

Govt officials split over LC elections

Date set. Disagreements over money and ongoing changes to election law leave the vote tentatively slated for January 17, 2017 in 57, 800 villages hanging in balance.

BY DAVID MAFABI, NELSON WESONGA
& MOSES KYEYUNE
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. The Local Council I and II elections will after a decade-long wait be held on January 17, 2017, about three weeks from today, Parliament's committee on Local Government heard yesterday.

Mukono Municipality Member of Parliament, Ms Betty Namboze, said the poll date is contained in a letter from Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda.

The development comes in the wake of sharp differences of opinion between Finance ministry and Electoral Commission (EC) honchos over money required to hold the ballot in the country's 57, 842 villages and 7,431 parishes.

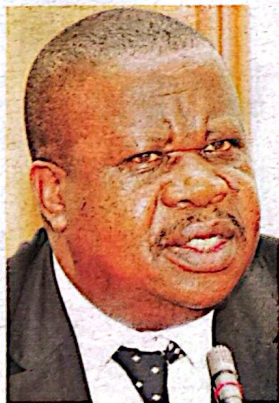
Whereas the EC, which is responsible for organising the elections, first budgeted Shs33b and revised the figure downwards to Shs15.9b following a hard bargain, Finance minister Matia Kasajja said they can only provide Shs10b as Cabinet agreed.

"When I come here and hear them talking different stories then I get amazed," Mr Kasajja told lawmakers on Parliament's Local Government committee where he clashed with EC operations director, Mr Leonard Mulekwa, with whom he jointly appeared on Wednesday.

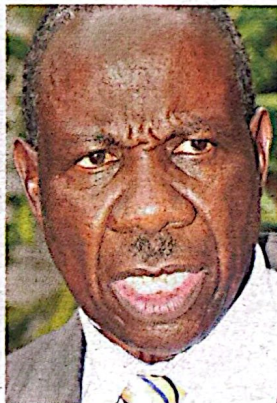
Details of the EC budget show that Shs10.7b would be spent on LC I and II elections, Shs3.3b for Women Council polls and Shs1.9b on mandatory voters' register display and update.

The electoral body insists that any offer less than Shs15.9b is inadequate, prompting MPs at yesterday's committee sitting to propose a meeting with President Museveni to resolve the impasse.

Senior Presidential Press Secretary Don Wanyama earlier cast doubt on the poll date, saying although it was



Declared. Maj Gen Kahinda Otafiire



Supported. Matia Kasajja



Counseled. Elias Lukwago



Hard bargain. Jonathan Talemwa

possible to secure required finances, "it is a very short time from now to January 17 to have elections held because the law on LC elections is yet to be amended".

Parliament is currently conducting public hearing to amend the Local Government Act, the law under which the LC elections are to be organised, to, among others, allow voters express their choices in lower-tier elections by lining behind candidates instead of by secret ballot, seen as more expensive.

It is unclear when the proposed amendment will be enacted, casting uncertainty on the set poll date.

Because of this, Mukono South MP Muyanja Ssenyonga yesterday proposed that the election be deferred until after the legal changes to ensure that "everything is in place".

The Wednesday showdown in Parliament between bureaucrats showed how high-stake and polarising the LC vote already is, with the passion expected to permeate to the grassroots and manifest in coarse campaigns and possible chaos.

Not enough money

Minister Kasajja in his mid-week stinging presentation aimed at EC officials, told lawmakers that, "I want to make one statement clear:

money is never enough, it will never be enough. With the little money you can still do an effective job."

Unimpressed, Mr Mulekwa said they had been ambushed with news that the certificate for the financial implication of the proposed Local Government Act amendments was only Shs10b and "it looks like [the

money] was meant for only one day, not based on the proposed amendments."

Vote will go on

Justice minister Kahinda Otafiire, the political overseer of EC, however, discounted the contest over money that has bubbled to the surface, insisting the vote will go on next month with or without cash.

"Local people can mobilise themselves because they know the people in their villages, line up behind the aspirants and the exercise will be done," Maj Gen Otafiire told this newspaper by telephone, adding: "We don't need to be pessimistic; I am sure that government will get money for this exercise and it will be done in January".

His proclamation came two days after Treasury secretary Keith Muhakanizi said they had no money to organise the village-level polls last held 15 years ago, in 2001.

The tenure of lower local councils is five years, but new office bearers were not elected in subsequent 2006, 2011 and 2016 general elections after the Constitutional Court in 2007 nullified several provisions of the laws establishing the local, women and youth councils, rendering the existing village bodies illegal.

The court agreed with petitioner

Rubaramira Ruranga, then head of the Opposition Forum for Democratic Change party's electoral commission before his 2013 defection to the ruling NRM party, that Parliament enacts new laws for election of the local leaders since Uganda had following the 2005 plebiscite reverted to multi-party from the no-party Movement system under which the LC system was conceived.

Amendments

The August House is now considering those amendments, nine years later, a period within which some of the LCI and LC 2 officials have continued to conduct official business --- endorsing documents, writing recommendations and adjudicating cases --- without a fresh mandate.

Kampala Lord Mayor Elias Lukwago, who is a lawyer, said decisions made by LCs in office in the first place illegally risked being nullified if challenged in court.

"We need to exhaust all legal guidelines in this matter because the elections can be overturned by court in future should somebody sue," he said.

As the controversy over the election brews in Kampala, political parties are busy in villages mobilising for the victory of their candidates.

57, 842

VILLAGES FOR LC I VOTE

7,431

PARISHES FOR LC II VOTE

Shs15.9b

AMOUNT OF MONEY
REQUIRED FOR POLLS

In the
Saturday Monitor..

about The makeover that left

LC ELECTIONS

When. The Local Council I
and II elections will be held on

What they say...

