

## Is the Tanzanian National Electoral Commission credible?

*As confusion surrounds the 2015 Tanzania elections, Chambi Chachage examines the role played by the National Electoral Commission so far.*

**“There is a grey area between incompetency and conspiracy” – Election Observer**

If a palm wine tapper is praised, he/she dilutes it with water. This **Swahili proverb** captures what has been happening in the aftermath of Tanzania’s General Elections that seemed to be held freely and fairly on Sunday, 25 October 2015. No sooner had the local and international observers hailed the National Electoral Commission (NEC) than the political parties started lodging complaints about irregularities and/or rigging.

Headed by a retired judge, Damian Lubuva, NEC has been sluggish in announcing the results. As **Elsie Eyakuze** aptly noted a day after the voting, one could hardly comprehend how, in this day and age, we could be down to one man reading from a spreadsheet. To make matters worse, the initial focus seemed to be more on announcing results from the constituencies that the ruling party – CCM – was leading.



Damian Lubuva is the head of Tanzania’s National Electoral Commission

As such, conspiracy theories abound. The presidential candidate of the main opposition party, CHADEMA, has publicly claimed that the delay tactic is NEC’s gimmick geared towards preparing people ‘psychologically’ to just accept defeat no matter how unjust. By people, it seems, he is referring to supporters of a coalition of four opposition parties known as UKAWA that endorsed him as their sole candidate.

Hoseana Lunogelo, however, views it positively: “I think it is a commendable strategy to ‘manage expectations’ from the youthful voters supporting Ukawa who were promised that ‘Ukawa will be the outright winner before noon on election day.’” So, he insists, “by showing them that they are trailing from the start is part of a clever strategy to diffuse tension otherwise we could have seen streets already full of youth celebrating victory even when less than a quarter of the votes have been counted.”



While we have been watching what Elsie Eyakuze refers to as a public institution fighting an uphill battle over the legitimacy of results, CCM's machinery has been churning out projected results so efficiently. How come, one wonders, the ruling party seems so well equipped than NEC? And why is CHADEMA 'inept' this time around?

The answer, it seems, is twofold. First, CCM's tech-savvy 'spokesperson' – January Makamba – who also happens to be the Government's Deputy Minister of Communication, Science and Technology has marshaled an Obama-like machinery of campaign and information bombardment. For instance, I had never subscribed to CCM's listserv but both my yahoo addresses have been receiving 'his/its' statements.

At the end of each statement there are these words: "You received this email as part of our network. Click here to UNSUBSCRIBE." Tellingly, the statement that January Makamba sent a day after the voting had a section that translates to "CCM's Results" whereby he claimed that, according to the results that were posted on voting booths, up to that point CCM had won 176 out of 264 seats in the regions their party had tallied.

Probably aware that it would be so problematic to also give their projected figures for CCM's presidential candidate, he shrewdly stated that the parliamentary trend was in tandem with NEC's then ongoing announcement of presidential votes. In other words, January Makamba was simply saying their candidate was 'winning big'. On twitter he did not restrain himself that much when he tweeted, on 25 October 2015, that on 29 October 2015 CCM's candidate 'would/will' be announced as "The President Elect."

Expectedly, the tweet triggered a furore, leading the co-founder of an opposition party known as ACT, [Kitila Mkumbo](#) to thus tweet on the same day: "I have also asked to exercise restraint." Understandably, the deputy minister responsible for communication thus kept going on the 'defensive': "For [a] party to say it will win is allowed (all parties been saying that since Aug). Announcing tallies not allowed."

Meanwhile – and this is the second reason for the contrast between NEC, CCM and CHADEMA – UKAWA's machinery staggered, apparently, because the police captured its tech-team that includes one respected young Tanzanian activist, [Frederick Fussi](#). The contentious matter is in the courts hence beyond the scope of this analysis.

One thus finds it ironic that now even CCM seems to be complaining about NEC. In its latest statement dated 28 October 2015, January Makamba claims that those in charge of the following constituencies that they lost 'messed up' the elections: Iringa Mjini, Mikumi, Ndanda and Kawe. Some folks in [WhatsApp groups](#), which have proved to be a main online site of campaigns and contestations over the elections, claim that this is a ploy, by the ruling party, to play the game of the opposition party.

In such a setup, NEC is indeed facing an uphill task to safeguard its credibility. But for many a critic, it lost its legitimacy long time ago when the constitutional reform process that could have led to an independent electoral commission process faltered. It is also ironic that UKAWA, as self-proclaimed movement for the 'Constitution of the People', was a product – indeed a byproduct – of the faltering that favoured CCM.

No matter how just NEC's current chair and [new director of elections](#) were, they are new wines in an old bottle. The wine taper may have not diluted it. But who can tell?

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