

...y, chambers of commerce in Uganda have been trade associations. They were organisations that enabled buying and

at Mail & Guardian Africa, we did several business, enterprise, and innovation events around Africa either as media partners or conveners and brought some of the richest

...saw my new car with a plane load of future-looking business leaders. There were ministers in the room, who mostly sold Kenya's strategic and anchor position on the edge of the Indian Ocean rim. Safaricom telco CEO

boat again.

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Allison Kasozi > Tourism

The Ugandan rolex; opportunity couched in humble beginnings

It is said that a prophet is often not accepted in his hometown. And so it seems with the Ugandan rolex – that simple and yet ingenious chapatti-egg-vegetable roll born off the streets of Kampala.

Derided as 'petty', 'insignificant' and unworthy of national celebration relative to 'more serious' pursuits such as 'going to the moon'; the humble rolex has mostly been on the defensive in the months since the State Minister for Tourism endorsed it as a new tourism product alongside efforts to rebuild the country's broad tourism brand and appeal.

The implication has been that to celebrate something as seemingly trivial as the rolex while the rest of the world celebrates 'monumental' feats is to indulge in a bout of unproductive mass foolery.

Which comes as no surprise, because as a people, we perennially seem to be enamored by the thought of despising anything and everything local; with a deference and taste instead for all that we consider exotic, not-from-Uganda, however truly petty.

A quick thought experiment to this effect would bear this out; suppose that for a moment the rolex in question was not a street-side wrap prepared by your street buddy down the road, but was instead a raved up menu-item lit up in neon lights at your local Café Javas, KFC, Pizza Hut or Javas House;

would it seem so petty and insignificant after all, or would it take on an elevated sense of value, credibility as a result of its elegant dress and cush environs? I leave you to ponder that.

In the mockery of it all, we have seemingly missed three potentially critical lessons and opportunities presented by the rolex; one - the power and potential of small beginnings; two - the momentum that celebrating all victories - however small - builds towards attaining big wins; and three - the immeasurable value of shared pride and heritage in facilitating socio-economic esteem and progress.

On the first lesson, my thought experiment above represents a fleeting glimpse at the starry sky to which the rolex could aspire; with the right dress, the rolex has the potential to become a revered delicacy in high end restaurants as it is a popular feature on fast food chain menus, it could hold its weight as a festival highlight as easily as it could evolve into a pop-culture icon of street ingenuity, energy and bustle born off the dusty environs of African sidewalks. The rolex we see now is but a ragged early version of the polished gem it could become.

Onto the second point; the bulk of human feat and achievement in history, however mighty, has been born of gradual improvement and small victories in succession. Be-

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fore Thomas Edison's modern day light bulb came to be, it was preceded by over a century's worth of small victories and discoveries by over 20 other inventors. Before sausages, fried chicken and chips, and burgers became the fad that they are today; they were family recipes passed on generation to generation in humble mom kitchens and pop-up lunch stalls.

The point is, if our predecessors had despised and not thought strongly enough of their inventions to celebrate and improve them - however small, we wouldn't be seated here today talking about them.

The same goes for the rolex; let it grow, share it, celebrate it and you just might be surprised how far it flies!

The third, and in my mind, most important

opportunity presented by the rolex is not its economic or scientific value – although I do look forward to the day when the rolex is indeed a raved menu item carried by restaurant chains in neon lights and its economic value can be spoken of in GDP terms – it is rather its contribution to our sense of shared pride and heritage that I cherish - that intangible pride that constitutes the fuel and spirit of oneness, of purposeful innovation, entrepreneurship, cohesion, nation-building and socioeconomic esteem.

In general, it is those communities that are most proud of, and confident in, their shared identity and heritage; that tend to be the most cohesive, internally fulfilled, progressive and resilient over the long term.

This in turn becomes the 'brand' and esteem through which those communities are viewed and held by outsiders. Few other things speak of the heart and soul, the pride and heritage of a people than the food that they share and celebrate among themselves, and with others.

In this regard the rolex is only the tip of the iceberg in how the story of Ugandan food could be woven and shared with the rest of the world, forming a rich heritage and fabric celebrating what it means to be Ugandan; to see, to eat, to live and feel Ugandan.

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So here's to the Rolex this festive season; next time you walk past your local rolex stand ask for one with extra tomato and cabbage as you dig in, pause and ponder the beauty sheer potential of small beginnings.

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