildings in the town centre.

"Among the NRM cadres we have, Karangwa was an exceptional one. He has been a loyal cadre.... He used to finance party activities using his personal money. Whenever there was a party activity to undertake, Karangwa never asked for any facilitation as some party leaders do," Mr Todwong said.

Mr Mutwalibu Kizza, the Kayunga District NRM publicity secretary, said: "Whenever he invited NRM leaders and supporters to a meeting, he would facilitate all of them. Karangwa's generosity extended beyond his party supporters but to everyone who went to him seeking financial assistance."

Close associates said it had become a habit for people to go to him, asking for money whenever they met him.

Nearly all politicians in the district sought his support, including those from the Opposition.

"Karangwa was an influencer. His word to the people in key public offices was fi-

nal, and whoever showed disrespect or ignored his wishes would often suffer the consequences," Mr Sam Lubulwa, an opinion leader, said.

One of Karangwa's confidants, who preferred anonymity, said: "There are several Cabinet ministers, RDCs and civil servants who used to come and wait for him for hours at his office. They usually wanted him to help them with several things, and surprisingly, after meeting him, he would give them money."

Karangwa often criticised the NRM for delaying the tarmacking of the Bbaale-Kayunga Road. The project eventually began and is currently ongoing.

Cabinet dreams

Six months before his death, Karangwa was appointed senior presidential advisor for special duties.

He reportedly told close associates that he wanted to use the new position to transform the lives of not only the people of Kayunga, but also in other parts of the country.

He also reportedly vowed to use his new position to fight corruption in Kayunga District and lobby for developments.

Karangwa had also furthered his education in a bid to meet the academic qualifications required for appointment to President Yoweri Museveni's Cabinet.

He graduated last month with a Diploma in Social Work and Social Administration from Kampala University and was in his second year pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration.

"Now that I have a diploma, the President should appoint me minister in his new Cabinet," Karangwa told this reporter after his graduation.

He also hoped his daughter, Ms Birungi, would be elected Kayunga District Woman Member of Parliament.

He twice supported her bid for the seat, but she was unsuccessful.

In the most recent election, which was won by Harriet Nakwedde of the National Unity Platform (NUP), Karangwa reportedly urged his daughter to challenge the result in court, alleging the election was marred by irregularities, and had vowed to see Nakwedde removed from Parliament.

Land disputes

Karangwa was on many occasions accused of grabbing land.

Mr Tonny Ndyabera, a resident of Kirnamawanga Village in Bbaale Sub-county in Kayunga District, alleged that in 2013 the late Karangwa paid him "peanuts" for his land.

Mr Ndyabera said despite negotiations with the late Karangwa on how much he wanted for his 20-acre piece of land, Karangwa allegedly paid him half the price and ordered him to vacate the land.

Ndyabera is among hundreds of tenants who in 2013 complained about Karangwa allegedly grabbing their land, which prompted President Museveni to intervene.

The President, through his investigation, came to the conclusion that Karangwa had legally procured the land in question.

Karangwa was also accused of grabbing land in Mubende and Kamuli districts, but none of the claims was verified by this publication.

Ironically, although many people accused Karangwa of being a land grabber, he reportedly saved many land tenants from being illegally evicted from their land.

Karangwa is survived by several children and his widow, Ms Florence Kirabo. The couple had lived together for nearly 30 years before officially wedding four years ago at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church in Kayunga Town.