

Crime surge demands more than new faces

Ugandans are once again confronting a troubling rise in urban crime, from robberies, pick pockets, attacks on the roads during traffic jams and assaults, to organised gangs targeting homes and businesses. In recent weeks, the police have responded by publicly naming crime hotspots and reshuffling leadership. Kampala Metropolitan Police Commander Richard Echega has been replaced by Ezekiel Emitu from Kabalye Police Training School, but who had previously worked as deputy commander for the same area, in an effort to arrest the situation. This is a very positive step to give assurances to city residents that their security is at the heart of planning by security agencies. However, the changes must translate into sustained action if public confidence is to be restored.

The public will judge the new leadership not by public statements, but by measurable improvements in security.

Arguably right, crime thrives where unemployment is high, communities are disengaged and policing is reactive rather than proactive. Law enforcement must strengthen community policing structures. What happened to neighbourhood watch? How about using boda boda associations at their stages and youth or community groups?

The issue:

Crime

Our view:

Uganda has weathered waves of insecurity before. They have seen measures taken, only to be dropped a few months later. The new measures must be consistent; name the hotspots and secure them.

How are security agencies using technology? Are all the cameras working? Can they be linked to private CCTV cameras to increase the reach? Can they be deployed for prevention, rather than the usual post mortem of helping to identify criminals when a crime has been committed, life lost or property taken? Improved forensic capacity and faster emergency response systems can deter crime. But these must be maintained, monitored and handled with trained personnel.

Training of the people on safety measures is also very important. The public cannot simply neglect the role of securing their lives and property and leave it to the police or sister security agencies. Vigilance begins at home. Basic safety measures such as proper lighting, reinforced doors, verification of domestic workers, cautious use of social

media to discourage displaying valuables, and announcing personal whereabouts, can reduce vulnerability. Reporting suspicious activity helps secure the community as a whole.

Allegations of corruption, delayed response times and occasional heavy-handed operations have strained relations between citizens and law enforcement. A relationship has to be rebuilt to fight crime in a concerted manner.

Uganda has weathered waves of insecurity before. They have seen measures taken, only to be dropped a few months later. The new measures must be consistent; name the hotspots and secure them. If these are not considered, changing leadership may only inject new energy, but combining intelligence, accountability, community engagement, will expose the criminals for action and Ugandans will be able to enjoy the fruits of their labour in a secure environment.

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