

By Staff Writer

It was announced April 10th that Pascal Nyamulinda had resigned as Kigali city mayor just over a year after he was elected. The city council chairman Athanase Rutabingwa said the resignation letter indicated the mayor resigned for personal reasons. A new mayor is expected to be appointed or elected within three months of the resignation.

It was clear from November that all was not well at city hall when the Executive Secretary Eng Didier Sagashya was suddenly sacked and a few days later detained by police on charges that included alleged insubordination. The sudden fate of Eng Sagashya showed that a power struggle was underway and indeed to those closely following the city hall politics, it was no surprise that Nyamulinda would not last long after that.

Nyamulinda was elected mayor by the City Council following the departure of Mukaruliza Monique who had an underwhelming short tenure. She has since been appointed ambassador to Zambia. Nyamulinda had previously served as the head of the National Identification project. His emergence as mayor was a surprise since he was not a typical politician but more of a state bureaucratic operator.

At the same time Nyamulinda was elected, Sagashya resigned his position as Director General of Rwanda Housing Authority (RHA) and applied for the post of executive secretary of the City of Kigali.

At RHA, he was among those who oversaw the completion of the construction of Kigali Convention Centre, the country's biggest infrastructure project so far. Sagashya had previously worked at the land centre being among those who oversaw the nationwide land registration process. Like Nyamulinda, he arrived at city hall with a big reputation and a promising career.

This was supposed to be a dream team, but sources indicate that it never became a team as the two seemed to hold different power centers. In the end, the careers of both seem to be in peril.

System of indirect elections

The short lived tenures of the two officials at city hall has provoked renewed debate on whether the system that appointed them was itself structurally weak that

inevitably would lead to a clash. A mayor is elected through indirect elections system and has to be a councilor rather than universal adult suffrage as is common in major world cities. This has meant mayors have no direct mandate and manifesto agreements with the citizens, significantly reducing their power. It also explains why it is easy to force them out as has happened repeatedly in Kigali and many other districts since they have no independent constituencies/power bases. Wouldn't it have been more sustainable if the mayor was elected by the masses and appointed his team to work with including the executive secretary in situations when the post is not held by a long standing bureaucrat.

What is clear is that leaders of decentralized entities are designed more to implement central government policies at a local level rather than originate their own manifestos directly with the citizens.

The responsiveness of city and district officials to citizens' concerns remains heavily debated on media particularly when issues of expropriation for both private and public infrastructure in the supposed implementation of the city master plan.

Case in point is the current dispute over the relocation of residents of Kagando slum (Bannyahe) in Nyarutarama, where city officials are siding with a private investor to relocate property owners rather than give them equivalent value in cash.

Gasabo mayor, Stephen Rwamurangwa was quoted by KT Press saying that the property owners would not be given money because they would use it to build another slum, though it sounded bizarre since no one can build without a permit anywhere in Kigali. The lawyer representing the residents has accused officials of coercion and dictatorship in a letter to the minister of local government.