

By Vision Reporters

Fewer Ugandans turned up at polling stations to elect district and city local government leaders yesterday, compared to the presidential and parliamentary elections that were held on January 15.

Although the elections were generally peaceful, many stations had few people turning up to vote district and city leadership positions, mainly district LC5 chairpersons, city mayors and councillors.

According to the Electoral Commission (EC), about 1.9 million elective positions will be filled nationwide by the end of the process.

In Busia, James Okello, a voter in Sikuda sub-county in Samia-Bugwe North, said the local government elections were more important to the district than those for MPs, noting that the leaders being elected play a key role in service delivery.

Nevertheless, by press time most polling stations in the district were largely empty, with only polling officials present.

The situation was not different in Hoima, where at Buseruka Market polling station only 13 people had cast their ballots by midday out of the 231 registered voters.

Justus Asinguza, a presiding officer at the station, said many residents were busy in the market instead of turning up to vote. He added that although polling opened at about 8:00am, the first voter arrived around 10:00am.

Daniel Okello, one of the few voters who turned up at Buseruka Secondary School polling station, said some people prioritise presidential and parliamentary elections due to the excitement surrounding the campaigns.

"Many people are now in their gardens harvesting maize. It is very difficult to convince them to come to the polling stations," he said.

Other voters expressed demoralisation stemming from the failure of biometric voter verification machines during the presidential and MP elections, which caused delays.

This caused frustrations because many voters could not cast their ballots in time despite turning up.

Godfrey Byarugaba, the NRM flag bearer for LC5 chairperson in Masindi district, expressed concern at the low voter turnout, saying it could negatively affect their performance.

He, however, remained hopeful regarding his chances, citing the extensive mobilisation he had conducted across the district.

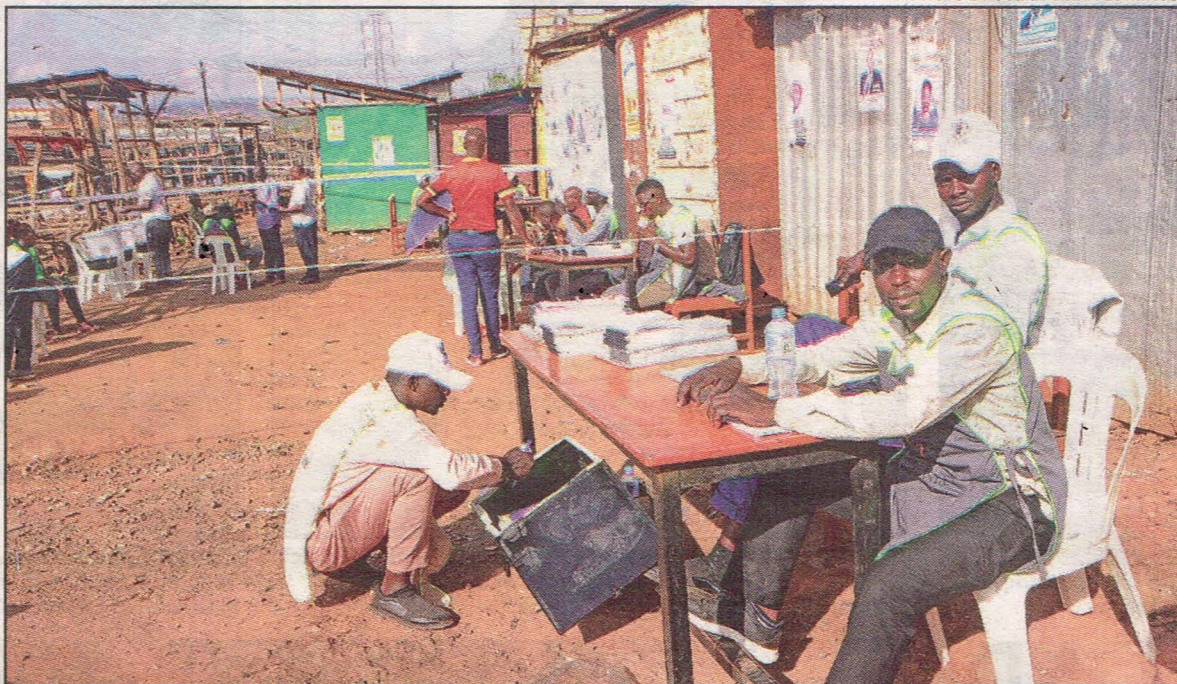
However, other candidates vying for positions including district councillor resorted to ferrying them to polling stations, which was admittedly costly and illegal.

"This is very costly for us," an anonymous candidate said. "But the truth is, if people aren't ferried, they do not turn up. People have less interest in local government elections. We do not know why."

Bodaboda riders were observed transporting voters to various polling stations. To address the challenge of low voter turnout for local government elections, the candidate suggested holding all elections on a

LOW TURNOUT IN LC5, CITY MAYORAL POLLS

PHOTO BY JULIET ANNA LUKWAGO



Polling officers relaxed as they wait for voters at Kasumba zone polling station in Kibuye, Rubaga Division. This was due to low voter's turn-up on yesterday

single day, noting that most voters' interest lies in national-level polls, despite the crucial role local leaders play in service delivery.

KAMPALA

In Kampala, at Kansanga parish's Maasa-Ana polling station, voters said they arrived early, but found very few people present, despite polling materials being delivered on time.

By 9:30am, fewer than 10 people were present to witness the opening of polling materials at Maasa-Ana, meaning voting could not begin in line with EC guidelines, which require at least 10 voters to be present before polling can start.

In Mulago and other parts of Kampala, although the EC delivered materials early to most polling stations, many eligible voters stayed away. At a polling station near Pioneer Mall, for instance, although polling assistants demarcated the station as early as 8:00am, voting commenced at about 10:15am.

Edward Baguma, the LC1 chairperson of Nakivubo Shauri Yako parish in Kampala Central division, said many people shunned voting because some were out of town, while others lost interest after the presidential results were declared, especially those whose preferred candidates had lost.

Another factor, Baguma said, was that the day had not been declared a public holiday, forcing many residents to go to work.

"You cannot expect people in Kampala to come as early as 8:00am to vote and then go to their workplaces. People are looking for money to buy sugar, pay school fees and meet other needs. We have four polling stations at Pioneer Mall. Although officials

KAKUMIRO DISTRICT

Kakumiro district returning officer John Baguma said that although voter turnout was low, the biometric voter verification kits functioned at 445 out of 446 polling stations. According to polling officials in Kakindo town council and sub-county, voting delayed until about 10:00am due to the absence of the legally required 10 eyewitnesses before the exercise could start. In Kakindo sub-county, the name of an independent female district councillor did not appear on the ballot paper, prompting her supporters to boycott the election. "We have decided to boycott the elections because our candidate's name did not appear on the ballot paper and we believe this was politically instigated by top district leaders," Jacqueline Kyaligonza, a voter in Kakindo, said.

were ready by 8:15am, voting only started at about 9:45am, and even then it was slow," he said.

Despite the low turnout, Baguma said the exercise was generally peaceful and no complaints had been registered by political parties.

Independent Kampala lord mayoral aspirant Eddie Mbazira Kibalama said low turnout could have been the result of voter fatigue or the heavy security deployment in parts of Mulago.

"The Government should have declared today a public holiday to enable eligible voters to cast their ballots," Mbazira said after voting at St Martin Mulago Primary School.

Edith Nabulime, a resident of Kavule in Kawempe division, said she declined to vote because most politicians do not keep their promises.

At Ssimbwa polling station at Kansanga Primary School, polling assistant Baker Mfitundinda said all materials had arrived by 6:30am, but voters were very few, even by 10:00am.

A similar situation was observed at Muzaana polling station in Kabalagala parish. Although materials arrived

district registered a low voter turnout.

Joan Kyalikunda, a presiding officer at Kabuga Primary School polling station, said this was due to prayers by Faith of Unity believers headed by Owoboshobozi Bishaka. The prayers are held on the second, 12th and 22nd of every month.

Meanwhile, Mercy Ataho, the Kagadi district returning officer, said some of the ballot boxes had no ballot papers for male and female district councillors in Kyansoike and Mpefu sub-counties, forcing her to seek urgent guidance from the EC headquarters.

FORT PORTAL

In Fort Portal city, voting for the woman councillor was disrupted after ballot papers for several polling stations went missing while others were mixed up.

Fort Portal city returning officer Isaac Byamugyisha said some ballot papers were sent to the wrong polling stations, while at other stations, candidates' names and photos were not on the ballot papers. The affected areas included Central Division West (Kagote, Kimbimba, Nyabukara and Rwengoma wards) and Central Division South, where there were no elections in Bazaar, Kasusu and Kijanju wards.

In Fort Portal North Division, Byamugyisha said voting was also cancelled in North Upper, covering Karago, Kazingo, Kiguma, Ibonde, Kitarasa, Nyakitoto, Kitaka and Mandako.

He said a new date for the cancelled elections would be announced by February 4.

Josephine Komuhimbo, a candidate in Fort Portal West Division, criticised the Electoral Commission, saying: "Some ballot papers with my picture were instead taken to the wrong divisions."

Kempeta Usita, contesting for city woman councillor in Fort Portal North Upper, said she was ready for the race, but voters found that ballot papers meant for Fort Portal North Lower at their station.

At midday voter turnout across Fort Portal was still low, with some polling stations taking hours before registering a single voter.

YUMBE

At Aringa Senior Secondary School polling station in West Yumbe, voting was delayed due to the absence of the required 10 voters to witness the opening of ballot boxes.

Habib Alindu, the presiding officer, said polling officially opened at 7:05am but voting only began at 9:12am when the 10th voter arrived. During the presidential and parliamentary elections, only 131 out of 345 registered voters turned up at the station. Alindu said registering such a turnout this time

PHOTO BY JULIET KASIRYE



Eddie Kibalama, an independent candidate for the Kampala Lord Mayor seat, casting his vote at St Martin Mulago Primary School

would be difficult.

Gertrude Munguci, presiding officer at Senior Quarters polling station, attributed the low turnout to frustrations to the outcome of the presidential and parliamentary elections. Yumbe resident district commissioner Sulaiman Lubwama said a low voter turnout was registered across most polling stations, attributing it to voters who had come to cast their ballots during the presidential polls returning to their workplaces and the voting day not being declared a public holiday.

MBALE CITY

In Mbale, the LC1 chairperson of Lorry Park, Suleiman Luled, mobilised residents to witness the opening of ballot boxes. He said voter apathy could be linked to alleged malpractices in the presidential and parliamentary elections.

"Ugandans are getting tired of elections because people's choices are not respected unless money changes hands," he said, adding that it took nearly an hour to convince 10 people

to witness the opening of the ballot boxes.

MBARARA

In Mbarara city, incumbent mayor Robert Mugabe Kakyebi urged the EC to revise its election programme and conduct all elections on a single day. All the city's 305 polling stations reportedly experienced a low turnout.

Stanley Katembeya, a voter, blamed the low turnout to electoral malpractices.

NAMAYINGO

Namayingo LC5 chairperson Ronald Sanya was declared unopposed.

He was initially set to face former Bukooli MP Peter Patrick Ochieng, who later withdrew. Sanya was officially declared unopposed by EC registrar Eve Ritah Nakandhi.

This will be Sanya's third term and his first on the NRM ticket.

LIRA, DOKOLO

Dokolo resident district commissioner Barbara Akech said residents continued with business as usual,

showing little interest in elections.

"They are not interested. They expect to be transported to the polling stations," she said. In Lira city, presiding officer Rajab Ocen said most people regard LC5 and mayoral elections as less important.

IGANGA

A low turnout was registered in Nawanningi, Nakalama and Nakigo sub-counties. A polling official at Bukyaye Primary School said some voters were turned away after it was discovered that their names were not in the registers. Some candidates hired bodabodas to transport voters amid complaints of long distances and hot weather.

AMURU AND GULU

In Lamogi sub-county, Amuru district, polling in some stations began after 9:00am because the minimum number of voters required for the exercise to begin – 10 – had not yet arrived. In Gulu city, business went on as usual despite the polls, with fewer than 100 voters having turned up at several stations by midday.

Gulu district LC5 chairperson Christopher Opiyo Ateker said low turnout could be due to demoralisation following last week's elections and long distances to the polling stations.

Compiled by John Masaba, Egessa Hajusu, Wilson Asilimwe, Yosam Gucwaki, Caleb Bahikaho, Delux Emmy Alomu, Betty Angatai, Jackie Nambogga, Jonan Tusingwire, Adam Gule, Abdulkarim Ssengendo, Simon Ssekidde, Ibrahim Ruhweza, Andrew Musinguzi, Daniel Nsengimana, Patrick Okino, Hudson Apunyo, Job Nantakiika, Paul Watala, Moses Bikala, David Magere, Saidi Engola, Dennis Ojwee, Rosemary Anena, Abbey Nantale, Juliet Waiswa, Violet Nabatanzi, Michael Odeng, Wilfred Sanya, Juliet Lukwago, Paul Watala and Juliet Kasirye.