The Ugandan elements of selfishness and sense of entitlement

It was from William Congreve's 1697 play *The Mourning Bride* that the world got the loaded saying "hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." The same may be said of a Ugandan politician when the voter denies them their vote. It happened to Yusuf Nsibambi, the outgoing MP of Mawokota South Constituency.

In a corrupt country like Uganda, where the social safety net is almost non-existent, the elected MP is looked at as the government. He pays school, hospital, wedding, and funeral expenses as a matter of common sense.

Nsibambi did a lot of this. He extended power to the area, erected street lights, established public toilets, collected garbage, repaired roads, and, importantly, paid tuition and upkeep for over 60 students, mostly in higher institutions of learning.

The voters gave their votes to someone else, leaving Nsibambi in distant third place. What miffed him most is that part of the campaign was dominated by religious sectarianism that labelled him as a person trying to push an Islamic agenda. Nsibambi, like Congreve's scorned woman, treated with contempt, rejection, and betrayal, reacted angrily. He cut off the electricity supply he had extended to the area using 'personal funds.' The bursary scheme has also ended, leaving many in limbo.

There are so many MPs who are in this situation. Even after bending over backward, voters forget quickly and move on very fast. It is one of the reasons why every five years Uganda's legislature loses 70 percent. It saddens many MPs.

Yet there is something very peculiar about Ugandans that makes them very amiable, especially to foreigners. It is cliché that Ugandans are very hospitable people. But underneath the veneer is a dark side many get to learn the hard way. The elements of boundless greed, deceit, selfishness abounds and a misguided sense of entitlement.

Almost everyone has their own story. The Ugandan in the diaspora working three jobs, who sends money home to build a house, but ends up being short changed. The relative/friend for whom tuition is paid, or the orphan looked after, only for them to rudely turn against their benefactors. The one who is helped with a job but ends up stealing or cheating their charitable employer. Or the story of the person lent money at their lowest moment but refuses to pay because they feel it is unreasonable for a rich creditor to demand what is due to them from a poor debtor.

A culture very sinister, has grown overtime from our hunter and gatherer days. The men of valour who went to hunt in the wild, were looked at with expectation and anxiety, as the fenders for the ones who stayed at home.

The one at home got the privilege of being fed. They, especially women, reciprocated. They complimented by taking on the responsibility of house chores, child upbringing, and cooking.

In the modern times such privileges are regarded as rights often demanded for and enjoyed without responsibility or any form of reciprocation. People are there to demand without discipline or decorum like they are owed. This is the beginning of the development of a misguided sense of entitlement. This provision to such people without accountability on their part eventually weakens character. People lose the sense of worth and self-reliance and become leeches. They become lazy and easy to buy, bribe, compromise, and sway.

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Nicholas Sengoba
Plainly speaking

That is why the Ugandan voter is not only very unreliable but also very demanding in a manner that is akin to blackmail.

But even when one moves away from material things to what in Uganda is known as 'the struggle to remove the dictator', it is the same story. Someone else must bell the cat while the others sit pretty and wait to sail scot-free into the 'new Uganda.'

Many people come to the inbox with 'hot information' for publication. When you ask them if you should quote them, they back out claiming they will lose their job, yet their children are still young.

Worse still, they fear that 'these people' might kill them! Many times, these are people who may not even buy the paper to support what they call 'the good work of journalists.' They want you to stand in the line of fire and if you don't, they claim you or the paper has been paid to go slow on issues of the regime. Uganda has a very mean public spirit that does not afford people to come together and play their part for a common good. It is mostly petty, parochial personal interests, then they move on.

That is why every after an election the Opposition is faulted for failing to cause change, even by people who are too lazy to wake up on a public holiday to go and vote for change.

Result? The whole concept of leadership has been distorted irreparably. A leader is not supposed to provide material things per se. They share a vision for people to follow, be self-reliant, useful to themselves, and society. Leaders should guide and motivate people to be better. Since this is not yet possible, those who offer themselves to lead make the populist and opportunistic mistake of promising more than they can offer or are even supposed to offer. You have to be very wealthy and solid to claim you will personally improve the health, education, roads, and general well-being of the people, yet your primary responsibility is to legislate and lobby. So the demands come thick, fast and overwhelm many. Unless one is corrupt and has unfettered access to public finance, they are bound to fail.

Any failure to give more to the ever-demanding voter leads them blindly to promises and false hope because they are entitled to be given. It is the dilemma that leads them to keep moving from leader to leader but end up with the same results.

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