

The lessons that stay with Kalinaki



BY CHARLOTTE NTULUME

When I think about Daniel Kalinaki and his long journey in journalism, my mind almost always goes back to Makerere, to those early days when many of us first knew him as a student.

There was something about him even then. He was focused, yes, but also self-assured in a way that made you pay attention.

He stood out as one of the stronger students in his class, and some years later, after completing his Masters degree in the United Kingdom, he returned to the department as a part-time member of staff.

At the time, the Department of Mass Communication, now the Department of Journalism and Communication (DJC) leaned quite a bit on young graduates who showed promise. Daniel fit right in, but there was something about him that set him apart.

And not just because he worked hard.

He was bold. I remember that. He would ask questions that others sometimes held back, occasionally pushing at how things were done in the department, even at the university.

Not in a disruptive way, but in a thoughtful, probing way that suggested he was already thinking be-

yond the immediate. Looking back now, it is hard not to see the same instinct that would later define his work in the newsroom.

He was involved in teaching a number of journalism courses, and many of us remember how dependable he was. That mattered a great deal in a department that was often stretched. The few of us who interacted with him in those early years remember a seriousness, a willingness to learn, and a deep respect for the craft of journalism.

There was also something about the way Daniel spoke. Softly. You often had to lean in slightly to catch what he was saying. But when you did, it was always worth it.

One moment that has stayed with me over the years says a lot about who he is. I once went to see him at his office in Namuwongo [Monitor Publications Ltd head offices on 8th Street Industrial Area, Kampala]. As we talked, I flipped through my notebook, and a blank fuel receipt slipped out. Now, as many of us know, a blank receipt can easily be read the wrong way. Daniel paused, looked at me, and simply said, "Charlotte, I am so disappointed that you have that receipt."

That was all. I did not need to explain anything, and he did not press further. But the message was clear. From that day on, I have never kept blank receipts. That firm, non-negotiable stance against even the smallest hint of impropriety is some-

thing he has carried consistently, and it has stayed with me.

Even after he moved fully into newsroom life, he never quite drifted away from the department. He remained present, sometimes in small ways, sometimes in very significant ones. One of those has been his role in keeping the Tebere-Mudin Award going, the award given each year



by Monitor Publications Ltd to the best performing journalism student. It was established in memory of Richard Tebere and Rashid Mudin, who were senior editors at *The Monitor* and died in a car accident in Karamoja in 1998 while participating in a cannonball rally.

Over time, Daniel became the person we turned to on this, and he never let it slip. Year after year, he showed up for it. And it has meant a lot to the department, and especially to the students who receive it.

He has also kept his connection with students in more direct ways. He comes back. He speaks. He shares. Whether at the Media Convention or in guest lectures, he has a way of talking about journalism that is both honest and grounding. He does not romanticise the profession, but he also does not strip it of its meaning. And students can tell. You often see it in the conversations that follow, that something has clicked.

And then there is his depth. Daniel is deeply reflective, in a way that does not always announce itself immediately. I had the opportunity to interview him for a research project at one point, and I remember coming away from that conversation

seeing my own work differently. He opened up angles I had not considered.

There is a kind of natural brilliance there; present, but never forced. It shows up when it needs to, and when it does, it draws you in. You find yourself thinking more carefully, asking better questions.

There is something else that stands out when I think about that period. A number of us who worked with Daniel at the time also had a foot in the media in one way or another.

But over the years, many moved on, some quite early. Daniel stayed. He held fort.

Through the changes, the pressures, and all that comes with newsroom life, he remained. And I think, for many of us, that has been a real source of pride.

I have followed his journey over the years with a sense of pride. From those early days in the department to his leadership within the Nation Media Group, his path has been steady, shaped by hard work and a clear sense of purpose. He has made his mark, and he has done it in a way that feels true to who he has always been.

Now, as he steps away from the newsroom, at least in the formal sense, you find yourself hoping this is not really a stepping back, but just a shift. We would certainly not mind seeing more of him again on this side. There is a lot he carries that cannot be taught from books, and it would be good for our students to keep learning from it.

But for now, it is enough to say this: he has done well. And he has remained connected to where he started in ways that matter. We at DJC wish him well in what comes next. We have a feeling he is not quite done yet.