



By Paul Busharizi

One of the more sobering ways to understand corruption is to translate the numbers into human terms.

Last year, Mulago National Referral Hospital told Parliament that its sh122b allocation was grossly inadequate to run the country's largest health facility and fully operationalise critical units such as intensive care. Recent hospital and research data indicate Mulago now handles roughly three million patient interactions annually. That means, very roughly, the hospital spends about sh40,000 per patient encounter.

Now place that beside the roughly sh28b reportedly discovered in various currencies in properties linked to former Speaker Anita Among.

At Mulago's expenditure ratios, that amount alone could theoretically support treatment for about 700,000 patient visits — equivalent to the population of Isingiro district — or nearly triple the shroob the hospital said it urgently needed to fully operationalise its intensive care units.

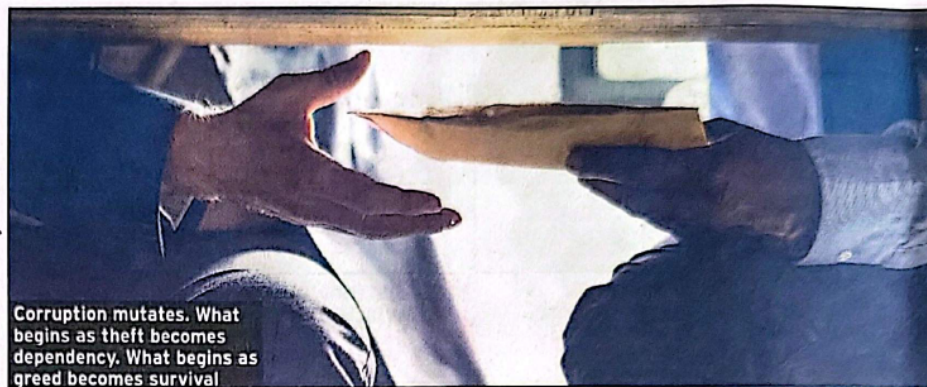
However, here is what the numbers alone cannot capture: Corruption does not simply steal money. It corrupts everything it touches — the thief, the witness, the bystander — eventually, the entire society.

That is the real danger.

It first corrupts the individual.

Once individuals accumulate extraordinary wealth through public office, losing power becomes existential. Retirement stops being an option because, without continued access to the state machinery, sustaining those lifestyles becomes impossible. No employer in Uganda's economy pays enough to maintain convoys, mansions, entourages, luxury shopping and political patronage networks at that scale. Very

CORRUPTION POLLUTES EVERYONE IT TOUCHES



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few legitimate businesses generate such cash flows either.

So corruption mutates. What begins as theft becomes dependency. What begins as greed becomes survival. Office holders stop behaving like custodians of public institutions and begin behaving like shareholders protecting a revenue stream.

That, perhaps, explains reports that Among briefly contemplated resisting directives to step aside as Speaker. She reportedly explored an independent political path before raids on her properties and the freezing of accounts neutralised those ambitions. One almost understands the logic emotionally, even while rejecting it morally. When a person becomes accustomed to limitless facilitation and elite privilege, stepping away from the office can feel economically catastrophic.

Corruption has, by that point, already poisoned the person entirely. It, then, corrupts institutions.

As corruption deepens, loyalty shifts from institutions to networks of mutual protection. Politicians protect procurement officials. Procurement officials protect businesspeople. Security actors protect politicians. Everyone possesses compromising information about everyone else. The system survives less on legitimacy



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and more on shared vulnerability.

Public institutions, such as hospitals, Parliament and the Judiciary, cease functioning as instruments of national development and begin operating as platforms for elite extraction. The state does not disappear. It is simply repurposed.

But most insidiously, corruption corrupts the rest of us.

One of the most troubling features of recent public discussions surrounding the Anita Among saga has been the language ordinary people casually use. "Let her eat; after all, other people are eating." "Why was she eating all that alone?" "People just

need to know when to stop eating."

Notice what has happened there.

The debate is no longer about whether stealing public resources is wrong. It has shifted to whether the sharing was equitable or whether the appetite simply became too visible. Corruption has been normalised — treated as an unofficial entitlement of office. We have stopped measuring leaders against principles and begun measuring them against the hunger of those around them.

That is how corruption corrupts citizens. It lowers the moral floor so gradually that people barely notice they are standing somewhere they would once never have tolerated.

This matters because a society can survive inequality. What it cannot survive is inequality stripped of legitimacy. A businessman who builds factories and creates jobs may grow wealthy and still command public admiration. But wealth born of political office triggers deep resentment, because citizens instinctively understand that public office exists to protect the common good, not to serve as a private ATM.

History repeatedly confirms this. Societies rarely collapse simply because people are poor. They collapse when citizens become convinced that elites are enriching

themselves obscenely while ordinary people cannot afford school fees, rent or hospital bills. The French Revolution was fuelled as much by the visible excess of the aristocracy as by poverty itself. The Arab Spring was driven not only by unemployment but by perceptions of corruption, exclusion and elite impunity.

Hopelessness is politically combustible. People eventually stop asking how to succeed within the system and begin asking whether the system itself deserves to survive.

Social media has considerably sharpened this danger. The gap between what is flaunted and what is endured has never been more visible or more volatile.

Uganda today is wealthier than it was 40 years ago. There are more banks, highways, telecom towers, shopping malls and private fortunes than ever before. However, development without fairness creates instability. People can tolerate hardship. What they struggle to tolerate is humiliation.

That is why the fight against corruption cannot be framed as merely a moral or financial issue. It is a question of what kind of society we are becoming. Every time we joke about who is "eating." Every time we measure a leader's wrongdoing against someone else's greed rather than against principle — corruption wins another convert.

Because that is precisely how corruption works; it does not only take the money.

pbusharizi@newvision.co.ug
Twitter @pbusharizi

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