

# Why President Museveni won

By Umaru Kashaka

**A**s the election campaigns headed into the home stretch, it was clear that the National Resistance Movement presidential candidate Yoweri Museveni, the old man with a hat, would carry the day.

After the elections, held on February 18, Museveni, in power since 1986, emerged winner with 60.75% of the votes, while his main challenger, Dr. Kizza Besigye of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) got 35.37%.

However, Besigye, who is a four-time presidential contender, in whom many pro-change voters had vested their hopes, refused to concede defeat, saying Ugandans had seen "the most fraudulent electoral process".

He described the polls as a sham. Despite his protests, analysts *New Vision* spoke to say Museveni's victory was due to many factors:

## Opinion polls

All the opinion polls had also shown Museveni consistently in the lead with more than 50%. They included Vision Group (71%), *Daily Monitor* (57%), Research World International (51) and Ipsos (53%). Independent researcher and political analyst Dr. Frederick Golooba-Mutebi said he would have been surprised if Museveni had got 40% of the total votes cast in the general elections.

"I work with Afrobarometer which conducts opinion polls and opinion polls we conducted during the presidential campaigns showed that Museveni's popularity was over 60% and our polls are done properly, so I am not surprised (by Museveni's wide margin)," he told *New Vision*.

## Trust

Analysts argue that the presidential results in these elections meant that the majority of Ugandans still trust Museveni to correct some of the basic weaknesses of his regime.

They reasoned that Museveni's re-election was due to the fact that he had delivered on everyday bread and butter issues. They also credited him for the prevailing peace and stability which they said most voters would not want to gamble with.

In addition, they said Museveni represents predictability and a sense of continuity of the gains made since 1986.

## Service delivery

For some, Ugandans still value the various policies introduced by Museveni's government such as decentralisation, the Universal Primary and Secondary Education programmes. Analysts argue that free education was certainly a voter catcher for the President, especially in the rural areas. In the health sector, the widespread immunisation coverage against polio and measles, along with establishment of more health facilities also endeared Museveni especially to women in rural areas.

According to analysts, it was always going to be next to impossible for opposition candidates to get the President to lose votes by attacking him over service delivery. The state minister

for information technology, Nyombi

Thembo, says challenges in the health services notwithstanding, the NRM government over the past 30 years has made large strides in the sector.

He says their government had reduced infant mortality to below 60, put close to 650,000 Ugandans on ARVs, rehabilitated, re-equipped and built new health centres up to sub-county level (80%).

"And policy and regulatory framework that has encouraged the private sector participation in provision of health services," Thembo added.

## Women empowerment

The observers said Museveni had delivered on affirmative action in favour of women. Since 1986, the NRM Government embarked on a deliberate effort to empower women and provide them with equal opportunities as

## NRM HAS A VERY LARGE NETWORK OF SUPPORTERS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, UNLIKE OTHER PARTIES

their male counterparts to take up leadership positions in Government as well as in the judiciary, legislative and other organs of the Government.

In her book, *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*, Dr. Sylvia Tamale, the first female dean at Makerere University's faculty of law, describes the position of the Ugandan woman in the pre-NRM era as that of imposed powerlessness. Back then, she observes, and perhaps even today, it is believed that women were not supposed to speak up or express their opinions in public, a view that is deeply embedded in African patriarchal values, which relegate women to the affairs of the home and family.

Tamale notes that with the Government's 1989 affirmative action policy, guaranteeing the election of a minimum of 39 women district representatives to the national legislature, the gender dynamics shifted in favour of women. During his term as Chancellor of Makerere University, Museveni initiated the affirmative action policy by requesting Makerere University to come up with measures to increase female students' admission.

This initiative resulted in the Senate of Makerere University passing a policy on awarding 1.5 points to female applicants. This policy has increased female admissions from 25% in 1990/91 to the current over 40% in most university programmes.

## TDA collapse

Analysts argue that the failure by the Opposition coalition, The Democratic Alliance (TDA), to agree on a single candidate rendered Museveni's re-election an increasingly likely outcome.

Dr. Ronald Mayambala, a lecturer at the department of public law at Makerere University, says if Besigye had been able to get the entire Opposition on his side, he would have galvanized the opposition support.

"But when Go Forward TDA (U) went to Amama Mbabazi (who stood as an independent and only managed 1.43% of the total votes cast), he had to rely on FDC structures, which are not very firm," says Mayambala.

Weighing in on the debate, veteran journalist and consultant, Angelo Izama, describes the failure by TDA to front a joint candidate as a strategic blunder. "Since no one came out of TDA, they lost the opportunity to frame the election as between Museveni and the opposition, but not one between Museveni and Besigye."

The fact that the TDA had proved unable to agree on a joint candidate had led some to conclude that the opposition was more interested in ousting Museveni and acquiring power for themselves, than in bringing about substantive change.

This perception, analysts say, was further fuelled by the fact that both Mbabazi and Besigye are former NRM leaders.

Observers also say Besigye's performance in Buganda and the north could have improved

with the support of former Buganda premier Mulwanyamuli Ssemwogerere and other DP members like MPs Medard Ssegona and Mathias Mpuuga and party president Norbert Mao. Ssemwogerere and group backed Mbabazi, a former prime minister and NRM secretary general.

## Defiance campaign

NRM deputy secretary general and Nwoya County MP Richard Todwong says Besigye played right into their hands when he talked of a "defiance campaign". On his campaign trail he repeatedly said the election would be won "not by compliance but by defiance." He had vowed not to go to court if there was vote-rigging, saying this would be sorted using people power.

Stressing the fact that many Ugandans appear to be put off by the possibility of violence, Todwong says: "Ugandans need peace and that talk of defiance, of violence brought people to us."

Commentators argue that there is significant fear among many Ugandans in regard to change and that is why the majority did not vote for Besigye, who had campaigned on a platform of radical change.

One voter, Patrick Muhumuza, a resident of Bitekero sub-county in Mitooma district, recently said: "People think when they vote opposition leaders, they will disorganise the peace. Consequently they veered towards the devil they know instead of the untested angel!" Pundits argue that in a country that has never seen peaceful change of government, the fear of the unknown is strong and people need reassurance during campaigns that change will not bring instability.

## Flip-flopping on reforms

Of the 15 million voters registered, the NRM said it had 10 million registered party voters in the primaries.

Izama says Besigye had a torrid time convincing these NRM members to throw their weight behind him considering the fact that he himself had discouraged his own followers from participating in electoral process without electoral reforms.

Following his selection as FDC presidential flag bearer last September, there had been concern in some quarters within FDC that he would lead the party into a boycott of the elections.

"They had run an almost a two-year campaign of no reforms, no elections and he (Besigye) had said he would not be on the ballot. By doing that they made a strategic blunder because not only did their members not anticipate he would not be on the ballot, many kept away from registering (for national IDs) because FDC had contested the electoral process itself much earlier," argues Izama.

## A mass party

The NRM is the only party that has organised party structures right from village to national level. According to party officials, NRM has 30 leaders in every village.

With 60,000 villages, it means NRM has 1.8 million leaders at village level. They have 30 leaders for each of the 7,500 parishes, hence the total of 225,000 and 30 leaders in each of the 1,500 sub-counties or town councils, bringing the number of NRM leaders at that level to 45,000. At district level, there are 4,000, bringing the total to 2,074,000 NRM leaders.

"If each of the two million NRM leaders turned up to vote with five other supporters, you would have 12 million votes for the NRM. With that strategy, how can President Museveni lose?" asks Moses Byaruhanga, a senior presidential advisor on political affairs.

**ANALYSTS ARGUE THAT THE FAILURE BY THE OPPOSITION COALITION, THE DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE, TO AGREE ON A SINGLE CANDIDATE, RENDERED MUSEVENI'S RE-ELECTION AN INCREASINGLY LIKELY OUTCOME**