

Regional News

Why Kalangala Council incumbents did not return

The elections significantly altered the district's political composition, with several Opposition parties losing their seats.

BY DAVID SEKAYINGA

On January 23, the Kalangala District Returning Officer, Mr Ronald Agaba, announced the results of the local government elections, confirming a major political shake-up that saw 15 out of 22 incumbent district councillors fail to return to office.

The elections significantly altered the district's political composition. The National Unity Platform (NUP) lost five of the seven seats it previously held.

The National Resistance Movement (NRM) increased its representation, gaining nine more seats from the 10 it had in the last council. Independents retained their three seats, while the Democratic Party (DP) and the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) lost all representation in the incoming council.

With newly created electoral areas in Bujumba and Bubeke sub-counties, the council expanded from 22 to 24 members. However, the expansion did little to cushion incumbents, most of whom were voted out.

Party politics

Mr Jonathan Kiboneka, a voter from Kiboneka in Mugoye Sub-county, said some incumbents were blocked by their own political parties during internal selection processes, forcing them out of the race before the general election.

"For example, Richard Katumba wanted to contest for the LCS chairperson seat on the NUP ticket. But during party selections, he was regarded as unfit for the post. He decided not to contest for any other position," Kiboneka explained during an interview on yesterday.

Richard Katumba, the councillor for Bujumba Sub-county and also served as district speaker for five years and as Kalangala NUP spokesperson for four years, lost the NUP flag to Robert Munaaba, a recent defector from FDC where he had served as district chairperson and Bufumira Sub-county chairperson for over 10 years.

The fallout affected other incumbents. Herman Jilibe, who had been handed the NUP ticket to contest for the Mugoye Sub-county seat, returned it in protest, citing bias and unfairness in the party's selection process. In a letter to NUP leaders, he described the exercise as discriminatory. He later joined the NRM campaign trail, and his influence is said to have contributed to the defeat of the incumbent Mugoye Woman councillor, Betty Nanyanzi (NUP).

Following the elections, Tiliha



Kalangala District headquarters which houses the district council meetings. PHOTO/DAVID SEKAYINGA

Others who did not return include Ronald Jamba (NUP), the incumbent councillor for Kalangala Town Council, who declined to contest after Katumba was denied the party ticket. Farouk Bukenya (NRM), who had initially shown interest in contesting for the LCS chairperson seat, stepped aside during the NRM primaries in favour of Agnes Lunkuse and did not contest for any other position.

Paul Kabinga, the incumbent councillor for Bubeke Sub-county and the secretary for finance at the District Executive Committee, abandoned his political ambitions after crossing from NRM to Patriotic League Uganda (PLU). He said he was frustrated when PLU leaders directed members to participate in NRM primaries.

"After consultations with different stakeholders, I decided not to return to any political contest, and that is how my ambitions to replace my boss as LCS chairperson died," Kabinga said. Kiboneka said lack of funds also played a major role in the defeat of incumbents.

"If you lacked money to sustain your campaigns until the last day of elections,

you would not win. One needed money to transport voters, sometimes buying votes and sustaining agents. If you look closely, the highest bidder won," he said.

Election dynamics

Former Kalangala District speaker Richard Katumba attributed the losses to the shift in election dynamics.

"In 2021, we campaigned under Covid-19 guidelines, moving door-to-door. In 2026, elections returned to normal campaigns that required a lot of money, which many incumbents did not have," he said. He also alleged that the elections were characterised by violence and heavy involvement of State actors, making it difficult for Opposition candidates without party facilitation to compete effectively, especially in hard-to-reach island areas.

"Individual resources could not sustain campaigns and polling agents," Katumba added.

Kiboneka further linked the outcome to the implementation of government programmes such as the Parish Development Model (PDM). He claimed that whenever Resident District Commissioner Fred Badda distributed PDM funds, he was accompanied by the district chairperson-elect Agnes Lunkuse and Mugoye Sub-county councillor-elect Michel Muwombefu.

"Voters began to think that if they voted out Opposition incumbents and brought in NRM candidates, they would receive more government support," he said. Some incumbents reportedly lost after failing to secure nominations for high

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The number of incumbent councillors who did not reclaim their positions out of the 22 councillors.

chances to return to the district council yet she had earlier shown interest in contesting for Woman Member of Parliament before stepping down.

Internal wrangles within NUP further weakened incumbents' chances.

Sources said disagreements emerged over the appointment of Hellen Nakimuli as the district NUP mobiliser, with some members arguing that a mobiliser should not hold an elective position.

Richard Kiganda, Kalangala's NUP secretary general, said some incumbents were voted out because they failed to perform to the expectations of the voters.

"Voters expected service delivery and regular feedback from their representatives. Many councillors did not return to their constituencies, and voters decided to vote them out," he said. However, he also alleged electoral malpractice.

What awaits the new council?

As the new Kalangala District Council prepares to assume

who once served as the district secretary for finance, said the new councillors must focus on improving household incomes and work closely with Buganda Kingdom structures.

"We expect them to collaborate with the Buganda Kingdom to improve the incomes of our people," Mr Kasirye said.

He urged the councillors to put aside party politics once sworn into office and focus on serving the electorate.

"In those days, we knew that once we entered council, we were in the same government to serve our people," he said.

Mr Kasirye also expressed concern about councillors who enter office with personal interests rather than the welfare of residents.

"I am worried about councillors who come with their own interests and end up serving public servants instead of the people who elected them," he said. He recalled that when decentralisation was first introduced in Uganda, councillors were thoroughly trained about their responsibilities through radio programmes.

"This was about how we should serve our people. We implore those responsible to organise proper induction training for the new councillors. However, deliver these trainings in local languages to ensure councillors clearly understand their roles," he said.

Glaring gaps

Mr Kasirye also pointed to a long-standing gap between the district's technical staff and elected leaders, which he said sometimes weakens councillors' ability to represent their areas effectively. For example, some councillors are Senior Six leavers, while the technical team has degree holders.

"That reduces the councillor's ability to contribute to financial decisions. It is worsened by the fact that most of the district funds are controlled by the technical team, particularly the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)," he says.

With the council receiving a small parcel of the funds, Kasirye alleges that councillors seek a bigger share and end up being compromised during budget allocations.

Another issue is that the government sometimes has its different priorities for the released funds from those of the councillors. Kasirye advised councillors to understand this to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

He further urged them to first understand how conditional government funds are allocated before raising expectations among voters.

"It is a blessing that councillors have come when the district has just launched its five-year development plan. It will be difficult for them to introduce new items into it immediately. Let them first read and understand the plan to see how it resonates with the demands of voters," he said.

Meanwhile, former Kalangala District chairperson Willy Lugolobi Bageyente urged the incoming councillors to manage their expectations about the realities of public office.

"Despite needs such as fuel for field trips, funds are not always available. They need to learn to exercise patience," he said.

Mr Lugolobi al

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CURRENT
COUNCIL
NUMBER

FINANCES PUZZLE

Finances are a major problem councillors grapple with. Sseso Ssaza Chief Augustine Kasirye, and former directly elected councillor for Bufumira Sub-county said that the government sometimes has different priorities for the released funds from those of the councillors. He advised councillors to understand this to avoid unnecessary conflicts. He further urged them