

KHWISERO

Litmus test for university dons

Story by JOHN SHILITSA , May 31 2007

KHWISERO, 2002 results:

Julius Arunga	Narc	10,714
Wilfred Katibi	Kanu	2,502
Laban Anziya	Ford-P	1,938
Wilson Opembe	KPP	586
David Ashioya	Ford-A	421
Abutti Okwirry	SDP	78
Registered voters:		32,923

Khwisero constituency could have one of the most interesting contests in the country, with scholars abandoning lecture halls to campaign for the parliamentary seat.



They include former Kenyatta University (KU) vice-chancellor George Eshiwani, Prof Joseph Ombete and Prof George Aseka, as well as other highly educated people. All of them want to unseat the incumbent, Mr Julius Arunga.

Others include Mr John Abuko (an engineer who works with the United Nations Lifeline), former civil servant William Eshifindi, Kitui district officer Antony Kisa, a Kenya Airways director, Mr Dickson Kativi, Narc-K executive director David Sande Oyolo, businessmen Evans Bulimo and Henry Moi, and councillor Ann Kataka of Kisa

Central ward.

Mr Barrack Muluka of Mvule Publishers — a big rival of Mr Arunga — will also be trying his luck again after he lost the nomination to the incumbent in 2002 polls.

Khwisero is an agriculturally productive region yet residents rely on Government subsidies and relief food.

Mr Arunga got the Narc Kenya nomination with much ease. Former MP Odongo Aywa was sick at the time. He died later.

The constituency lags behind in development, with a poverty index of 60 per cent, although it has produced many educated people compared to neighbouring areas.

Prof Eshiwani, who was KU vice-chancellor for a long time, is optimistic of winning the seat. His supporters say he is down-to-earth and approaches issues without the airs of a scholar.

He is now a fish farmer and has converted his land into an exhibition to teach people

and institutions new skills.

Central Organisation of Trade Unions (Cotu) secretary general Francis Atwoli has also been mentioned as a likely contender, but close friends say he could back Prof Eshiwani, who is a close friend.

Lack of health facilities, dilapidated roads and poorly equipped schools are some of the issues the contenders are likely to raise in the campaigns.

Voters blame Mr Arunga for not putting in place strategic plans to empower them economically and to reduce the level of poverty, which has resulted in many pupils dropping out of school. Khwisero division performs poorly in national examinations every year.

Voters say millions of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) money disbursed to the area have been mismanaged at the expense of development.

Mr Arunga at one time introduced tea as a cash crop but people refused to buy seedlings from a tea nursery established on a section of his land.

Residents complain of having to travel long distances to Yala, Kakamega and Mumias for medical services. The nearest hospital is Mwhila Mission, where patients have to pay to be attended.

There are many youths who scored high marks in examinations but can't pursue higher or tertiary education due to lack of money.

Mr Arunga found himself in trouble at a rally in Khwisero market last year when he asked parents to carry their own burdens.

Mr Muluka often accompanies ODM-K presidential aspirants Musalia Mudavadi, Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka in their visit to the area and is seen to understand the problems of constituents.

Mr Arunga seems undecided on which party to defend the seat despite sorting out his differences with Ford-K chairman Musikari Kombo.

ODM-K and Narc-K are the key parties in Khwisero. Mr Eshifindi, the Kanu branch chairman, has said he will contest on his party's ticket.

A combination of Mr Abuko, Mr Eshifindi and university dons Ombete and Aseka seem to be worrying the other opponents.

Most of the aspirants are expected to decamp if they lose the ODM-K primaries. They could switch to less popular parties, such as New Ford-K, Kaddu and Kenda. Prof Eshiwani and Mr Muluka are allied to ODM-K.

Mr Abuko seems to have the blessings of many youth and women. Mr Eshifindi will be taking advantage of his solo efforts to repair Sigalagala-Khwisero road, which initially was impassable and used to claim lives. He says Khwisero people know his

development record.

Mr Abuko said his first challenge would be to eradicate poverty and give the people clean water.

The battle could be difficult for Mr Arunga, whose opponents are well endowed financially.

Source: NATION