Kalangala RDC lifts ban on community radios

BY DAVID SEKAYINGA

KALANGALA. The Resident District Commissioner (RDC) for Kalangala District, Mr Fred Badda, has lifted a ban on the use of community radios and megaphones, locally known as *ebizindalo* for political campaigning, a month after the 2026 General Election.

The suspension, imposed on January 10, aimed at curbing hate speech and the spread of false information during the heated campaign period.

Speaking to *Daily Monitor* on Monday, Mr Badda said: "The period I gave them [owners of megaphones] not to host anyone campaigning with the intention of promoting hate speech has elapsed. Now, they are free to pass on their messages without spreading hate or abusing others."

He added that messages aired through the mounted megaphones should focus on development and community interests rather than personal attacks.

In his January 10 directive, Mr Badda said his office had received reports that some politicians and their supporters were using the local public address systems to spread hate speech, rumours, and inflammatory statements that could incite violence.

"These actions may result in violence, which we have decided to stop immediately," he stated in the letter, warning that offenders would be arrested and the megaphones confiscated

The directive particularly affected remote landing sites with limited access to electricity and formal media platforms, where ebizindalo are often the only reliable means of reaching large numbers of residents at once.

Daily Monitor has learnt that at least one owner of the megaphone was arrested during the ban, he was released after admitting wrongdoing and the confiscated megaphones were returned.

While some residents criticised the ban, a section of the community members welcomed the move, arguing that political tensions had begun escalating during the campaign period.

Several residents said politicians and their agents had started spreading false information and personal attacks through the megaphones, creating hostility among supporters of rival camps.

However, political actors from the opposition say the directive disproportionately affected them.

> **Essential.** At Kitobo, we rely on the *ebizindalo* to communicate with many people on the island. We are glad the ban has been lifted.
>
> Mr Musa Kayondo, LC1 chairperson, Kitobo Landing Site

> **Campaign.** Banning them [megaphones] meant the only way to spread the message and our gospel was cut off.
>
> Mr Ben Saabwe, the registrar for the National Unity Platform (NUP), Kalangala District

Mr Ben Saabwe, the registrar for the National Unity Platform (NUP) in Kalangala District, said the ban severely limited their candidates' ability to campaign.

"Our candidates couldn't campaign all the time like those of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), so these megaphones were the only way we could reach everyone at the same time on one landing site," he said.

"Banning them [megaphones] meant the only way to spread the message and our gospel was cut off," he added.

Beyond politics, the suspension had financial consequences for families that operate the megaphones as an income source. At Kitobo Landing Site alone, there are nearly five megaphones, which owners rely on to support their households.

Mr Twaaha Sozi, who operates a megaphone at Mweena Landing Site, said he suffered significant losses during the suspension.

"Each announcement fetches Shs2,000. Before the ban, I hoped to earn almost Shs300,000 during the election period, only to end up with only Shs100,000," he said.

Similarly, Mr Musa Kayondo, the LC1 chairperson for Kitobo Landing Site, said the lifting of the ban restores both communication flow and livelihoods.

Even after ban, Mr Badda has directed LC1 chairpersons to closely monitor the use of community communication channels.

"The chairpersons must ensure there is no hate speech, no abusive language, and that volume and usage are controlled so as not to disturb peace in their communities," he said.

In February 2017, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), which regulates the broadcasting industry, banned *bizindalo* accusing the operators of contravening the law and causing noise pollution. However, many have remained operating in various parts of the country.

The programming of *bizindalo* radios consists mostly of local announcements on lost or found property, lost children, market information, adverts, talk shows, sermons, community mobilisation, local employment opportunities, education, and health information.

According to Section 26(1) of the UCC Act 2013, "A person shall not install or operate a television station, radio station, or any related broadcasting apparatus without a licence issued by the Commission".

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