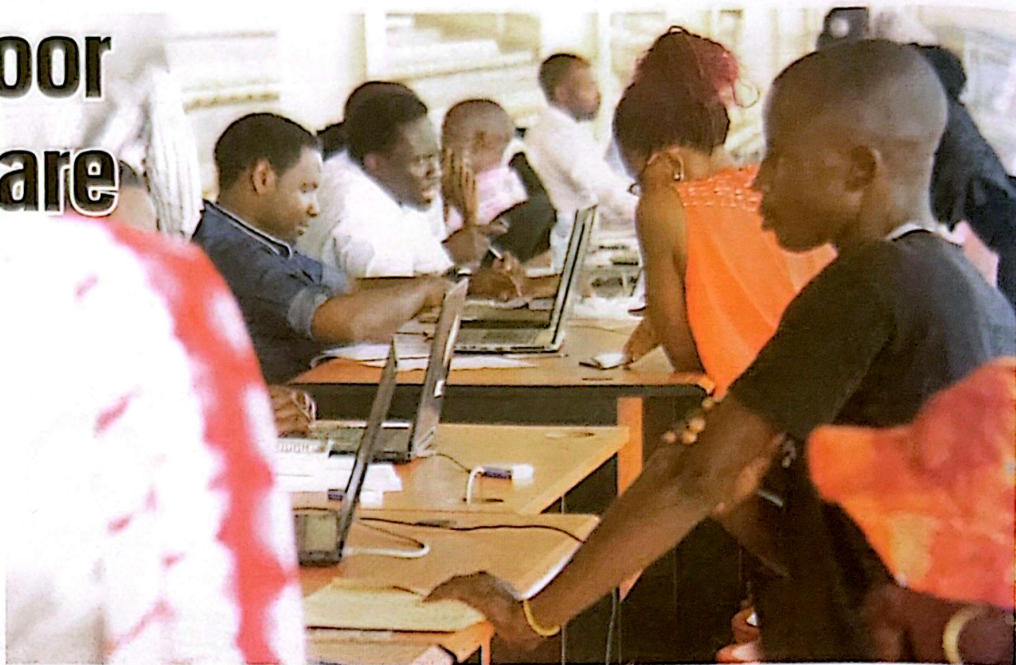


Uganda's poor customer care



Protest. I'm not going to pick up my ID until I see some order and fairness to all who come for theirs, and not this selective favour the Makindye Division people tried to show me just because I am a well-known figure, **Timothy Kalyegira** writes.



OPINION

I have noticed over time that whenever I pretend not to understand Luganda and speak only in English to supermarket or grocery shop attendants, they treat me differently. They become a little more serious and polite and act their best. So these days as much as possible I speak only English when I visit local supermarkets and shops.

Last week I went to my Makindye Division headquarters to pick up my national ID. At the end of May I had been told to return after 70 days for it.

The ID, it was confirmed, was ready.

Women with babies queued for hours. New applicants sat opposite the officials, giving their personal biographical details and having their fingerprints photographed.

None of the KCCA or national ID agency officials bothered to explain the procedure to us.

Later it was discovered that one of the people standing before them was the "famous" Daily Monitor columnist.

That was when the mood changed. A sense of purpose and urgency set in. An official started to go the extra mile to look up my details and make my card a priority.

'Me an exception'

Finally as they started to work on my card, I asked them why they had taken so long and why they were making me an exception.

I asked, "Why me and not these mothers I see here?", I said, pointing to a woman holding a child who had been standing in the room for two hours until she finally got tired and sat on the floor.

With that, I walked out in protest and decided to write about that for this Sunday edition of the Daily Monitor.

That is the side to Uganda that I always shudder about. More than 50 years since independence we have failed to work out a rational culture and method of running public affairs.

I'm not going to pick up my ID until I see some order and fairness to all who come for theirs, and not this selective favour the Makindye Division people tried to show me just because I am a well-known figure.

We might be perceived as friendly, warm people, but Ugandans can also be frighteningly sluggish and incompetent people.

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They become a little more serious and polite and act their best. So these days as much as possible I speak only English when I visit local supermarkets and shops.

In general, Ugandans don't think much of themselves. They do not have much regard for each other.

It is a very insensitive society, probably because it has been abused and neglected for so long that people no longer have any sense of self-worth or the worth of others.

But they have an almost pathological fear of "Big Men" or people in authority.

To get your way in Uganda or have some fair amount of customer care,

one either should be a prominent person well known to the public or holding a high office.

Alternatively, one should speak English when dealing with the local people.

English somehow makes them behave themselves or feel they are dealing with an important matter or important person.

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COMMENT

It is at this level of daily toil, inconvenience, insensitivity by petty officials at the local municipal or village that one realises that Uganda's problems are much deeper than just political or which government is in power.

It is not different in the administrations of the traditional kingdoms, which is why some of us feel that federalism for Buganda, Bunyoro, Tooro or wherever will not solve much.

The idea behind federalism is that when services, budgets and adminis-

trative services are brought "closer to the people", the closer they are the better life gets.

I have my doubts about that.

Some of the poorest customer care in Uganda is by people from the central and western parts of the country.

Nigeria is a federal republic, but that has not prevented it from being and remaining one of the most corrupt and incompetently-run countries not just in Africa but in the world.

'Unable to take it anymore'

Because of all this, an increasing number of Africans are unable to take it anymore and, tragically, tens of thousands are embarking on treacherous land and sea journeys hoping to make it to Europe where they can start life afresh.

Thousands have died in the Sahara desert or drowned in the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.

The tragedy of Africa is that more people have suffered and died at the hands of fellow Africans since the wave of independence started in the mid-1950s than suffered and died during the European colonial era.

Many who don't go on risky journeys in search of a better life in Europe live out their lives in the grind of daily inconvenience, suffering at the mercy of both their government leaders at the top and petty local council or township officials in the residential areas.

People register for their national IDs at Kololo Independence Grounds in May. There have been long queues at ID registration points since government announced a mandatory update of SIM cards using national identification cards in April.

FILE PHOTO

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

Compiled by Juliet Kigongo