

OPINION

Well done Ugandans

On Tuesday, hundreds of thousands of Ugandans went out to vote for their Local Council 1 (LC1) chairmen in a poll which while it had its share of excitement and fracas was a successful one.

In 60,000 villages around the country, people voted for their chosen candidate by lining up behind them, a throwback to elections in the 1980s.

The Government said they did not have the money to carry out a secret ballot election of LC1 chairpersons, which has been pending for 17 years. Civil society was highly critical of the procedure arguing that it would not constitute a free and fair election, if it happened.

The ruling party's secretary general, Justin Kasule Lumumba, declared that judging by preliminary results, the NRM had won the election by a mile.

That maybe as it is, but the true winners of this election were the people who participated in it. The ones who presented themselves as candidates. Those who turned up to vote and the general public.

We may not have had a secret ballot, but distilled to its basic ingredient, that the people got to choose, to express themselves in a matter that is important to them.

Since all of us can not represent our people, the right to choose who represents us, therefore, becomes an important one. And in a society where the public services do not work perfectly and even more important function of our democracy.

It may not be with all the fancy bells and whistles the paragons of democracy would have wanted. The election may not have heard moving speeches delivered with eloquence and panache. And we may question whether people can choose freely, when their choice is exposed as they line up in broad daylight behind their chosen one and not another candidate. But it has happened.

We were not looking for perfection, but for a result we can live with. No doubt there is room for improvement, even within the context of inadequate resources. Hopefully these will be kept as learning points for the next time, hopefully before 17 years are up.

Well done Ugandans.

New Vision

Editorial Tel: 0414 337000/337139/337125;
Fax: 0414 235843; P. O. BOX 9815 Kampala.
Email: news@newvision.co.ug;
guestwriter@newvision.co.ug

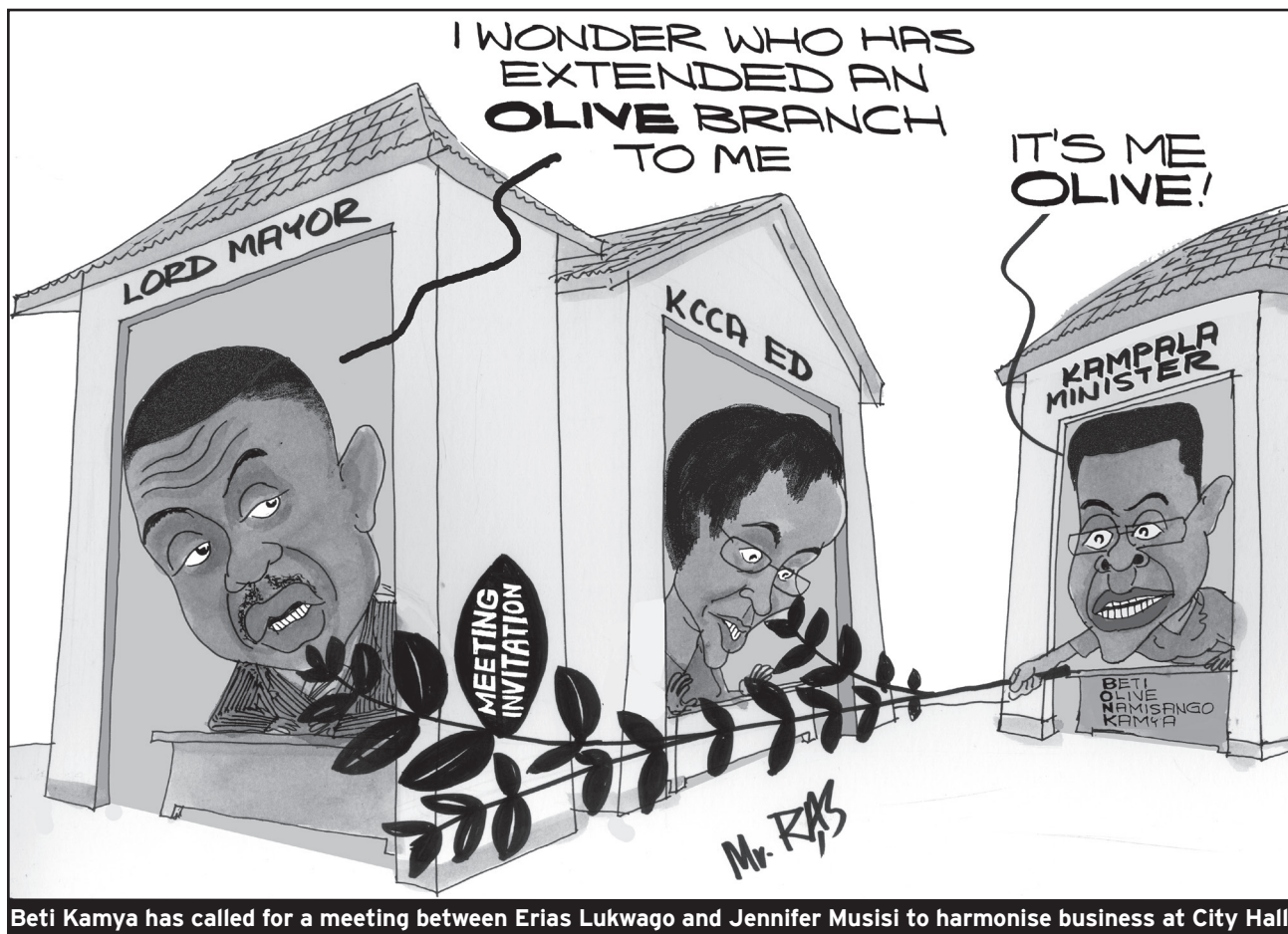
Marketing/Advertising Tel: 0414337000
Fax: 0414 232050

Email: advertising@newvision.co.ug
Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC);
Company listed on the Uganda Securities Exchange

www.newvision.co.ug

For subscriptions/bulk buying

Call 0774732913/0414337245/ 0772446204
Email subscriptions@newvision.co.ug



Beti Kamyá has called for a meeting between Erias Lukwago and Jennifer Musisi to harmonise business at City Hall

Dr. Sylvia Baluka, lecturer

The dangers associated with indoor air pollution

Reports of household members found dead the next day after they went to bed leaving beans cooking on a charcoal stove in their poorly ventilated house (*muzigo*) have often left the public in shock as to what could have happened and sometimes speculating the possibility of foul play.

In May 2010, it was reported that odorless carbon monoxide fumes from a charcoal stove killed two teenagers in Budaka town. They died of suffocation after they left a charcoal stove burning in their tiny room.

Leaving a charcoal stove burning inside a small house with poor ventilation implies incomplete combustion due to shortage of oxygen resulting into production of a variety of poisonous chemicals and gases particularly carbon monoxide that is poisonous.

Carbon monoxide, if breathed in large quantities, can lead to acute poisoning resulting into sudden death. Whereas if carbon monoxide is breathed in small quantities for a long period of time it can lead to chronic poisoning with several health consequences, including difficult breathing or breathing complications and cancer.

Once carbon monoxide is breathed in, it replaces oxygen in the blood resulting into shortage of oxygen (anoxia), organ failure and eventual death.

Carbon monoxide is a gas produced by burning fuel or gas, oil, kerosene, wood or charcoal in a poorly ventilated area resulting into incomplete combustion.

Besides using charcoal stoves behind closed doors in poorly ventilated houses, carbon monoxide poisoning in our homes can arise from car engines or other engines left running in closed spaces such as garages from where carbon monoxide can accumulate and leak into the house. Even sitting in an idling car in an open garage can be dangerous.



Carbon monoxide, if breathed in large quantities, can lead to acute poisoning resulting into sudden death

If fuel burning appliances are not installed or used appropriately or properly, they can produce and build up dangerous levels of carbon monoxide inside the house.

Fuel burning appliances used in inside the house when doors and windows are closed or without chimneys can lead to production of carbon monoxide inside the house.

Many people from developing and developed countries die from accidental acute carbon monoxide poisoning every year many times in their sleep without the opportunity to access treatment from health centres.

It is estimated that globally, about two million die prematurely every year from illnesses linked to indoor air pollution resulting from the use of solid fuels. Hence the need to invest in precautionary and preventive measures.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can be prevented by employing measures such as not using a burning charcoal stove inside the house, when doors and windows are closed, not leaving a car running inside the garage even if the garage door is open, not using a kerosene stove in an enclosed space and not using a generator or any other engine in enclosed areas or in a house when windows and doors are closed.

Installation of detectors near sleeping areas may be of help where alarms go off to alert the household occupants when the carbon monoxide concentration levels reach toxic levels.

Although indoor air pollution is quite common and incidences pointing to carbon monoxide acute poisoning and sudden death occur frequently in Uganda besides the wide spread exposure to chronic carbon monoxide poisoning, especially by the rural women who cook on fire wood in poorly ventilated kitchens, this issue has not received the attention it deserves and commensurate public education to avert future occurrences.

The writer is the president of the Uganda Veterinary Association and a Board Member of the National Drug Authority