Councillors pin district leaders over missing works funds

No accountability. According to Mr Wandera, the district received Shs188m from the central government to construct Bulumbi Sub-county administration block but only used Shs30million.

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BUSIA. A district council meeting called to scrutinise committee reports for the various departments degenerated into chaos after Busia District officials failed to account for missing millions of shillings.

The district councillors were involved in an ugly spat with the acting LCV chairperson, Mr Boniface Paul Oguttu, and other district leaders before the presentation of the Works committee report last week after discovering that more than Shs183 million could not be accounted for.

The Works committee chairperson, Mr Stanley Wejuli, Mr Oguttu and the speaker, Ms Betty Ajiambo, could not explain to council how the money disappeared from the district coffers.

To make matters worse, the Works report that was to be presented by Mr Wejuli had been endorsed by only two of the 10 committee members, creating suspicion and mistrust.

The other eight members did not sign on the report, having expressed dissatisfaction about Mr Wejuli's operations.

The disgruntled councillors blocked Mr Wejuli from proceeding with the presentation, insisting he first accounts for the missing funds.

Later, the councillors agreed to endorse the report but when copies were circulated to the members, Mr Michael Wandera, a senior councillor for Masaba Sub-county, asked his colleagues to disregard the report, saying it had inconsistencies.

THE ISSUE

Besides having financial gaps, the works committee report that was to be presented by Mr Wejuli had been endorsed by only two of the 10 committee members, creating suspicion and mistrust among the councillors.

According to Mr Wandera, the district received Shs188m from the central government to construct Bulumbi Sub-county administration block but only Shs30 million had been utilised.

He therefore tasked the committee to explain how the remaining Shs87,503,000 was spent.

During the meeting, it was further revealed that of the Shs70 million that UNICEF released to the district to drill bore holes, only Shs44 million was spent.

The councillors also noted that Shs480,699,000 meant for development, but only Shs418,415,000 was reflected and the balance could not be traced.

The district officials also failed to explain to council about the funds

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released for the fourth quarter that reflected Shs8,827,000 unaccounted for. A total of Shs93,020,000 was released but only Shs84,193,000 was reflected in the report.

Mr Raymond Ochieng, one of the councillors, asked the district leadership to give an accountability of the missing funds.

However, tempers flared as councillors accused Mr Oguttu of incompetence in executing his work.

The acting district engineer, Mr Ogoola Japiag, gave a status of the "finished projects" which were supposed to be launched and commissioned, including Dabani-Buwembe Bridge.

In the report, Shs4,171,000 had been spent on the construction of the said bridge, but nothing was on ground.

The councillors had previously inspected the projects and discovered that there were no works going on and the materials meant for the project had allegedly been sold off.

Having failed to prevail over the rowdy leaders, Mr Oguttu then directed that council deliberations be held in the local language, which angered the councillors more.

The meeting ended prematurely.

In 2009, the then LCV chairperson, Mr Charles Wedakule, owing to the pressure from councillors suspended three members of his executive committee over allegations of corruption.

Some technical officials were accused of connivance to steal district funds and incompetence.

The councillors called for the interdiction and investigation of the said officers before they were suspended.

Government has severally warned district officials against corruption and misuse of public funds.

President Museveni has also constantly echoed that whoever swindles government money will be punished and ordered to pay it back.

MISSING FUNDS

Development funds. The councillors noted that Shs480,699,000 meant for development, but only Shs418,415,000 was reflected and the balance could not be traced.

Fourth quarter. The district officials also failed to explain to council about the funds released for the fourth quarter that reflected Shs8,827,000 unaccounted for. A total of Shs93,020,000 was released but only Shs84,193,000 was reflected in the report.

Drilling of bore holes. During the meeting, it was further revealed that of Shs70 million that UNICEF released to the district to drill bore holes, only Shs44 million was spent.

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