



Charles Onyango-Obbo argues that the 2050 generation will not ask whether we handed out tractors. They will ask whether we built the system that allowed them to own one – and a home besides.

In my column, "A 300% rise in divorce reveals the revolution Museveni lost", (*Daily Monitor*, February 18, 2026), I argued that in a country that has changed as radically as Uganda has over the last 40 years, with one of the world's youngest populations, the best way to manage it is as a "platform" State.

Today, its ruling grandees see the State as a patron, a father figure who hands out hoes, brown envelopes and security in exchange for bowed obedience. But the 17-year-old Ugandan of today requires a platform State: a stable, high-speed smart tech and legally transparent environment where the citizen is the developer, not the end-user.

By 2050, when the pioneers of the early 1980s Bush War are historical footnotes, Uganda's success will depend on whether we left it to the whims of a patron State that eventually starved it, or built a liberal social-democratic platform that empowered its people to thrive. It is easy to mouth off when someone else is expected to solve the problem. Those who demand "constructive criticism" and "alternative solutions" are right. So what might a practical platform solution look like?

At a wider philosophical level, this is not a call for a Ugandan State that does everything, but one that provides the base layer. It is a mix of robust public support for essentials and a cut-throat free market for the rest. This State does not give you a fish, or even a fishing rod; it ensures the pond is clean, fishing rights are legally protected, and you have a high-speed digital (as well as mortar-and-brick) route to sell your catch globally.

To see the difference, look at the tractor. In the old patron order, reflected in the Parish Development Model (PDM), the State buys a machine, say a tractor, for Sh100 million and gifts it to a youth group or women's sacco. Without a supporting ecosystem, the tractor ends up as a rusting monument to failed charity. In the platform model, the State builds the operating system that makes owning a tractor profitable.

Instead of one group owning a single machine, high-speed data infrastructure allows a young tech entrepreneur to build an app – an Uber for tractors.

Kabalega's 1879 breakthrough shows we can fix housing gap



An AI-generated picture of how a typical city in Uganda will be in 2050. Onyango-Obbo says Uganda's platform must shift towards market-based, incremental micro-housing. PHOTO/ COURTESY

Greening cities. Crucially, our cities must turn green by law. A platform State would require every urban plot to maintain a 10 percent green patch. For the apartment blocks dominating the Wakiso-Mukono corridor, balconies and rooftops should be engineered to support vertical gardens and potted greenery. A city of balconies alive with plants reduces the urban heat island effect and provides a modest buffer for food security, bringing the hoe from the distant village to the urban terrace," **Charles Onyango-Obbo**

once paid Sh100,000 for manual labour now book a tractor via the app for Sh40,000. The owner profits, the developer earns a fee, and the State collects a small, automated transaction tax.

Then, today, you need a land title in a marketable Kampala suburb, or an asset like a house, to secure a bank loan. In the platform State that could carry us to 2050, the law recognises movable assets. The State creates a digital collateral registry, allowing a 24-year-old to use digital service contracts as security for a bank loan to buy computer equipment. The State provides the registry and the contract law – the stage – that enables young people to access capital from the free market.

Next, Uganda needs between 210,000

lion units. At this rate, and given population growth, the shortage could reach 4.5 million units by 2035.

The housing crisis facing the 2050 generation cannot be solved with the 1980s model of sprawling bungalows for the elite and pricey apartment blocks. Our platform must shift towards market-based, incremental micro-housing. Others have shown how. One of the best examples is the "half-a-house" model pioneered by Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena. Here, national or decentralised regional and district governments provide a high-quality structural core – kitchen, bathroom and solid roof – and the resident, as an invested stakeholder, builds the rest as income allows.

This approach creates a property-owning class driven by equity, not dependence on handouts. It suits the erratic incomes of the gig economy in which so

many young Ugandans work. By providing the foundation and plumbing, the State ensures the house is safe and bankable, while young owners complete the finishing work.

Crucially, our cities must turn green by law. A platform State would require every urban plot to maintain a 10 percent green patch. For the apartment blocks dominating the Wakiso-Mukono corridor, balconies and rooftops should be engineered to support vertical gardens and potted greenery. A city of balconies alive with plants reduces the urban heat island effect and provides a modest buffer for food security, bringing the hoe from the distant village to the urban terrace.

Education is another fault line. The public school remains largely a factory for 20th-Century clerks and State employees. In the Artificial Intelligence (AI) era, a high school qualification or university degree should be a portfolio, not a certificate. China has moved in this direction with a "Practical PhD" model, where a doctorate is awarded for developing a functioning product or patented industrial process rather than submitting a 300-page thesis few read.

A high school student who builds a low-cost irrigation sensor or a new fintech algorithm should earn a credential immediately. The idea can stretch further: music students exploring therapeutic uses for mental illness, or a History or Anthropology student at Makerere University

infrastructure to protect it.

The Ugandan of 2050 will be as global a citizen as anyone. The State's task is to ensure they can work with peers in Seoul, San Francisco or Johannesburg without leaving Fort Portal. That work should have begun yesterday. One practical step would be to establish Digital Export Zones across Uganda – legal sandboxes where young remote workers on global platforms are shielded from predatory local taxes and petty municipal harassment in exchange for investing in community tech hubs.

Even in sport, the shift should move from stadiums for spectators to data hubs for athletes. These would be high-performance centres equipped with biometric sensors, allowing a runner in Arua or Kisoro to sell their performance data securely to global scouts. This is the liberal-democratic platform in practice: a State that builds the arena, sets fair rules, and then lets individuals run as far and fast as their talent allows.

In the same spirit, a platform State would provide digital public goods – high-speed Internet, Tier 4 data centres, and a Judiciary that protects intellectual property. Free data in a sub-county hub could be unlocked by completing a module in data ethics, AI literacy or coding. That is an architecture of incentives and responsibility, not charity.

We could go on, but the argument is plain enough. Uganda needs a State that keeps the operating system updated, patches the corruption bugs, and

PLATFORM MODEL

- Digital collateral registry for movable assets
- Tax credits instead of direct state purchases
- Legal sandboxes (Digital Export Zones)
- High-speed internet as a public good