My Perspectives on Ibanda Municipality NRM Parliamentary Primaries

By Professor Venansius Baryamureeba

Normally, for candidates interested in political offices underground campaigns span a period of at least 3 years. This notwithstanding, on 17th July 2020 I announced my intentions to contest for Ibanda Municipality MP seat. So, basically, between 17th July 2020 and 4th September 2020, I had less than one and half months to campaign and turn voters and opinion leaders to my side. So, I entered the race well knowing that the results could go either way.

From the day I announced my candidature, most leaders and voters in Ibanda Municipality told me that I had joined the race late. The reasons advanced among others were:

(i) That they had already aligned themselves around certain candidates and in some cases made commitments that were impossible to break;

(ii) That it was hard to turn against some candidates they had already committed to support in an election where they will line up behind candidates instead of secret ballot;

(iii) That due to COVID-19, it was not possible for some organised groups to gather their followers (potential voters) again and align them towards a new candidate whom they believed had a better manifesto for the Municipality;

(iv) That due to COVID-19, I would not be able to effectively campaign and appeal to all voters in the Municipality before voting in September 2020.

That in view of the above, they suggested that I needed to buy off key members of campaign teams of the other candidates to be able to penetrate the campaign structures at village level. They also suggested that I should focus on running as an independent candidate in January / February 2021 since that would be under secret ballot and they would vote for me. These suggestions were against the values I stand for. I believe in institutions and thus I cannot run as an independent candidate when I am a card holding member of NRM and I also don't believe in promoting corrupt tendencies.

My manifesto was about Ibanda Municipality total transformation that involved ensuring quality education and health services, addressing unemployment through provision of employment opportunities in country and abroad and addressing lack of affordable financial services through fundraising and resource mobilisation. I had neither the intention of buying off campaign teams of my opponents nor did I have the intention of buying votes.

So, my team focused on campaigning among the voters through radio and small gatherings in villages and we were able to reach more than 90% of the voters in a period of less than a month. I highly commend my team. Though, in the last week towards elections on 4th September 2020, my campaign team came up with a proposal of consolidating our votes across the Municipality that involved buying votes at a price of between UGX 1,000 and UGX 10,000. I told them that I cannot do what other candidates are alleged to be doing. So, I flatly rejected the proposal because handouts / bribes to voters were against what I stood for in my manifesto of transforming Ibanda Municipality.

I am very happy that I never bought any vote. I was amazed to see voters on voting day being bribed with UGX 1000 next to the voting venue to vote for a certain candidate in the Ibanda District Woman MP race.

As much as the voters across the municipality loved my manifesto and expressed a lot of support for me, I understand why they voted the way they did. The key factor was that they had already committed and was not easy for them to change to another candidate when the voting was by lining up behind the preferred candidate in the open. Maybe if it had been voting by secret ballot the results could have been different.

Despite the short period of less than one and half months for the whole campaign period, miracles did happen. Despite the pressure of lining up behind candidates some villages in the municipality went against all odds and voted for me overwhelmingly as their best candidate. They believed in my manifesto and I believe in them too and will support them to become model villages. These included Kikandure, Kasharara and Rwenchwamba.

For the good of the broader Ibanda Municipality, I will hand over my manifesto to the NRM MP Flag Bearer of Ibanda Municipality for implementation. So, I call upon all people of Ibanda Municipality to rally behind and work with the NRM Flag Bearer.

For my campaign team and supporters across the Municipality, I want you to know that what we achieved in the short period is commendable and it has provided me with a platform of a villages that I shall work with as part of giving back to Ibanda and turn them into model villages that will serve as examples to the rest of the Municipality and the country.

I will also focus most of my time on contributing to the growth and development of NRM and the country at large in areas where my expertise is required.

Disclaimer; These are my views, beliefs and perspectives but I respect individual decisions of different political players. To each their own! And at this juncture, I wish all continuing candidates successful and peaceful nominations, campaigns and Elections.