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An open email to Daniel Kalinaki

A hoy Daniel,
I read and reflected on your column,
"From Moshi to Namuwongo and
back, what should *The Monitor* do?"
(*Daily Monitor*; April 2). I have a few
things to say about it.

You referred to my column, "What should
Monitor die or kill for?" (October 2, 2007),
which you had pinned on a board. In it, I
wrote that, given the severity of repression
facing Uganda's independent media at the
time, and *The Monitor* in particular, and re-
flecting on the paper's decades-long lone-
ly combat for free expression, its primary
goal should be to outlast the Museveni gov-
ernment.

You, too, saw your primary task on becom-
ing editor as avoiding a shutdown of *The
Monitor* and its outlets.

You argue (in my view, correctly) that it
later became clear this was not a produc-
tive strategy; the paper and its outlets were
still shut down anyway, proving that pos-
ture was passive and unequal to the times.
Your prescription? That *The Monitor* should
now "find and recreate the missing middle
in our politics, restore evidence-based ar-
gument to policy-making, and allow calmer,
sharper voices with a diversity of views
to emerge".

My grim pragmatism of the time rested
on a timeline I had clearly misread. I did
not expect the wait to stretch as long as it
has. That is because, on a lighter note, I did
not account for how much drinking unsul-
lied sour milk and eating organic, moder-
ately cooked potatoes and vegetables would
give President Yoweri Museveni the phys-
ical and mental stamina to remain in power.
What might have been a 30-year shelter
from the rain has become a potentially en-
dless 50-year residence.

Secondly, and most critically, whatever Mu-
seveni's faults, he was always, and remains,
a rational man. My miscalculation in 2007
was not only about biological and mental
endurance, but about a deeper misunder-

It can fairly be said
of you, to slightly pa-
raphrase Apostle Paul in
2 Timothy 4:7-8, that "you
have fought the good
fight, you have finished
the race..."



Charles Onyango-Obbo
Ear to the Ground

standing of what a rational leader like Mu-
seveni ultimately prizes. I assumed that af-
ter his long quest for power, after the blood
and sacrifice of the Luweero Triangle, his
goal would be to leave a grand legacy, a gold-
en exit securing his place among the giants
of history. I did not foresee a shift from the
pursuit of legacy to the pursuit of tenure,
which feels almost banal for a man of his
ideological and intellectual bent.

Therefore, to your list, I would add that *The
Monitor* should go all in on sparking the im-
agination of one of the world's youngest na-
tions, where nearly 87 per cent have known
only one leader – President Museveni. This
creates a dangerous imaginative block. How
does a 21-year-old picture a functioning de-
mocracy having known only one presiden-
cy?

The Monitor should show, through sophis-
ticated storytelling and rigorous reporting,
how technology, local agency, and regional
integration can bypass the bottlenecks of a
stagnant central state.

It can help ensure those who walk through
the door when it finally opens are informed,
clever – as you argue – and ready to build a
country that at last matches their potential.

It could consider a series on "The Path to
the 75th Year" of independence, imagin-
ing quick, practical interventions that could
turn Uganda into a sophisticated, self-sus-
taining republic by 2037. Or a long "The 2037
Debates" series: evidence-based forums
driven not by a new leader's face on a post-
er, but by the image of a young Ugandan up-
country running an AI-driven cooperative
that feeds a city.

Is it possible to imagine a future where
Kampala is no longer the sole axis of the
economy? How might high-speed satellite
Internet and decentralised grids turn Gu-
lu, Mbarara, and Jinja into autonomous tech
hubs?

Showcasing these pockets of the future,
that progress is possible even under the
shadow of a long-ruling, now-stagnant polit-
ical order. It shifts the narrative from passive
waiting to active preparation. *The Monitor*
should be the bridge between the struggle
of today and the possibilities of tomorrow.

So, yes, I see it. There is a marked difference
between spending half a day in a queue at
the Ministry of Internal Affairs waiting to
lodge a passport application, only picking
your nose, and sitting in the same queue,
if you can afford the bundles, watching Ali
Mazrui's "The Africans: A Triple Heritage"
on your phone.

Finally, as you leave the newsroom, I tip
my hat to your service to journalism. It can
fairly be said of you, to slightly paraphrase
Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, that "you
have fought the good fight, you have fin-
ished the race, you have kept the faith. Now
there is laid up for you the crown of right-
eousness, which the Lord, the righteous
Judge, will award to you on that day – and
not only to you, but also to all who have
longed for his appearing."

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...safety are you protecting?