

BY THE WAY >



Uganda, the land of sweet nothings

It is only in Uganda that people you have never seen will call you dear. You walk down the street and a stranger comes up to you and they say, Hi dear, where is Kampala Road? Or you go to a restaurant and the waitress in taking your order asks, "Baby what will you eat?" "No baby, we don't have flies but we have chips."

Or at the salon where for the whole five or so hours you are there, the women baptise you *sweerie* (why do people even use that word?).

"*Sweerie*, which colours of braids do you want?" "Are you hungry *sweerie*, we can bring you soda *sweerie*."

Or the mechanic who will only refer to you as mummy even if he is old enough to be that bad uncle who makes lewd signs at Lulu the dog when he thinks no one is watching.

Strange thing though is that these words of 'endearment' instead bring out the cringe and sulk in the 'victims'. Notice how every time you walk into a shop and the man or woman there asks, "Baby girl how can I help you?" or "Daddy what can I get you?", the brain immediately freezes and the legs slowly but surely turn the body around and lead it out of that shop?

Ideally, these words are meant to make you feel special but coming from strangers, they are like precious jewels mangled up in the mud. They just come off so wrong. If you are new in Uganda, you might be misled into thinking that people here are just extremely sweet natured or so full of love and compassion that they literally and verbally choke you with it.

Worse still is when this show of endearment or what many mistake

for customer care is displayed in a corporate environment. I mean how are you supposed to deal with someone at say a sales/marketing meeting who insists on calling you daddy or sweetheart even if you are meeting for the first (and quite obviously the last time because of their choice of words) time? How? Is it even legal?

Once, a beggar at the Old Taxi Park after taking a coin I gave him said, "*Webale nnyo* sweet Beyonce" (Thank you very much sweet Beyonce). This 'customer care' is everywhere I tell you. And now that it is Valentine's Day, I do not even want imagine what people are calling themselves.

- Janet Napio

