

Shs5b for bloggers while Mulago can't afford water

You have probably heard this said countless times. The media is always quick to criticise the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government. The criticism, we are told, is neither constructive nor fair. Journalists ignore major government achievements and blow small failures out of proportion.

For people working for the government and relying on it to pay all or most of their bills, this narrative makes sense. You cannot convince them that the media has compelling reasons for its criticism.

But let me cite a good example. Put emotions aside and look at everything objectively. The goal is to see whether journalists' criticism of how the government runs the country is justified.

I will begin with recent media reports that President Museveni pledged Shs5b to organised groups of content creators. Mr Museveni met them at his farm in Kisozi, and he gave some a chance to speak to him.

It was blindingly obvious that many simply wanted money from him. If he had asked them whether they had a proper working plan for their projects, they would probably struggle to answer his questions.

Some of the content creators — they sometimes call themselves bloggers — are notorious for using obscene/vulgar language on social media, raising questions about how their content helps Ugandans. They have uttered words some people would only use if they were certain life was going to be shut down completely, and they

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would never live on this planet again.

I am not saying the government should not support young people. They, in fact, need support because the future of Uganda largely depends on them. You do not have Uganda without young Ugandans. A baby born today or tomorrow is going to serve like a brick in the wall of a house called Uganda.

Nonetheless, the financial assistance Mr Museveni pledged to content creators raises serious questions about whether he recognises that there are urgent national problems that need money — and could do a lot with Shs5b — but they are just not getting enough.

Consider healthcare. Health means everything, and proper healthcare increases our chances of seeing another tomorrow. Health, it is said, is wealth. Countries where people live longer tend to be stronger economically.

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and ready to work productively to build their country. But our healthcare system is on life support, as former Inspector General of Government Irene Mulyagonja told Ugandans in April last year.

If you asked Dr Rosemary Byanyima, the director of our national referral hospital, Mulago, what Shs5b can do, given that the hospital sometimes lacks the basics, she will say "a lot".

Mr Museveni has been in power for 40 years. If he had made four trips to Mulago — one in every 10 years — just to see what is working and what is not, and how he could help, the hospital would be a great place to seek medical care.

If the President was throwing money at Mulago the way he does at problems that can wait, his government officials would be receiving treatment at the hospital.

As things stand, they cannot. The hospital is not fit for purpose. A couple of years ago, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Diana Atwine, told Parliament that Mulago should resort to boreholes because it cannot afford running water.

National Water has repeatedly complained about Mulago, the Uganda Police Force and the Ministry of Defence for failing to pay water bills amounting to billions of shillings in time.

Billions of shillings is a lot of money. People spending it do not think much about it because it is taxpayers' money. But if you had to sell cattle to raise billions of shillings, you would have to sell thousands. That is why what the government prioritises while spending matters. And that is why the media criticises spending that seems to ignore urgent problems.

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