From guarding London buildings to becoming a real estate mogul

Yasin Bakaluba Sekimwanyi's journey from migrant security guard to multi-million-shilling developer was not visible for most of its arc, but the foundations were laid in London, UK, during night shifts when he read, observed, and dreamed of building differently.

BY EDGAR R. BATTE

The night shifts in London were long and quiet. While others slept, Yasin Bakaluba Sekimwanyi stood guard outside buildings he could never afford, watching details most people would miss. The marble finishes caught his eye first, then the symmetry in design, the way windows aligned perfectly with doors, the attention to waterproofing that seemed absent in Kampala, the maintenance standards that kept decades-old buildings looking new.

At 19 years old, Bakaluba had left Uganda for the United Kingdom like many of his generation, for *kyeyo*. He landed a job as a security guard. The job demanded sacrifice of long shifts, modest living conditions, and disciplined saving. It also demanded alertness and endurance. But it offered him two advantages that would later shape an empire.

The first was time, which he used to read. One book changed everything. Robert Kiyosaki's *Rich Dad Poor Dad* taught him how to differentiate between liability and asset.

In Uganda's consumption-driven culture, that distinction helped him shape his entire life trajectory. He learnt that a vehicle purchased for status financed at high interest starts depreciating the moment it leaves the showroom. On the other hand, land purchased and held builds equity and strengthens your position year after year, and a house that only consumes income weakens it gradually but surely.

> “Solution. People are like water. You do not need to force it. The moment you create a canal, it will just follow,” he says about efforts to decongest the city. His investment in Kalagala, Dundu reflects that thinking.

The second advantage was exposure.

He guarded buildings around Canal Wharf and similar developments, observing not just architecture but philosophy. “I was seeing beauty, creativity, and seeing advancement,” he says. When he returned to Uganda periodically, he compared layouts and finishing with fresh eyes. He saw that local construction could improve, not necessarily in scale, but in discipline and detail.

Building from abroad

Even while abroad, he was building at home. Not extravagant mansions but simple rental units. In many diaspora stories, *kyeyo* money follows a predictable pattern. It goes first into a large, visible home; something that announces success to neighbours, something that says “I have arrived.” Bakaluba watched this pattern and instead chose rental income and land banking over visibility.

Philosophy of timing

By 21, he had built his first house. Within the same compound, he began with six rental units and later added two more. At 21, rental income shifts perspective. It introduces the radical idea that money can work for you while you work abroad, while you plan the next move. That same year, he became a father. At 22, he performed Hajj using his own money.

“You always have to do things before people expect you to do them,” he says.

The trap of keeping up appearances

The real estate businessman is candid about reactive spending. “You buy a car not because you want it, but you want to keep up,” he observes.

In Kampala's social circles, keeping up appearances has become an expensive competition. Weddings that cost years of salary. Cars that announce status but consume fuel. Funerals that stretch budgets.

Thinking in 10-year bits

“To create wealth, you do not work in months or one or two years. You work in 10-year bits,” the 44-year-old says, referencing land purchased two decades ago for Shs3m that is now worth hundreds of millions. He does not say this to boast but to illustrate a principle. He says appreciation did not happen overnight but followed infrastructure improvements that took years to arrive. It followed demographic growth as Kam-