The beauty of corruption – Part II

Last weekend, I cited President Museveni's departed propagandist, Tamale Mirundi. Mirundi propagated the idea that President Museveni had deliberately postponed the task of fighting corruption until 2016, so that his long rule may not run out of tasks!

Perhaps because we, Ugandans, are gullible, many good-hearted people thought that such timetabling was a sensible approach for a ruler who had been concentrating on things like fighting Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and programmes for making poor people rich.

However, on reflection, the absurdity of the approach needs elaboration. Even a parable.

A great warrior was given a huge vanilla vineyard as a reward for his bravery. The warrior appointed supervisors and gave them a five-year contract to run his vineyard.

The warrior told the supervisors that he was going to be occupied by other commitments. He would not have time to scrutinise their expenditure or sales records. Their honesty and other management habits would not be questioned during the five years.

Whenever the warrior visited the vineyard, he heard stories from the people in the village that the supervisors at the vineyard were dishonest. They hired lazy workers. They were not paying their suppliers on time. Sometimes they took bribes before they paid. And some of the vanilla was sold without the transactions appearing anywhere in the records.

The warrior agreed, and he observed that the vineyard was indeed being run down by the plunder.

> NRM has shaped corruption into a convertible tool."



Alan Tacca
On the Mark

Anyhow, the warrior decided to give the managers another five-year contract, since they had become his friends and were still obedient to him. They often sang to praise him as a great warrior and pledged their unfailing loyalty to him. Some were his close relatives. He was afraid that if he appointed more competent managers, they might use their superior skills to distance him from the operation of the vineyard. They could even edge him out altogether, taking full possession of the vineyard. It was important that the plantation remained his vineyard.

As for the plunderers who had become long-serving friends, the warrior told them about the rumours in the village. But he would not act in haste. After he was done with his other assignments and the supervisors had served enough contracts not to complain, he would announce a special anti-theft, anti-laziness, and anti-nepotism period at the vineyard.

During that period, and maybe from then onwards, the managers and workers at the vineyard would be forbidden from engaging in theft and other anti-vineyard activities. That would be the time to sort out all the problems that had plagued and made his vineyard a laughing stock in the province.

One day, when the warrior visited after a long absence, he found most of the workers sleeping under a big tree at noon. Some were in a hangover, having drunk too much the previous night. The vineyard had more weeds than vanilla vines.

Completely upset, the warrior inquired about the supervisors. He was told that most had grown rich and had set up their own plantations and other businesses. They had left early to go and attend to matters at these enterprises.

NRM has shaped corruption into a convertible tool. As the leadership of Parliament discovered from the sum of its corruption scandals, it can be a trap for ensnaring those with fantasies of power. But as the new Speaker and his deputy already know, corruption can also be used to reap huge benefits under NRM rule, as long as one keeps mindful of the mines planted at the boundary between impunity and naked folly.

Mr Tacca is a novelist and socio-political commentator.
altaccaone@gmail.com

Anita Among probe: Why many