

pick-ups, bicycles and buses carry bananas, maize flour,

of Uganda statistics, ICBT grew by 26% from \$628m (2024) to \$794m (2025).

entirely on cross-border trade. You might wonder; why does informal cross-border trade matter? Who

they avoid systems they cannot navigate. Informal trade is not a bed of roses.

should not focus on informal traders but

Are your lifestyle expenses rising faster than income growth? This is a question many professionals may not ask directly, yet they feel the answer every month. Remember those moments 10 or so years ago when you judged the spending habits of friends who earned much more than you. Several years later, your salary has improved, or the business is bringing in more revenue. At the same time, your status or title has also changed in tandem with income rise.

However, the financial pressure remains, and in some cases, it feels worse than before. The problem is not always indiscipline. Sometimes, it is due to the silent expansion of what we now consider normal living.

This may sound familiar. The house you once considered good enough no longer feels suitable for an expanded family and new status. The school that was once affordable no longer matches the standard you want for your children. You believe that the car you drive must now reflect your role. Your clothes, phone, social life, holiday choices, and even the places where you meet friends begin to adjust to your new identity.

None of these changes look reckless on its own. In fact, you convince yourself that they are reasonable. A bigger and better home means safety and



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convenience. A better school represents opportunity, while a reliable car supports your work commute and navigates the poor roads smoothly. However, if you lack a financial strategy, such decisions become permanent costs before your financial foundation is strong enough to carry them.

Before you know it, your acceptable lifestyle expands. Notably, what used to be a luxury becomes ordinary. What was optional becomes expected, or those occasional items turn into monthly expenses. Before long, your income is no longer growing your wealth but simply maintaining your new standard.

As it is, many disciplined earners feel squeezed because they are not spending lavishly but are paying for a life that has become more expensive in small, incremental ways. For example, home maintenance and upgrade costs or rent rises. A new, bigger car means the fuel budget rises while food costs rise as tastes evolve. More to that, school requirements increase while family and societal expectations grow. At the same

time, professional visibility brings its own costs because you must attend more functions, contribute more often, and feel less able to say you cannot afford something.

This is why those who are earning more still feel financially strapped. Subsequently, any increase in income gets absorbed by a rise in lifestyle, obligations, and expectations.

It is important to note that middle-class identity comes with costs. Once people see you as stable, they assume you have room to contribute extra. If you occupy certain professional spaces, you inevitably begin to feel pressure to match them. You may not be trying to impress anyone, but you also do not want to appear like you are struggling.

Moreover, the risk is that rising standards consume future wealth. Before you realise, money that could have built an emergency fund, bought income-generating assets, reduced debt, or supported retirement planning is redirected toward maintaining appearances and comfort today.

Do not get me wrong. Self-awareness does not mean you

should live as though your income never improved.

I support enjoying the fruits of your progress. However, ask yourself whether every improvement in income must immediately create a new permanent expense. Remember, if your lifestyle rises every time your income grows, your future never catches up.

To avoid this trap, professionals and business owners need to pause and ask questions: What percentage of your income increase is going toward long-term financial stability? When your business performs better, does the extra money strengthen the business, reduce pressure, or build assets? When your salary grows, do you first expand your lifestyle or your financial base?

A useful exercise is to identify your current "minimum acceptable life." What does it cost you to live the way you now believe is necessary? Include housing, transport, food, school fees, domestic support, social obligations, medical care, loan

Assign every shilling before spending

repayments, and lifestyle spending, etc. The numbers will surprise you.

Once you know that figure, compare it with your income growth. If your lifestyle cost is rising much faster than your income, then you are not

progressing as much as you appear to be. You are simply upgrading financial pressure.

The next step is to deliberately slow down your lifestyle cost expansion. Remember, not everything your income can afford deserves to become part of your life. Some upgrades should wait until savings, investments, and emergency buffers are strong enough.

If you are lucky enough to get windfalls, use them for productive purposes. Bonuses, business profits, and allowances should not be consumed by comfort. Give every extra shilling an assignment before it is swallowed by lifestyle. When you do this, you are growing assets that will sustainably support your lifestyle. Options provided by a diversified asset portfolio are more reliable than a transient title.

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