MUSEVENI ORDERS FINANCE TO RELEASE SH56B FOR LCI ELECTIONS

BY DAVID LUMU AND MARY KARUGABA

President Yoweri Museveni has ordered the finance ministry to release sh56.9b for local council and women council elections, saying the process must be concluded before the swearing-in of the new government in May.

According to sources, Museveni issued the directive during a special Cabinet meeting convened on Thursday at State House, Entebbe, to discuss local council elections and other pressing issues, including the changing global dynamics following the war in the Gulf region.

The discussion on the local council elections, sources said, was triggered by recent pronouncements by finance ministry officials that no money has been allocated for the exercise in the current financial year. This pronouncement pushed the long-awaited polls further into uncertainty.

Declaring the uncertainty over the polls, the state minister for finance, Henry Musasizi, said the Government is unable to facilitate the elections at the moment due to funding constraints.

"No money for these elections this year," Musasizi said on Tuesday.

Although he declined to provide detailed explanations, a senior official in the finance ministry corroborated his position, indicating that the required funds are expected to be allocated in the next financial year.

This pronouncement effectively meant that the elections, which had been anticipated to take place in March or April, this year, had been postponed to 2027.

The Electoral Commission (EC) has also reiterated the position of the finance ministry, saying the process cannot proceed without the necessary funding.

"According to our plan, we were supposed to start the process on March 9 by recruiting polling officials who would help us in displaying and cleaning the register. Unfortunately, we have not yet received the money, so that activity has been postponed until we get the money," Richard Kamugisha, the EC secretary, said on Tuesday.

Kamugisha added that even though LC1 and LC2 elections are conducted using the lining-up method – considered less costly compared to conventional voting – significant financial resources are still required.

These include funds for printing voters' registers, facilitating polling officials, transportation, and other logistical arrangements.

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The above developments, sources said, triggered the special Cabinet meeting on Thursday, with Museveni ordering the finance ministry to "look for money" and ensure that LCI polls in all 70,000 villages are conducted before May.

When contacted, the local government minister, Raphael Magyezi, said: "During the special Cabinet meeting, the President directed that all LCI, LCII and women council elections must go on as planned. He also directed the finance ministry to look for the sh56.9b to enable the process of the elections."

"The roadmap might change, but the President directed during the special Cabinet meeting that the process must be concluded before the swearing-in of the new government in May. However, the President emphasised that the elections should go on as planned in March and April. He said the finance ministry should look for the money urgently," Magyezi said.

He added: "I have also informed the EC that the President's directive is that the elections should go on as per the roadmap. So, the EC will provide the dates and the details of the activities, including the appointment of polling agents."

Magyezi said during the Thursday Cabinet meeting, the President emphasised the importance of holding the elections to complete the country's electoral cycle, saying LC structures form the foundation of Uganda's governance system.

"The President has guided that LC structures are important in the implementation of government programmes. He also emphasised that the country should have a single electoral cycle. So, the implementation of the presidential directives has started, and the EC will issue the roadmap for local council elections next week," Magyezi said.

Last week, the local government state minister, Victoria Rusoke, told MPs that the long-delayed elections would take place by the end of April. Her statement came after Kiboga East MP Keefa Kiwanuka raised concerns over conflicting reports from government agencies. Kiwanuka cited earlier remarks by the EC chairperson, Justice Simon Byabakama, suggesting that funds had been released, whilst the finance ministry maintained that the required sh56.9b was not yet available.

Kiwanuka warned that continued delays in organising the elections risked creating governance gaps at the grassroots level, as communities are left under leaders whose mandates have long expired.

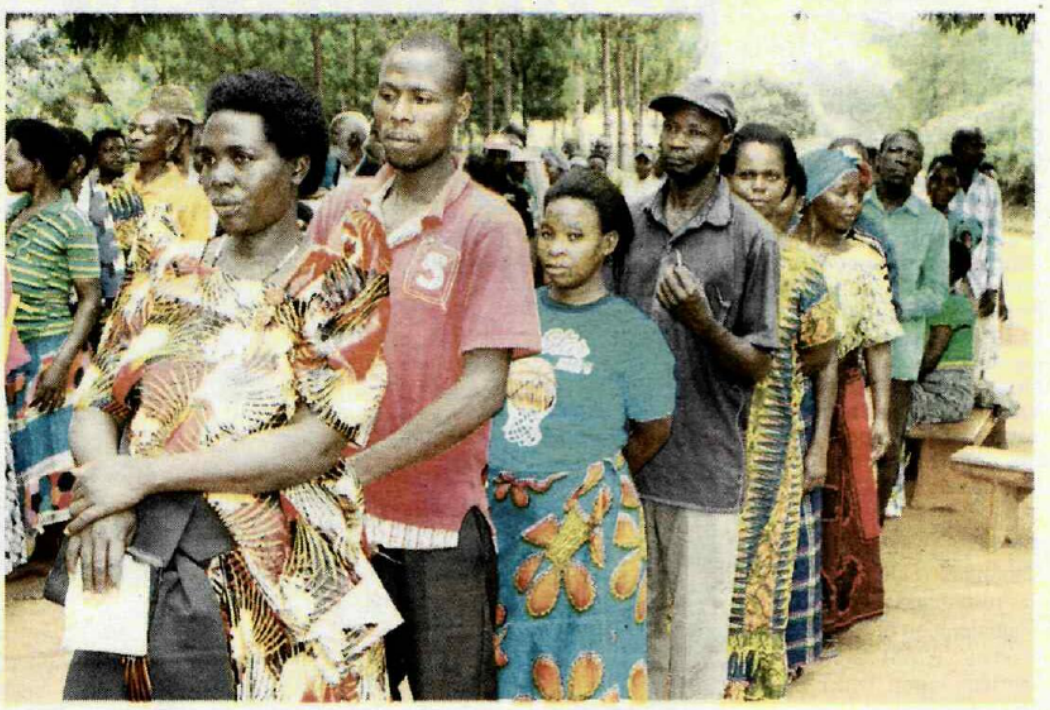
"These councils are critical in implementing government programmes. Without elected leaders, service delivery and accountability are compromised," he said.

The uncertainty surrounding the elections deepened further when Rusoke briefly stepped out of Parliament to consult on the funding status but did not return to provide a conclusive response. LC1 and LC2 leaders currently in office were elected in 2018. Their term officially expired in 2023, but Parliament has since extended their tenure six times, citing the need to align the electoral cycle and address logistical challenges, including funding shortages.

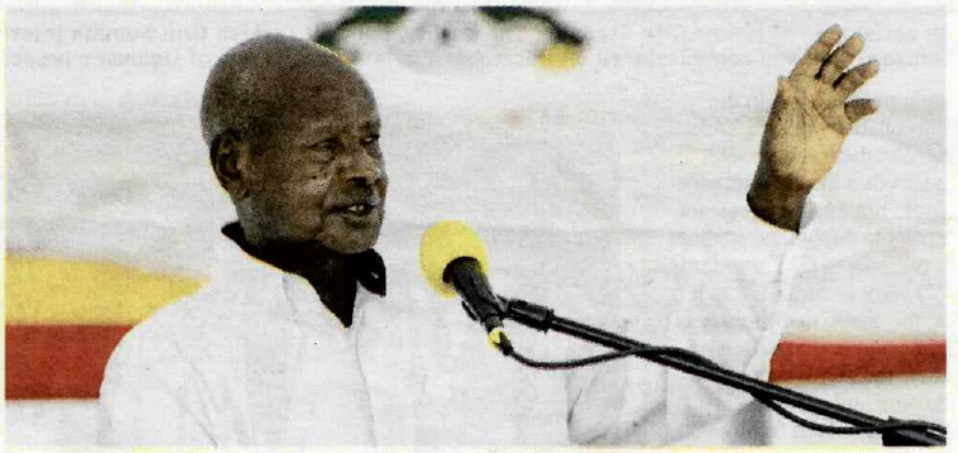
Since July 2023, these extensions have allowed the leaders to remain in office legally, although concerns have been raised about the democratic implications of repeatedly postponing elections.

The Speaker of Parliament, Anita Among, has also demanded clarity on the matter, questioning inconsistencies in government communication and highlighting the risks of operating without fresh mandates at the local level.

Uganda has more than 70,000 villages, all of which depend on LC1 structures for basic governance functions such as conflict resolution, identification of beneficiaries for government programmes, and maintaining community order.



Voters participating in the election of village leaders at Kabuga B village in Muhorro sub-county, Kagadi district, in 2018



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» THE EC IS EXPECTED TO ISSUE THE ROADMAP FOR LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS NEXT WEEK.



Musasizi