

Local sports reform agenda and the risk of personality-driven governance structures

Uganda's sports sub-sector entered 2025 with renewed reform momentum, yet structural weaknesses identified in official reports suggest that institutional strengthening—not personality-centred celebration—must define the next phase of development.

In 2025, the National Council of Sports (NCS) indicated that the sector required more than Sh450b to support national teams, infrastructure upgrades and preparations for major continental competitions, a figure that highlights the scale of financial demand across federations and disciplines. While funding appeals signal ambition, parliamentary debates and oversight discussions have continued to reference concerns about inconsistent allocations and what some legislators described as a "firefighting approach" to sports financing, where emergency support replaces structured multi-year planning.

The implementation of the National Sports Regulations, 2025 led to the gazettelement of 45 compliant federations under the National Sports Act, marking a significant governance milestone aimed at formalising operations and aligning bodies with statutory standards.

However, reports in early 2026 noted that several federations required additional time to meet compliance benchmarks, pointing to administrative capacity gaps in areas such as documentation, governance frameworks and financial reporting.

The Auditor General's 2025 findings further highlighted concerns around revenue realisation and facility utilisation within the sports sector, raising broader questions about efficiency and sustainability in the management of public sports resources. At the same time, infrastructure deficits remain visible, with multiple regional stadia and training facilities operating below optimal standards, limiting grassroots expansion and reducing opportunities for diversified talent development beyond a few dominant disciplines.

Against this backdrop of reform and resource



Wise heads.
SC Villa trustees' head Gerald Senadula and president Hajj Omara Mandela.
PHOTO/EDDIE CHICCO

constraints, public discourse has frequently celebrated individual federation presidents, administrators and managers for securing funds, hosting tournaments or achieving regulatory recognition. While leadership plays a vital coordinating role, governance experts caution that excessive focus on personalities can overshadow systemic performance indicators such as audit outcomes, athlete welfare frameworks and transparent electoral processes.

In football, for instance, governance debates within the Federation of Uganda Football Associations (Fufa) have historically drawn attention to constitutional reforms and internal accountability mechanisms, yet media narratives often centre more prominently on top executives than on institutional checks and balances.

Similarly, athletics successes on the global stage—driven by athletes such as Joshua Cheptegei and Peruth Chemutai—have reinforced Uganda's international profile, but long-term competitiveness depends on structured grassroots pipelines, coaching investment and facility development rather than administrative acclaim.

Observers note that sustained praise-singing of sports leaders may inadvertently reinforce power concentration by discouraging leadership turnover, reducing competitive elections within federations and limiting internal criticism from executive members or stakeholders.

Where leaders become synonymous with their federations, institutional identity risks merging with personal branding, making reform discussions politically sensitive and slowing the adoption of term limits or governance audits.

Parliamentary calls in 2025 for clearer funding formulas and stronger accountability mechanisms underscore the importance of evaluating federations based on measurable outputs, including compliance status, financial transparency and athlete support systems.

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The Uganda Olympic Committee has also been urged to align recognition strictly with legally registered federations, reinforcing the principle that sport governance must be rules-based rather than personality-driven.

For media houses and commentators, this reform window presents an opportunity to recalibrate coverage toward institutional performance rather than individual celebration.

Investigative focus on budget utilisation, infrastructure progress, youth participation rates and anti-doping compliance would strengthen public oversight and promote a culture where accountability is normalised rather than perceived as hostility.

Ending personalised highlight culture does not diminish leadership contribution; rather, it reinforces the idea that administrators are stewards of public institutions whose legitimacy derives from transparent systems, not personal acclaim.

Uganda's sports future depends on sustainable financing, equitable resource distribution across disciplines, empowered athlete representation and modernised facilities that serve communities nationwide.

If 2025–2026 reforms are to translate into lasting transformation, public discourse must shift decisively from personalities to performance metrics, from praise to policy scrutiny, and from individual branding to institutional responsibility.

In doing so, Uganda can build a sports sub-sector that is competitive, accountable and resilient—anchored not in the prominence of a few leaders, but in the strength of its systems and the success of its athletes.

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