



## Daniel Kalinaki Tribute

# Ink, intellect, and influence: Salute to Daniel Kalinaki

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BY JOE AGEYO

When I received the first email from Daniel Kalinaki, or DK as he was fondly known, I was intrigued by the signature at the bottom. It carried the witty self-effacing quote from Norman Mailer: 'If a person is not talented enough to be a novelist, not smart enough to be a lawyer, and his hands are too shaky to perform operations, he becomes a journalist'.

After spending weeks trying to internalise the quote, I couldn't disagree more: It was clear to me that DK was indeed talented enough to be a novelist, and certainly smart enough to be a lawyer. His hands too, were steady enough for all sorts of operations – and that is precisely what made him a great journalist. What's more, he was one of the few Ugandan journalists

I have ever met who could speak some Kiswahili – even if the rather broken type.

Indeed, wit is the very definition of every engagement I have had with DK since. Whether he is drawing animated comparisons between the cow economy of the Ankole people and digital subscriptions, or challenging widely held beliefs about Ugandan history, every conversation is a veritable masterclass, always delivered with a somewhat suppressed smile that belies the substance of a man who has for more than 20 years, straddled the Ugandan media landscape like a colossus.

Over an illustrious two-decade career, DK has stewarded our Ugandan newsrooms through some of the most turbulent times for the media industry. His leadership was marked by rare sophistication that ensured that at all times, all our

outlets were bold enough to challenge the establishment and earn wide public admiration, and yet measured enough to survive in an environment where every small misstep could prove fatal. Indeed, throughout DK's reign at *Daily Monitor* and NTV, none of the outlets were shut down by the government, even though their content routinely punctuated presidential speeches, often in not-so-flattering terms.

Daniel is a towering intellectual force that imbibes every emerging field with the alacrity of a child. A dyed-in-the-wool print journalist, he has weaved his way, almost seamlessly, into the brave new world of digital contraptions that started colonising the information landscape early in the 2000s. In time he could effortlessly walk through the digital *mot du jour* – page views, articles reads, attention time, average revenue per user – just as well as he had mastered the print lingua of yesteryear. Indeed, it is not a wonder that in the humdrum of headline writing and filing calls – nay, screams, from politicians and other noisy undesirables – he would still find time to pen one of the most consequential treatises on Uganda, the 2014 masterpiece *Kizza Besigye and Uganda's Unfinished Revolution*,



Daniel Kalinaki on the 93.3 KFM "Hot Seat" talkshow in July 2024.  
PHOTO/TIMOTHY KALYEGIRA

which is regarded by many as essential reading for understanding the country's contemporary politics. The copy I have is duly signed by the author, and indeed, it is kept in a treasured corner of my home library.

As editor-in-chief, I leaned on DK's intellectual acuity and professional insights. I routinely bounced ideas off him and took his advice on complex industry questions. But his talent and thought leadership resonated well beyond the newsroom, clinching him such prestigious industry positions as chairing the Uganda Editors' Guild, and being elected president of the East African Editors' Society.

In the end, though, DK's greatest legacy may well be the people he shaped and the newsroom culture he created that continue to prize curiosity, courage, and nuance. Several young journalists, who have passed through his hands, have learnt not just how to report, but how to think, question, connect ideas, and, above all, how to carry themselves with confidence in an industry that is increasingly fighting for air and relevance.

As DK steps away from the newsroom, he does so with the quiet assurance of someone who has given his all and changed the game in the process.

We celebrate his journey, we honour his contribution, and we pledge to carry forward the lessons he leaves behind.

Thank you, DK. The newsroom will not be the same without you, but it is far better because you came, you saw and you conquered!