

The Transcript

Haruna Kasolo on why 'NRM bounced back in Buganda'

Haruna Kyeyune Kasolo, the outgoing State minister for Finance in-charge of Microfinance and Small Enterprises, retook the Kyotera County slot from National Unity Platform's Paul Mpalanyi Lukwago. In an interview with **Derrick Kiyonga**, he explains why he thinks the ruling NRM party is still loved in Buganda and its relationship with the Catholic Church.

You have emerged victorious after losing your constituency in 2021. What changed this time?

It's a combination of many factors. In 2021, there came a presidential candidate from Buganda, and you know, people thought he would probably perform well. That's why they decided to back him as their own for Buganda. He promised a lot of things: 'we are going to do this in a new Uganda'. So, there was a wave and all the ministers from the government lost. I think for me, they wanted to send a signal because this party is basically here in Buganda and Mzee [President Museveni] was very strong in the rest of the regions.

So, for me, I thought they sat and agreed that: 'Now that we can't manage this Mzee because he is everywhere, let us capitalise on Buganda. Let us defeat all his ministers as a way of sending a signal to him that you know we would have come for you'. It's not that we hadn't performed well; we had really served our people diligently.

But luckily enough, we were there watching them, and we gave them a five-year term. The voters were waiting to receive the services they promised. They received none. I think they resorted to coming back to us. That's why you see that many ministers who had lost bounced back, such as Amelia Kyambadde [Mawokota South] and myself. There are quite a number.

After the 2021 elections, I received information that you were going to stand in Bukoto Central in Masaka District, then you made a U-turn and stood in Kyotera. What informed that decision?

It wasn't that I wanted to stand in Bukoto Central, but I wanted to mobilise the entire Masaka Sub-region. The picture had been painted that the NRM wasn't strong. NUP was in Kyotera. NUP was in Masaka District, and City. Almost everywhere. So now that I didn't have a constituency, I decided to go to Masaka District, work with those people, and mobilise for the NRM – which I did. I'm happy that even when I had left Bukoto Central and went back to Kyotera, we managed to get a number of seats.

Your opponents are accusing you of being the mastermind of vote rigging in that area

I think they are accusing me of hav-

ing mastered mobilisation skills. I'm talented in mobilisation. And being vice chairperson of the central region, I had to make sure this time round, the NRM regains strength, which we achieved. We didn't rig; if we had mastered rigging, we would have captured everywhere.

Specifically, let us discuss the Masaka City Woman Representative slot. I heard you tell people that if President Museveni hadn't intervened, then the magistrate wouldn't have declared Justine Nameere of the NRM victor, yet the Electoral Commission had earlier declared National Unity Platform's (NUP) Rosa Nalubowa

I think you quoted me wrongly. I was referring to the President as the chairperson of the NRM. Not the President of Uganda. As the national chairperson of the party, he had to make sure the party gains strength. The party's principles are not compromised. He had to fight for the party. For example, in that case, the results from 11 polling stations hadn't been captured. And Mzee, as the national chairperson of the party, was asking why? And because there was an earlier ruling in Kawempe [North]. He was wondering why they were disenfranchising the people who voted at those polling stations. You know you are denying them a chance for their voice to be heard. So, that's what I

meant. I didn't mean that Mzee had coerced the magistrate to make mistakes.

Again, if I heard her correctly, Nameere has accused you of sabotaging her, yet you are from the same party, and you are from the same sub-region of Buganda

I didn't hear that. But for me, I'm the vice chairperson (NRM) of central region. I don't like personalities. I like the party, the flagbearers and those who make contributions to the party. So Nameere was our flagbearer, and definitely, I had to support her. You know, supporting you doesn't mean that you have to be friends. So, whether you don't like me, whether I don't like you, provided you have the flag, I'm duty-bound to support you.

You have talked about NRM's support in Buganda. Do you really, honestly feel people love this party in the region?

Oh yes. You know love depends on the choices. Because they are choices from which people pick. So yeah, we are loved.

Do you feel the energy in Buganda compared to the energy you get when you go to other parts of the country?

Here in Buganda, we have the collec-

tion of the entire country. We have a people of all types of brains and the NRM is liked, and that's why we have a majority of Members of Parliament

You won the hotly contested vice chairperson of Buganda, beating your opponent, Moses Kibuka. But it had huge ethnic tones...

I think that was being manipulated. We all come from here. You know Buganda is just a combination of different ethnic groups. That's why in Buganda we have different Baganda: Buganda, Geere, Baganda waawa, Baganda bala, like that. So, all of us are Baganda because even in His Majesty the King's cabinet, there are people who are not Baganda. So, I think that was proper, but I think I won because I was more potential than my opponent.

Taking you back to the election, it's said that in 2021 the Catholic Church ganged up against you as they supported their own, Mpalanyi...

Again, that was being short-sighted because you see in Parliament there is no designated place for Muslims, Catholics, for Protestants, we are all leaders. In Parliament, we are all political parties, not religious affiliations. But anyway, I also heard about it even in the previous campaign, they attempted to do so. But I don't think it's a collective idea. Maybe in every community, there are people who, on their own, make mistakes. So those mistakes can be attached to the institution.

The tension between your party and the Catholic Church came to the fore when a Catholic priest was kidnapped late last year in the middle of an election...

I think I can't comment about that case... you have heard of many innocent cultural leaders, who are arrested. You see, all of us are human beings and if you commit an offence, the law comes for you. No one is above the law. No one is immune, apart from the President.

The issue is how he was taken away. Why didn't they just summon him?

I'm not an arresting officer. I don't belong to any security apparatus.

When they kidnapped the priest in the middle of the campaign, what did you make of that, considering that the area is dominated by Catholics?

Of course, it wasn't good. We even shared our sentiments with the President, and he intervened. That is why you saw what happened.

Your opponents say you had a lot of resources during the campaigns

That's what they say? You know, in campaigns, you are not supposed to dish out money. If they have evidence, then he can take me to court. I know their worry, but I was just smart, and I was capitalising on their mistakes. Of course, he had promised many things in the 2021 campaigns, which he didn't fulfil. Both of us had served the constituency and it was now easy for the people to compare. The comparison was the reason I went through.



Kyotera County MP Haruna Kyeyune Kasolo. PHOTO/ COURTESY OF NRM

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