

What next after govt betrayal, Busoga's silent rejection of NRM?

I physically campaigned door-to-door in 76 out of the 86 villages in Jinja North, and in every single home I campaigned in, there was bottled anger against the sub-region's leadership and NRM. The sub-region's leaders seem to only care about their convenience and are not articulating people's problems.

ISAAC IMAKA

Growing up in Namulesa (Busoga Sub-region) in the 90s, the community abhorred three things: A child not going to school, a child having dreadlocks, and child idling in the village squalor—the so-called ghettos—smoking marijuana, playing *matatu* and being unproductive and a threat to community safety.

Every parent, poor or, by village standards, rich, did their best to keep their children away from those vices because if it happened, it showed that the family or parent had failed. So, what did the parents do? They kept faith in the system and sold that hope to their children: That if you kept in school and or worked hard, life could be good and the family fortunes would positively change.

That faith and hopefulness were seen in the presidential ballot, 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011. They trusted the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party-led government would deliver for them a life where they could afford the bare minimum of life—basic health care, food security, shelter, education of their children, jobs, and security.

The more they kept the faith, however, the more joblessness increased, the more health centres around them turned into centres of pain instead of healing, and the less those they took for leaders cared about them that themselves.

By 2021, the feeling of betrayal was heavy. The parents' faith in the government and message of hope to their children had not delivered. Children had dropped out of school, those who had completed school were jobless, most families couldn't afford two meals a day and the sick were not sure what they would find at the health centres. And yet those seen as the region's political leaders by virtue of the positions they held in the NRM government were doing little to mollify the people but got entangled in ego-centric turf wars. To send a message, the people decided to draw first blood—voted against the ruling party.

I started community organisation in rural Jinja City as a first year university student in 2007, giving me a chance to observe and be part of the people's struggle for education, better household income, health issues and food un-



Mr Isaac Imaka (right) conducts one of the grassroots social economic transformation engagements in Jinja North, Jinja City. PHOTOS/ COURTESY OF ISAAC IMAKA



Mr Isaac Imaka speaks during a campaign engagement in Jinja North constituency.

certainly. In 2017, I resigned from my journalism job at *Daily Monitor* to go and intensify my solutions-based community leadership throughout Busoga through the Kyabazinga's organisation, the Gabula Royal Foundation.

Community meeting after another in all the eleven chiefdoms, the concern was the same—the people felt forsaken and neglected by government and the party leaders were concerned only about themselves.

I, therefore, understood their disappointment in 2024 when, during President Museveni's visit in Wakitaka in Jinja North for the National Resistance Army (NRA) Liberation Day celebrations, a sub-region's leader took to the microphone and said the sub-region had sent her to apologise on their behalf for not voting for NRM in 2021, instead of on the issues affecting the sub-region. The people got the message. They were on their own.

They knew it and so they hated NRM to the extent that all my subsequent consultative engagements in Jinja

VIEWS ABOUT NRM

Community meeting after another in all the eleven chiefdoms, the concern was the same—the people felt forsaken and neglected by government and the party leaders were concerned only about themselves... They hated NRM... to the extent that all my subsequent consultative engagements in Jinja North for Member of Parliament on NRM ticket received one clear feedback: We will not vote NRM.

If Busoga rejects NRM, the solution is not in embracing the National Unity Platform (NUP) or any other political party from across the River Nile. History has taught us that it only placates a few. Busoga must get a voice to speak up for itself, set clear terms and conditions for what it wants in exchange for political support," Isaac Imaka, the author and former Jinja North MP candidate.

North for Member of Parliament on NRM ticket received one clear feedback: We will not vote NRM. But I couldn't join the Opposition either. Having been a political journalist and grassroots community organiser, I knew for a fact that the Opposition's politics of the 'what is not what Busoga needs for social and economic change (in this *Animal Farm* that is Uganda, the problem is not man as the Old Major's want people to believe that removing him will forever abolish the root cause of hunger and suffering—the problems are both structural and strategic). I decided to contest as an independent.

I physically campaigned door-to-door in 76 out of the 86 villages in Jinja North, and in every single home I campaigned in, there was bottled anger against the sub-region's leadership and NRM.

The sub-region's leaders seem to only care about their convenience and are not articulating people's problems. The NRM is accused of ghettoising communities by promoting and rewarding gangsters.

"Why would the government start rewarding and promoting the same people who terrorise them day and night?" one woman wondered, referring to the NRM's hobnobbing with the ghetto youth.

She added: "Our children are in the ghettos because they dropped out of school, they lack jobs, and are now doing drugs. Instead of the government bringing real solutions, they are instead riding on our plight to spite us into voting for them."

Unlike in the past when elders guided the young in political decision making, the elders in Busoga lost that luxury when the faith they placed in the system begot joblessness, steep income inequality and hopelessness.

It's the young people who now run the show, and because the type of leaders who betrayed their parents can't be trusted, they choose those who quack a little better than them, but at least they all quack. We are the Jerusalem and Judah as described in the book of Isaiah, Chapter 3—a desperate, chaotic society in which someone is grabbed and begged to lead simply because they own a cloak.

For decades, Busoga has been the fertile soil for political farming. Political parties go there to cultivate easy mass support in exchange for some government or political leadership positions for those who help water the political farms. The loser has always been the common Musoga.

Look at the post-elections conduct of Busoga's elected leaders; they have set the tone for the next five years—the usual unhelpful personal fights that have bedevilled the region for the last five years. Meanwhile, other sub-regions are busy in the corridors of power pushing their sub-regions' interests before the swearing in.

If Busoga rejects NRM, the solution is not in embracing the National Unity Platform (NUP) or any other political party from across the River Nile. History has taught us that it only placates a few. Busoga must get a voice to speak up for itself, set clear terms and conditions for what it wants in exchange for political support. No more blind following and hand clapping by the appeased few.

The Namulesa of the 90s is long gone. Parents lost control. Ghettos run the show, and the leaders who would have helped instead fund ghetto militias that even terrorise the community. There's a deep sense of betrayal.

Mr Isaac Imaka is a journalist and former MP candidate for Jinja North Constituency. imackisa@gmail.com