

BY DAVID SEKAYINGA

KALANGALA. The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) has declared that all community radios or outdoor megaphones, locally known as *bizindalo* operating in Kalangala District, are illegal, warning that individuals or groups found using them without authorisation risk arrest.

Last week, a team of UCC officials led by Mr Dennis Okalanga, the UCC head of legal department, met Kalangala District leadership and discussed the fate of more than 250 outdoor megaphone radios currently operating across the island district.

The discussion followed a decision by the RDC's office last month to temporarily lift a ban that had earlier been imposed on the use of devices to mobilise communities.

According to Mr Okalanga, the *bizindalo* are operating in contravention of Section 27 of the Uganda Communications Act, which requires any person or entity providing broadcasting services to first obtain a license from the commission.

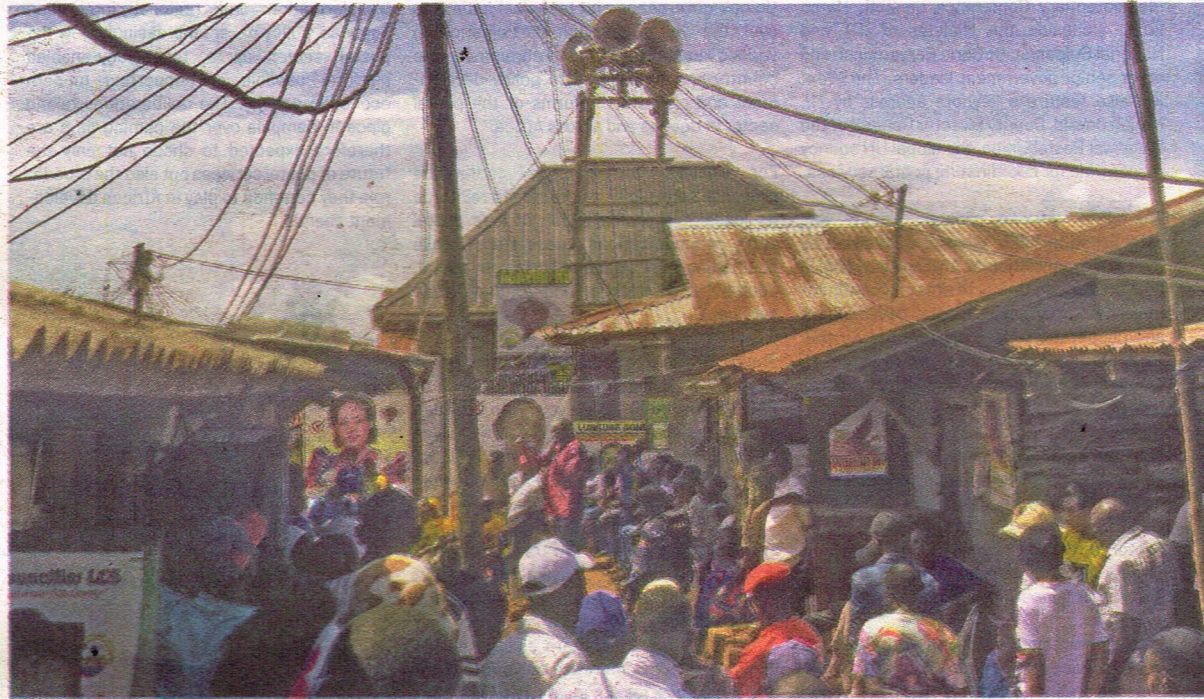
The programming of *bizindalo* radios consists mostly of local announcements on lost or found property, lost children, market information, adverts, talk shows, sermons, community mobilisation, local employment opportunities, education, and health information.

Mr Okalanga explained despite that, they still fall under broadcasting services and must therefore comply with the law.

"Any person who wishes to operate such communication equipment must first seek authorisation and licensing from the commission. Operating without a license is illegal," he said

In Kalangala, *bizindalo* are widely used in trading centres, landing sites,

Outdoor community radios illegal – UCC



RDC Fred Badda (in red) speaks to residents during a sensitisation session on the use of community radios and megaphones at Kitobo Landing Site on January 12, 2026. PHOTO/DAVID SEKAYINGA

and villages to relay community announcements, advertise local businesses, broadcast church messages, and mobilise residents for health programmes.

Mr Richard Kirwaana, one of the operators, said the *bizindalo* remains the most accessible source of information for many islanders.

"Not everyone owns a smartphone or has access to radio or television signals. Most people get information through these megaphones," he said.

He added that the *bizindalo* play a

THE LAW

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 license issued by the Commission".

crucial role in mobilising communities for immunisation campaigns, health

camp, and government programmes such as the distribution of hand hoes. Kilwaana appealed to UCC to consider the communication challenges faced in remote island communities.

"We can adhere to the law if we are sensitised on what is required," he said.

Similarly, Mr Taban Magidu, who operates a *kizindalo* in Bwendero in Bujjumba Sub-county, said operators are willing to comply with regulations if properly guided. He added that megaphone operations provide livelihoods to owners, technicians, and announcers.

Daily Monitor has established that some *bizindalo* operators, particularly in Kalangala Town Council, pay local taxes as part of efforts by authorities to regulate their activities.

Ms Barbra Nabunya, the Kalangala town clerk, said the council uses taxation and operational guidelines, such as restricting operating hours and controlling noise levels, to manage the systems.

"Those whom residents complain about or fail to adhere to set operating times are stopped from operating," she said.

During the meeting, Kalangala Resident District Commissioner, Fred Badda, called on the commission to first sensitise leaders and residents in Kalangala about the legal requirements before taking punitive action. He noted that the *bizindalo* are sometimes used during emergencies, including pirate attacks on fishermen, to alert landing site communities and mobilise first responders.

Badda also emphasised the need for improved telecommunications infrastructure in the district.

"What we need is improvement in network coverage for community radios and mobile telephones so that information can easily reach the population," he added.

Sources indicate that UCC officials during the meeting said that although the commission remains constrained by limited resources to enforce the ban fully, the decision to lift restrictions on the megaphone radios rests with the UCC not the RDC.

In February 2017, the 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.