

Government urges media on patriotic communication

TIMOTHY NSUBUGA

The government has reaffirmed its commitment to coordinated and strategic communication as a pillar in driving economic growth, export competitiveness, tourism development, and strengthening Uganda's international reputation.

Speaking at a high-level meeting of the National Strategic Communications Committee (NSCC) held at Sheraton Kampala hotel last week, the Minister of ICT and National Guidance, Dr Chris Baryomunsi, emphasised the need for communicators to align their messaging with national priorities.

"We must communicate, but we must communicate strategically, conscious of the needs of Uganda, the efforts that we have to attract tourism, investment, trade, and business. In a country, we communicate; we don't hide information, but we do it in a manner that does not injure the interests of the country," Baryomunsi said.

The NSCC, established under presidential directives, brings together ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), the private sector, and media.

Among those present were Kituuma Rusoke, spokesperson of the Uganda Police first son-in-law Odrek Rwabwogo, who is also chairperson of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Exports and Industrial Development (PACEID), among others.

Dr Baryomunsi stressed that government upholds freedom of expression, but warned: "Today's communication directly impacts investor confidence, social cohesion, and Uganda's global standing. Inaccurate or inconsistent messaging can undermine broader national development."



National Strategic communications Committee

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Rwabwogo said, "Strategic communication is not just about sharing information; it is about protecting livelihoods and national income. Reputation determines market access. Poorly managed messaging can hurt farmers, exporters, tourism operators, and investors, sometimes resulting in lost contracts, cancelled tours, and reduced business confidence."

He cautioned that uncoordinated communication from different ministries can unintentionally harm other sectors.

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while necessary, can negatively affect tourism and trade if not properly contextualised," he said. "That is why the NSCC exists to ensure government institutions communicate from a shared knowledge base and with a clear understanding of national priorities."

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is full of harmful bacteria. Reporting must reflect meaning and context, not isolated facts."

He emphasised the need for training in specialised areas such as science and technology reporting.

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Rwabwogo highlighted international best practices.

"Some countries have national press clubs. These are not just places to speak to the media and go away; they are forums for engagement and mutual knowledge. Experts, journalists, and policymakers come together to discuss complex issues like algorithms or digital media dynamics. That is where we are heading."

Baryomunsi said government is finalising a comprehensive national communication policy, reviewed by Cabinet, to reflect the evolving media landscape across print, broadcast, and digital platforms.

He added that a consolidated communication law is being developed to harmonise existing legislation into a single framework that responds to new technologies.

The minister knows firsthand, how far south uncoordinated communication from government entities can go. A few weeks ago, an altercation on X (formerly Twitter) between him and the Chief of Defence Forces, Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, became ugly quite quickly, sucking in legislators and online trolls in equal measure, until the president's son called for a truce.

Baryomunsi also said collaboration with the Uganda Communications Commission is also key.

"Regulation alone is insufficient. Media literacy, education, and responsible digital use, especially among young people, are equally important," he said.

Both Baryomunsi and Rwabwogo reaffirmed the government's commitment to working with the media as partners in national development.

KCCA vendor sweep results in clearer streets, but future remains uncertain

In the wake of KCCA's recent eviction of vendors from the streets of Kampala, **ASHLEY AISHA Aine** took a stroll through the city. She observed that whereas the city looks neater, vendors are not about to give up without a fight.

By 9am on February 23, downtown Kampala looked unmistakably like itself and yet, not quite.

The city center continued to experience the familiar surge of human activity. Taxi conductors shouted destinations. Boda bodas weaved through cars. Pedestrians moved in hurried diagonals, shielding their eyes from the harsh mid-morning sun.

Where shoppers once squeezed sideways to avoid knocking over piles of jeans, a clear path stretched ahead. You could see shopfronts that had been hidden for years. The air felt lighter. Quieter. The competitive chorus of "two thousand! Sister, come see!" had fallen silent. The wooden stalls that had clung to pavements were gone. The alley, aka Kikuubo lane, became more like a pedestrian road.

On the night of February 19, the city had uncluttered. The operation had begun shortly after midnight. Street stalls erected on roads and pavements were dismantled, in line with a two-week notice previously issued to vendors to clear the streets. Those who did not comply reportedly had their goods confiscated. By morning, enforcement patrols were visibly tight, and the message was unmistakable: no more street vending.

As I moved through the cleared stretches, photographing former vending hotspots, I noticed men wearing green shirts marked with numbers. Curious, I approached one and asked what was happening. He explained that anyone found stepping into designated planting



Downtown Kampala streets without vendors

areas would be required to dig briefly as a punishment. As we spoke, several more 'culprits', men and women alike, were brought forward and instructed to dig for about three minutes each before being released.

The supervisor showed *The Observer* a few architectural plans outlining proposed green strips and beautification layouts.

"We are making the city green because we love the country," he said.

NOT EVERYONE VIEWED THE EVICTION AS A LOSS.

Near Park Enkadde Mall and Mini Price, I met one of the brokers: the middlemen who typically call pedestrians into shops.

He, when asked about the situation, acknowledged that formal traders had struggled for years under competition from people who sell on pavements. He argued that these vendors distorted customer expectations.

"In my shop, we pay about Shs3 million in rent every month," he said. "Some pay even more. There is no way to make a profit when street vendors are selling the same items cheaply outside," he noted. As I walked through Park Enkadde mall, I observed several motionless people, some leaning against columns of the building. They were not selling. They were neither shouting nor arranging goods.

"Anyone you see standing in one place for more than ten minutes and looking very annoyed is an evicted vendor," noted one of the traders. They were waiting, he said, for an opportunity to display goods or hoping enforcement might relax.

I approached one of the clusters cautiously and greeted an elderly man seated nearby. He introduced himself as Rashid Ssenkungu, 56.

Ssenkungu, who uses two crutches and has one amputated leg, said relocation to gazetted markets has not worked for him. "Usafi is very dirty," he said. "One time my crutches slipped on a polythene bag dumped on the path I slid into dirty, murky water with all my goods, and as you can imagine, no one can buy from a dirty vendor," he said.

He described the Namirembe market, designated for individuals with disabilities, as inaccessible.

At St Balikuddembe market (Owino), movement resembled a two-lane human highway. Customers moved in single-file streams in opposite directions, navigating sellers who sang clothing prices loudly enough to drown out traffic noise.

When a porter carrying a load four times his size was approaching, he whistled from one end;

pedestrians instinctively ducked or flattened themselves against stalls to avoid collision. Space was difficult to find in Owino. Each space looked occupied.

Over loudspeakers mounted throughout the market, an announcement urged traders to welcome colleagues recently evicted from the streets, reminding them that the government established the market for them and that it is free. However, the speaker also warned vendors to keep phones secure and hide money carefully, noting that new arrivals had not yet undergone proper evaluation.

At Usafi market, conditions were visibly dirtier, but space appeared

more available than in Owino. The head of the shoe section, Shaban Kibirige, explained the allocation process.

"This market was made for low earners," he said. "You bring your ID or photocopy and an LC letter to prove residence, they give you a stall. No one charges you taxes because the government excused us. We only pay for security to people we choose ourselves."

He insisted there was still sufficient space for displaced vendors.

"Now that no one is selling on the streets, more people will come to the markets. That is how it is supposed to be. Before, people did not need to come because they could

buy everything outside."

A boda boda rider I interviewed Steven Mumbere, supported strict demarcation of spaces. "The road is for transportation," he said.

"If you want to buy something, go to the market. Go to the park if you want a cab. If you want a boda, go to the stage."

He argued that permanent stations create accountability and reduce crime.

All in all, Kampala is now calmer, neater and slightly organised.

However, whether it is a better city depends on whom you ask.

For now, the roads are open, the pavements are bare, and the singing is quiet.

But in the shade of verandas across downtown, displaced traders stand watching, waiting for the right moment, or perhaps a new place, to begin again.

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

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Date: 14th February 2026

Press Release

Appointment of Polling Date for Sub County/Town/Municipal Division Local Government Council Elections in Electoral Areas Where Polling Was Not Conducted or Concluded: Thursday, 26th February 2026

The Electoral Commission informs political parties, candidates, voters, and the general public that **Thursday, 26th February 2026** has been appointed the polling date for Sub County/Town/Municipal Division Local Government Council Elections in electoral areas where polling was not conducted or concluded on the previously appointed date of 4th February 2026, due to various unforeseen circumstances.

This polling date is appointed in accordance with the Commission's mandate to ensure the completion of the electoral processes in all affected areas.


Accordingly, elections shall be conducted for the following unfilled positions at the affected Sub County/Town/Municipal Division level:

1. Chairpersons;
2. Directly Elected Councillors;
3. Women Councillors; and,
4. Councillors representing Special Interest Groups (Youths; Older Persons; and Persons with Disabilities - PWDs).

Polling shall take place at all polling stations within the above affected electoral areas across the country and, where applicable, at the venues for the respective electoral colleges, starting at 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Thereafter, counting of votes and declaration of results shall take place.

The Electoral Commission urges all stakeholders and voters to participate peacefully and to comply with the electoral laws and guidelines.


Justice Byabakama Mugenyi Simon
Chairperson, Electoral Commission

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Ugandans start season of fasting

TIMOTHY NSUBUGA

As the season of Lent starts, and Christians enter a period of fasting just as Christ did for forty days and nights, Rev Fr Joseph Mukiibi, Director of Communications and Public Relations at the Kampala Archdiocese, has reminded the faithful to deepen their spiritual commitment.

In an interview with *The Observer*, Fr Mukiibi urged Christians, especially Catholics, to intensify their prayer life during the Lenten period, describing it as a time of reflection, sacrifice, and spiritual renewal.

"We are [in] a very beautiful season of

grace for all of us. And Lent is a spiritual school where we encounter the Divine with devotion, commitment, and purest love," Father Mukiibi said.

Lent, as defined by the Catholic Church, is a 40-day liturgical season of spiritual preparation for Easter, focused on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Thursday evening, imitating Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the desert.

"Its aim is nothing less than helping us to become more loving persons, loving God above all, and our neighbour as ourselves. So, its purpose is the transformation of our total being, mind, body, and spirit. So, the change of

attitude, the change of mentality, the pure understanding of our relationship with God, is essential for all of us," Fr Mukiibi added.

He also called upon Christians to break away from the usual to the unique.

Explaining the three pillars of Lent, Fr Mukiibi noted facets such as prayer, fasting, and alms giving help discipline the senses and also purify the soul so that God can dwell within us; he called upon Christians to shun their sinful ways to benefit from the fasting season.

"A good Christian is supposed to intensify their prayer life, to intensify self-denial, self-control, and self-mastery. That is fasting. And almsgiving; the more you give,

the more you show your faith to God as St James clearly states it, 'show me your faith and I will show you my action'."

"After Lent, we expect you to have changed your attitude, mentality, and your relationship with God. We have had many atrocities, we have experienced a lot from politics. It is a time for all of us to reconcile with God and one another. Generally, Lent is reconciliation," he said.

This year, it is an interesting Lenten season, seeing as it has coincided with the Muslim community's 30-day Ramadhan fast, with both seasons kicking off on Ash Wednesday.

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MALITA

THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE FR KIIBI

I attended a burial in Gombwe last week, and had never encountered such a quarrelsome priest!

Before the requiem mass started, he warned mourners to stand when he says stand, sit when they were supposed to, and save the gossip for later like "grownup women". To which a few women answered: "And men!"

"Unless you are sick or disabled, I expect you to stand. Otherwise, should you stay seated, may God strike you with an illness so bad, you never get to leave that seat again," the reverend father, whose only name I captured was Ssentongo, said sternly.

My eyes nearly popped out.

In Pentecostalism, we take words that roll off one's tongue very seriously. After all, the Bible says, life and death are in the power of the tongue.

I heard several people shout back: "Fire!" but the priest retorted: "Even if you loose fire, it shall consume you if you don't stand up."

One could easily tell that this youthful clergyman possibly looks up to Father Deogratius Kiibi, who famously uses banter and blunt humour to keep his congregation alert and entertained; but where Fr Kiibi is naturally witty and humorous, Fr Ssentongo came off as abrasive and angry.

In apparent fear of the issued curse, almost the entire congregation – some with Muslim caps on their heads – hilariously followed through with the Catholic rituals of sit-stand-kneel during the mass.

When someone remained seated, the priest would pause mid-sentence to ask, "Why is that one sitting?"

And when push came to shove with the sit-stand battle, he declared: "Never mind; we are all going to die, after all. I can even see who is next, here amongst us."

Africans joke about many things, but never death.

A lady sitting next to me muttered: "Goodness! I feel afraid to even drive to Kampala now. What is his problem?"

Soon, he turned to the deceased.

"I visited her in that house down there before she died. Imagine putting her body in such a beautiful casket and all of you parking these big cars to send her off, after failing to improve her house when she was still alive!"

The crowd murmured.

The lady next to me whispered, "I wonder whether people attend his mass on Sundays, if this is how he preaches..."

The burial was for 106-year-old Matilda Naiga, whose daughter later explained that her mother refused to be removed from her mud and wattle marital home, and two attempts to improve the house had met her fierce resistance, apparently in memory of her husband who had died decades earlier.

I had never sat through such a sermon.

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Out To Lunch

Uneb chair's exam grading argument needs immediate implementation

You may probably know a parent or even a child who is stressed due to their performance in the national exams.

By the time of writing, the Uganda National Examination Board (Uneb) had already released the results of the Primary Leaving Examination and the Uganda Certificate of Examination.

Learners who think they should have performed better than their results are stressed. Parents and guardians are making endless calls to schools in search of admission letters. Headteachers of some of the prominent schools have taken to hiding due to pressure.

Prominent people are praying their friends don't call them asking for help to place their children.

And once a child is admitted, parents have a day or two to pay school fees in full lest the vacancy is given to another child on the waiting list. If you thought teachers have no power, this is the season of the year where they get to exercise it or simply hide and switch off their phones.

However, amidst the brouhaha that usually accompanies the release of the results of the national exams by Uneb and the hustling for schools by parents and guardians that follows, something the chair of the examination body said may have been missed by many.

Prof Celestino Obua argued that the current grading system needs to be changed to "avoid the magic of aggregate 4" when it comes to the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). He said that a child who gets aggregate 4, which is the highest, may in actual sense have only performed better by four marks than the one who got aggregate 8.

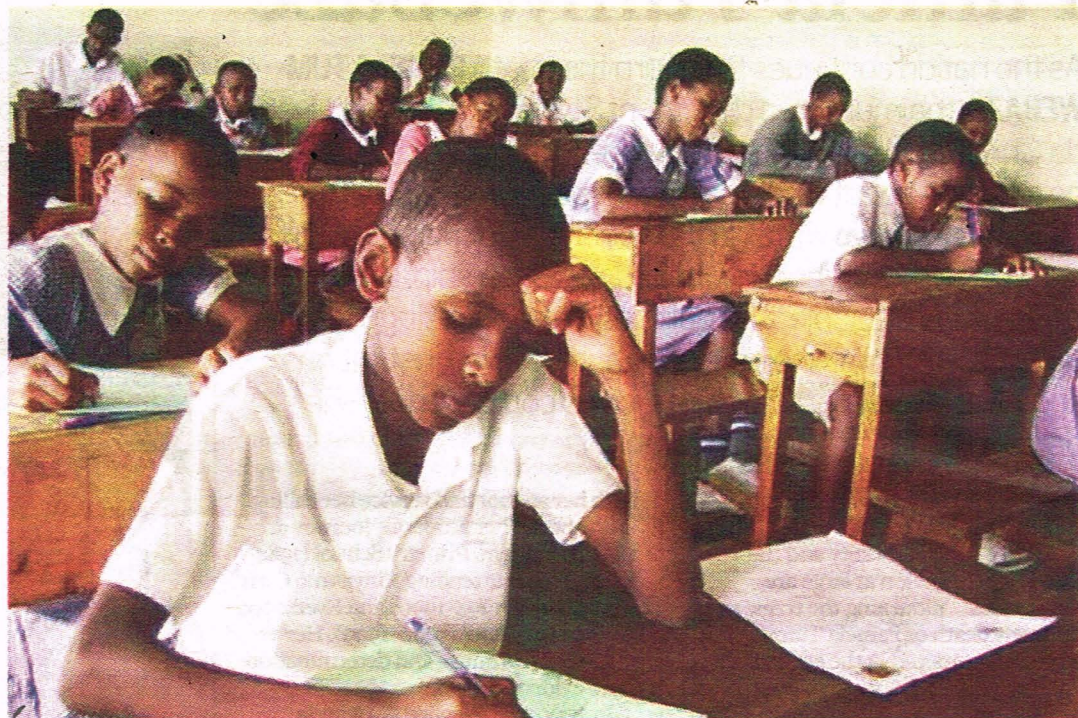
He gave an example where aggregate 4 may have been as a result of a child getting 80 marks out of 100 per a paper, which is a total of 320 marks out of 400 (four papers, each at a total of 100 marks).

The one who gets aggregate 8 may have got 79 marks in each of the paper, with a total of 316 marks out of 400.

But the one who has just 4 marks more is celebrated and the red carpet is rolled out. The parent or guardian doesn't have to call anyone to have the child admitted to their preferred schools.

Newspapers flash the learner on the front pages. The teacher may even win a trip to Europe. The parent of the learner celebrates and shares the news in each and every WhatsApp group.

The one who got aggregate 8 and missed the aggregate 4 grade by a mere 4 marks is left stressed and made to feel unworthy. Some of such children



DENIS JJUUKO

spend weeks crying.

They miss out on joining their preferred secondary schools (or even universities in cases of secondary schools) and sometimes their lives are ruined forever.

It takes a lot of time to regain confidence and push again. Some don't even recover at all.

It is under that background that Prof Obua argued the need to return to the actual marks grading system of the 1980s and abandon the current grading system of aggregates.

I have tried to search for information on why the 1980s grading system was abandoned but haven't found much. Blame the lack of internet at the time.

However, Prof Obua's argument needs to be supported.

Also, the grading system needs to change in case we are not ready for

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change. To get aggregate 1 in a paper, a child almost needs to be 100% correct in all their answers. And it isn't just correct answers, actually, but also punctuations and the like. You miss a full stop; you miss a mark.

The marks are simply too high. What is wrong with a child getting 75% and that is considered aggregate 1 or A in case we don't want to change the system to the 1980s one Prof Obua talked about?

We should be more interested in learners' passing their exams than making them look like failures, because they scored a 75% out of 100. In real life, usually 75% is excellent work. Why can't that be the same in exams?

Since Uneb doesn't seem to have the power to change the grading system (otherwise its board chair wouldn't be complaining), the ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) should have a sit down with him, listen to his idea, do whatever they need to do, such as consultative meetings over coffee, and change the grading system. While at it, they should also think about the exams themselves.

Are national exams necessary since we are not at the same level of development? Why not regional ones?

Wouldn't a regional curriculum actually be better than a national one to cater for the interests of each region? Over to you ministry of Education.

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The writer is a communication and visibility consultant.

Health

Rotary International president leaves indelible mark on Ugandan healthcare

GEOFFREY SERUGO

The two-day visit of Rotary International President Francesco Arezzo to Uganda may have been brief, but its impact on the country's health sector promises to be lasting.

Accompanied by his spouse, Ann Maria Criscione-Arezzo, Arezzo arrived on February 20 for a whirlwind tour that took him from hospital wards to community health posts, all to witness firsthand the high-impact work being powered by Rotary.

While the itinerary was packed with stops; from the "Oxygen for Life" initiative at Kawempe National Referral Hospital to the bone marrow transplant centre in Lubowa, one event stood out as a defining moment of the trip was the official launch of a dedicated polio vaccination centre in the community of Jjanyi, Kajjansi, Wakiso district.

For over two decades, the Rotary Club of Kajjansi, alongside partners like the Rotary Club of Kampala South and Kampala Blue Hearts, has been showing up in Jjanyi every single month to deliver immunization services. What started as a consistent outreach effort finally took permanent root on February 23, when Arezzo officially commissioned the new vaccination centre in the area.

Rotarians, healthcare workers, local leaders, and families gathered to mark the transformation of decades of grassroots service into a lasting home for community health. Speaking at the launch, Arezzo didn't just praise the new building; he praised the spirit behind it.

"This is a powerful example of what sustained service can achieve," he told



Rotary International President Francesco Arezzo does vaccination against polio at Jjanyi, Wakiso

the audience. "For over two decades, Rotarians have shown up for this community. Today, that commitment takes a permanent form. This is how we will end polio by being present, consistent and community-driven."

The new centre is more than just a vaccination post. It was envisioned as a long-term investment. Club leaders from Kajjansi shared their hope that this facility would be the seed for a fully functional health centre, one that would continue to serve the children and families of Jjanyi for generations to

come.

As a founding partner of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, Rotary has helped reduce polio cases worldwide by over 99.9 percent. In Uganda, the fight is sustained by moments like this one in Jjanyi, where partnership, private sector support from organizations like dfcu bank and community trust come together to protect every last child.

Beyond Jjanyi, Arezzo's tour painted a full picture of Rotary's footprint in Uganda. At Kawempe National Referral Hospital, a major milestone

was announced with the launch of the \$500,000 "Mama Toto Care" Global Grant, aimed at bolstering maternal and child health. Arezzo reminded everyone that behind the statistics of Uganda's disease burden "is a family and a future at risk."

He described the bone marrow transplant centre in Lubowa as "a symbol of hope and resilience," praising the collaborative effort to bring curative treatment closer to home. During his visit at the Uganda Blood Transfusion Service in Nakasero, he emphasized that the work being done was "more than equipment, it is hope" and a chance at life for a child with severe malaria or a mother facing complications.

Throughout the visit, local Rotary leaders reflected on the significance of having the global president in their midst.

Geoffrey Martin Kitakule, the district governor, noted that the visit was a reflection to Rotary's collaborative spirit.

Meanwhile, Christine Kawooya Kyeyune, the governor of District 9214, highlighted how initiatives like the Makerere University Rotary Peace Centre are equipping young leaders to build harmony.

On the other hand, Emmanuel Katongole, the incoming Rotary International director for Zone 22, reinforced Africa's pivotal role in global health progress. For his part, past District Governor Kenneth Wycliff Mugisha saw the visit as a moment to celebrate the legacy and the bright future being built by Uganda's young Rotaractors.

In the end, as Arezzo's visit drew to a close, the lasting impression wasn't just left by his words, but by the actions he witnessed.

For one, the new vaccination centre in Jjanyi stands as a permanent reminder that the fight to end polio is won not by global strategy alone, but by showing up, month after month, year after year, in the communities that need it most.

JCRC appeals for Shs 14bn to establish bone marrow transplant unit

GEOFFREY SERUGO

The Joint Clinical Research Centre (JCRC) is seeking Shs 14.3 billion to establish a fully operational bone marrow transplant (BMT) unit in Kampala. The appeal was made by JCRC's Executive Director during a fundraising event launched over the weekend by Rotary International President, Francesco Arezzo, in Lubowa, a Kampala suburb.

The BMT center was initially launched by President Museveni in 2023. However, delays in accessing funding have slowed progress. JCRC has made some headway by setting up temporary infrastructure, but the current facility cannot meet the growing demand for bone marrow transplants.

The proposed unit is expected to serve patients with a wide range of conditions requiring bone marrow transplants, including sickle cell anemia, blood cancers, and other bone marrow disorders. It will also provide specialized services such as plasma exchange for children.

Statistics indicate that 1% of Uganda's population suffers from sickle cell disease, with approximately 20,000 babies born each year with the condition.

"This is the first bone marrow transplant centre in Uganda, and probably the first in Africa. Currently, patients cannot be treated locally and must be sent to India and other countries. I am happy to see the community contributing to equip it," said Rotary

International President, Francesco Arezzo.

He added, "The centre is a necessity, and we must mobilize resources to save lives not only in Uganda but across the region as well."

The initial funding request from JCRC was approximately \$20 million, to be released in phases. The first phase requires \$4 million, while total funding needed within one year ranges between \$17-20 million to fully operationalize the transplant unit.

Monica Musenero, the minister for Science, Technology, and Innovation the initiative is just a gate opener.

"It will create opportunities for Ugandans to access cell-based medicine, individualized treatments, and gene therapy," Musenero said.

Dr Cissy Kityo Mutuluúza, JCRC executive

director, highlighted the potential of bone marrow transplant to cure numerous diseases, including blood cancers, sickle cell disease, bone marrow disorders, and even HIV.

Pearl Bank led the fundraising campaign by contributing Shs 200 million. Pearl Bank Managing Director, Julius Kakeeto said the partnership is not merely philanthropic but a strategic investment aligned with Uganda's national development framework, particularly the ATMS Strategy (Agro-Industrialization, Tourism, Minerals, and Science & Technology Innovation). "Our support for the centre strengthens this pillar by advancing medical research, expanding specialized healthcare infrastructure and building local capacity in complex medical procedures," Kakeeto said.

Economy

From Kampala to the continent: the business architecture behind live54+

A Ugandan entrepreneur's quiet assembly of a Pan-African creative group raises a more fundamental question. As **GEOFFREY SERUGO** wonders, is East Africa finally building the infrastructure its creative economy deserves?

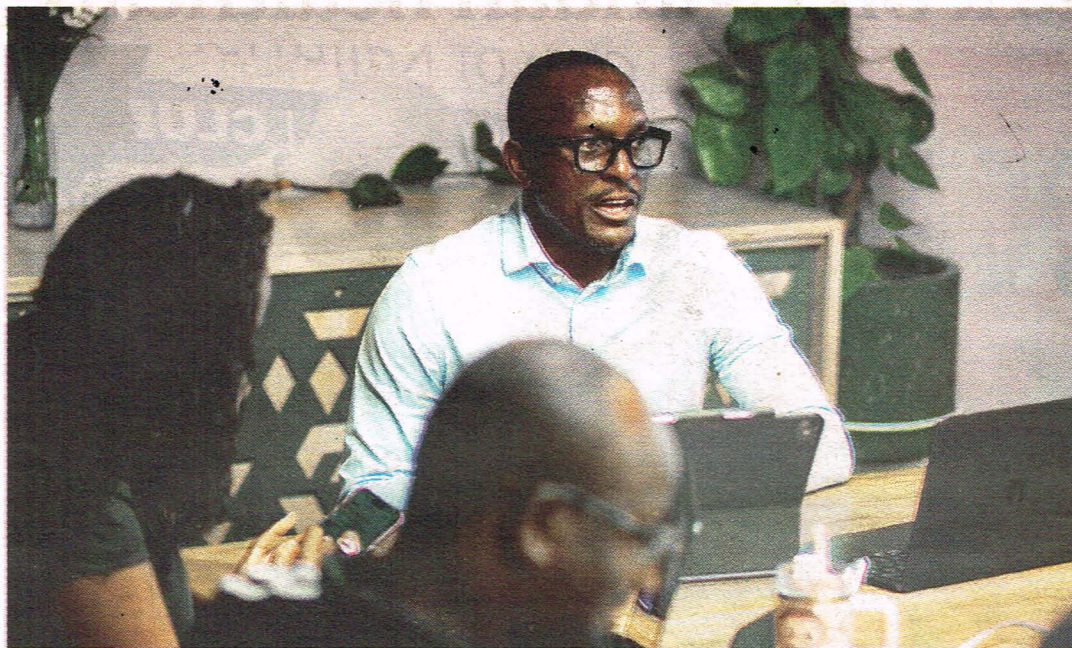
There is a particular kind of ambition that accumulates and methodically, over years of building businesses that work, then asks a bigger question: what would it look like if all of this were connected?

That is, in essence, the story behind Live54+, the Pan-African creative group that officially launched this week with Julius Kyazze as its chief executive. The group brings together a network of creative, media, entertainment and experiential businesses across multiple African markets, with a coordination hub in Nairobi and planned active operations spanning Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ghana and Burundi. Strategic offices in Dubai and Mauritius complete the architecture.

The name is not accidental. Africa has 54 countries. The ambition is continental.

THE STRUCTURE, NOT THE PERSONALITY

It would be easy and wrong to read this launch as a personal milestone



Julius Kyazze during Trace Music summit

story. Kyazze is already well known within East Africa's creative industry. He built Swangz Avenue into one of the most recognisable talent management and music production outfits on the continent. He expanded into experiential marketing through Buzz Group Africa, into youth-focused broadcasting through NRG and Play Radio, and into brand strategy through The Kolektive. Each of those businesses has earned its own standing.

Live54+ is something different. It is not a rebranding of those entities, and it is not a holding company in the traditional sense. It is, according to its own positioning, an ecosystem a group structure designed to enable those businesses to collaborate across borders, share infrastructure, and collectively

serve clients and audiences at a scale that no single entity could manage alone.

What Live54+ is attempting if it executes is to build that connective tissue into a formal group structure.

WHY THIS, WHY NOW

The timing is not arbitrary. East Africa's intra-regional trade has expanded sharply. Total merchandise trade within the East African Community reached roughly USD 38.2 billion in the second quarter of 2025 alone, a jump of 28.4 per cent compared to the same period in 2024. Goods, money and people are moving faster across borders than at any point in the region's history. The question is whether ideas, content and creative services can move with the same fluency. Africa's creative economy presents a

compelling case for why they should. The continent's music, film, fashion and digital content industries are among the fastest-growing economic segments on the continent. Markets that were once fragmented and undervalued are now attracting serious attention from global streaming platforms, advertising groups and private equity investors. The infrastructure to capture that value, however, the agencies, the management companies, the production houses with genuine cross-border reach, remains thin.

WHAT THE MODEL MEANS FOR BRANDS

From a commercial standpoint, the Live54+ proposition is straightforward and worth taking seriously. Multinational brands operating across East and West Africa have long faced a frustrating reality: to run an integrated campaign across Uganda, Kenya and Ghana, they must typically engage separate agencies in each market, navigate inconsistent creative standards, and manage fragmented reporting. The cost is not just financial. It is the cost of diluted creative coherence across markets.

THE TEST WILL BE EXECUTION

Scepticism is warranted. The history of Pan-African business ambitions is littered with announcements that outpaced their operational capacity. Building a genuinely integrated group across six or more markets requires not just shared branding but shared systems, shared financial infrastructure, and the kind of management depth that takes years to develop.

Kyazze brings 20 years of track record to that challenge. The businesses within the group are established entities, not paper ventures. The offices in Dubai and Mauritius suggest a structure built for international capital and client relationships, not just regional optics.

Whether Live54+ becomes the Pan-African creative group it intends to be will be answered not by this launch, but by what it delivers in the next three years.

But the architecture being assembled here is serious. That, at minimum, deserves serious attention.

Twenty students to benefit from Shs 3.85bn Africa STEM scholarships

GEOFFREY SERUGO

At least 20 students from underprivileged backgrounds are set to benefit from scholarships worth Shs 3.85 billion to pursue science and technology degree programmes at leading universities in Uganda.

The scholarships are being offered under the Airtel Africa Foundation Tech Fellowship, a newly launched initiative designed to support talented African undergraduates from low-income households in pursuing degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

The programme directly addresses financial and skills barriers that limit young Africans' participation in the digital economy.

Beneficiaries will undertake their studies

at top institutions, including Makerere University, Kyambogo University, ISBAT University, Uganda Christian University, and Mbarara University of Science and Technology.

Speaking at the launch, Soumendra Sahu, the Airtel Uganda chief executive officer, expressed confidence in the scholars' potential to drive Africa's digital transformation.

"This marks a new chapter in the lives of 20 remarkable young Ugandans. Our mission is to create a tangible and lasting impact by ensuring that no bright mind is left behind due to financial limitations. These scholars are on a path to contribute meaningfully to Uganda's and Africa's growing digital economy," Sahu said.

He added that the initiative reflects Airtel's

broader commitment to empowering the next generation of innovators, problem-solvers, and leaders.

"Technology is the language of progress. By equipping these students with education and skills, we are investing in people and solutions that will transform communities, industries, and nations," he said.

The fellowship underscores the Airtel Africa Foundation's commitment to long-term impact in digital education. With a total value of approximately Shs 3.85 billion (about \$1.024 million) spread over four years, the programme represents a significant investment in developing future-ready talent.

One of the beneficiaries, Edgar Baluku from Uganda Christian University, described the scholarship as a turning point in his pursuit of

a career in telecommunications engineering.

"I am very excited about this opportunity. I have been struggling, like many students, to raise school fees for my education. This scholarship gives me the chance to pursue my dreams and make my parents and the entire clan proud," he said.

The Airtel Africa Tech Fellowship forms part of the Foundation's broader strategy to strengthen education and digital inclusion across the continent. The initiative builds on other social investments, including the Airtel-Unicef partnership, which has connected more than 84,000 learners in 246 schools across Uganda to digital learning platforms.

"We want to ensure that financial limitations do not silence talent, ambition, or the power to transform communities," Sahu said.

In the fight against Malaria, everyone can be a hero



ANGELLA NAKAMAANYA

Uganda loses more than 15,000 people to malaria every year. Most of them are children, and most of these deaths are preventable. We have fought this disease for generations. Sometimes we have won. Other times we have lost. But one thing remains constant: the fight is won by heroes - and not all heroes wear white coats.

STANDING WITH GIANTS

Today, Ugandan scientists are writing the next chapter of history. At the Uganda Virus Research Institute in Entebbe, Dr. Jonathan Kayondo and his team at Target Malaria Uganda, of which I am a member, are developing genetic technologies that could change how we fight malaria forever. Instead of just killing mosquitoes or blocking their bites, they are asking: what if we could modify mosquitoes so they can't spread malaria at all?

"This isn't foreign science imported from overseas. This is the work of Ugandan researchers," affirms Dr. Kayondo. Our colleague, scientist Krystal Birungi, works with me in Uganda's first advanced insectary, collecting mosquitoes from islands around Lake Victoria, engaging with our communities, and building solutions for our problems.

"In 2024, we successfully began studying genetically modified mosquitoes in a contained insectary right here in Uganda. It's cutting-edge science happening in our own backyard," says Birungi.

Dr. Kayondo reminds us that in 1897, Dr. Ronald Ross sat in a cramped Indian laboratory, squinting at mosquitoes under a weak microscope. After months of failures, he finally proved that mosquitoes spread malaria. That discovery opened the door to every malaria control method we use today.

Decades later, Chinese scientist Tu Youyou tested hundreds of traditional remedies during China's Cultural Revolution. Working with basic equipment and limited resources, she discovered artemisinin — the drug that now saves millions of African lives each year. She won a Nobel Prize for it in 2015. These scientists refused to accept that malaria was unstoppable. They were right.

But here's what matters most: while scientists work on tomorrow's breakthroughs, we need heroes today. And that is where you come in.

FIVE-MINUTE HEROISM

You don't need a laboratory or a PhD to save lives. You just need to do these simple things:

- Sleep under a treated net every single night. Check it for holes and replace when it is worn out. Make sure your children and pregnant women in the house use theirs too. No excuses.
- Walk around your compound once a week. Look for standing water - in old tyres, containers, blocked gutters, flowerpots and pour it out. Mosquitoes breed in these places. No water, no mosquitoes.
- Keep your grass cut and your compound clean. Mosquitoes hide in overgrown bushes and rubbish piles. A clean home is a safer home.
- Go to a health facility when you have fever. Don't wait. Don't guess. Don't buy medicine from a shop without testing. Get tested. Start treatment immediately if positive. Finish all the medicine.
- Welcome health workers when they come to spray. When community programmes offer free nets, take them. When health workers educate neighbours, listen and share what you learn. These actions take minutes. But they save lives - maybe your child's, maybe your neighbour's, maybe someone you will never meet. That is heroism.

WE CAN WIN THIS

Let's be honest: the fight is getting harder. Climate change is expanding mosquito breeding zones.

Some malaria parasites are becoming resistant to drugs. The parasite and the mosquitoes keep adapting. But so do we.

We have bed nets that work. We have effective medicines. We have dedicated health workers reaching the remotest villages to treat patients. And now we have Ugandan scientists developing next-generation tools that could finally tip the balance in our favour.

Target Malaria's work is backed by rigorous safety testing, community consent, and government oversight. They are not rushing. They are doing it right. And they are doing it with Ugandan leadership. We should celebrate our scientists and invest in Ugandan research.

But we should not wait for perfect solutions. The child sleeping under a torn net tonight needs action now, just like the family living near a swampy area or the pregnant woman at risk.

THE CHOICE IS SIMPLE

Ronald Ross called malaria "million-murdering Death." He wasn't exaggerating. We know this disease. We've buried too many people because of it. But we also know it can be beaten. The scientists who came before us proved it. Our own scientists are proving it again. And every Ugandan who takes simple prevention steps is proving it every day.

This generation can be the one that finally frees Uganda's children from malaria. But only if we all fight - scientists in labs, health workers in clinics, families in homes.

Check your net tonight. Clear the water containers tomorrow. Support the health workers when they come. Trust our scientists as they develop new tools. Every action counts. Every person matters. In the fight against malaria, everyone can be a hero. Will you?

The writer is the Insectary Assistant, Target Malaria Uganda, UVRI

Delivering 10x Growth: What is our contribution?



SYLVIA MULINGE

At the beginning of each year, leaders from across MTN's markets gather to align on our shared ambition: driving digital solutions for Africa's progress.

This year, our discussions focused on how we can accelerate digital adoption in ways that deliver meaningful economic impact across the continent. The conclusion was clear. Real progress will require deliberate choices, coordinated action, and strong partnerships in every market.

Following that session, we met H.E. President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni at State House in Entebbe to discuss Uganda's opportunities and our contribution to advancing digital progress as a catalyst for national prosperity. The central question was how to translate Uganda's digital ambitions under National Development Plan IV (NDP IV) into tangible results for businesses, households, and the broader economy.

If that is the goal, then every sector must define its contribution. For the ICT industry, contribution is not simply about expanding networks or increasing data usage. It is about raising productivity across agriculture, tourism, minerals, manufacturing, services, and small enterprise. The real test is whether digital tools are helping businesses grow faster, farmers access better markets, and young people access new income streams.

The infrastructure base has expanded significantly. Nearly 87 per cent of Ugandans live within reach of mobile broadband. Yet only 29 percent actively use the internet. That gap between coverage and usage represents unrealised growth.

If adoption does not keep pace with

infrastructure, the economic multiplier remains limited. Closing that gap requires shared action.

For the industry, the responsibility is continued investment and practical innovation: strengthening rural coverage, improving service quality, and designing device financing models that reduce upfront costs. It also means expanding partnerships that deliver digital training tied directly to livelihoods.

For policymakers, the contribution lies in widening access. Entry-level smartphones remain out of reach for many households, partly because taxes significantly increase the retail price. Lowering the cost of entry is not a sector concession. It is a growth decision. Each additional affordable smartphone in the hands of a trader, farmer, or student expands the country's productive capacity.

For the education sector and development partners, the focus must be capability. Connectivity alone does not generate income. Digital literacy must move beyond basic familiarity to practical application: marketing produce online, managing mobile payments, tracking inventory, accessing digital credit responsibly. These are the skills that convert access into value.

For businesses across sectors, the responsibility is integration. Adoption accelerates when digital tools are embedded in supply chains, procurement systems, distribution networks, and customer engagement. When participation in markets increasingly requires digital interaction, usage rises naturally.

In this sense, smartphone penetration and digital literacy are not telecom indicators. They are national productivity indicators.

Digital infrastructure should be viewed as economic infrastructure, alongside roads and electricity. Roads connect producers to markets.

Electricity powers production. Affordable connectivity and devices reduce transaction costs, expand reach, and improve transparency. When more citizens are connected and capable, enterprises scale more quickly and competitiveness improves.

In earlier discussions with the Permanent secretary and Secretary to the Treasury, we focused on alignment. Fiscal policy, infrastructure investment, affordability reforms, skills development, and regulatory certainty must pull in the same direction. NDP IV already recognises ICT as an enabler. The foundation is largely in place. The priority now is accelerating adoption and embedding digital into sector performance.

Progress cannot be measured by coverage alone. It must show up in incomes, stronger enterprises, job creation, and better service delivery.

Infrastructure lays the foundation, but affordable smartphones widen participation. Digital skills turn access into income, and integration across sectors delivers scale. When these elements move together, the usage gap narrows, and digital ambition begins to translate into measurable economic growth.

History will not judge us by the ambition of our strategies, but by the outcomes we deliver. If we are serious about national prosperity, then digital adoption must move from conversation to coordinated action. Each sector has a role. The question is whether we will move together, at pace, and with intent. If we do, digital will not simply connect Uganda. It will power its next chapter of growth.

The writer is the Chief Executive Officer of MTN Uganda



Eight years after OTT: A failed experiment that stifled Uganda's digital economy

RONALD KARUHANGA

In July 2018, the government of Uganda introduced a novel tax: Shs 200 per day to access social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter. Dubbed the "Over-The-Top" (OTT) or "social media" tax, it was promoted as a necessary revenue measure and a tool to curb "online gossip." eight years later, the policy has been formally abandoned, but its legacy is a stark lesson in economic self-sabotage. A review of its journey reveals a trail of missed targets, suppressed digital growth, and an enduring chilling effect on free expression and a mistake the nation must not repeat.

GRAND PROMISE VS GRIM REALITY

The government's initial revenue projection was ambitious. The Ministry of Finance estimated the tax could generate up to Shs 486 billion (approximately USD 131 million) annually by 2022. This promise of easy money from the flourishing digital sector proved too enticing to pass.

However, the reality was a spectacular shortfall. By 2020, the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) reported a staggering deficit of Shs 234.48 billion from its OTT revenue target, blaming widespread "evasion and non-compliance."

The tax was not just unpopular; it was economically unworkable. Users simply stopped paying, turned to Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to bypass the block, or, most damagingly, disconnected from the internet entirely. This forced a policy U-turn in July 2021 when the OTT tax was replaced with a 12 percent excise duty on internet data bundles. In essence, the government swapped one access-choking levy for another, admitting the original model had failed.

COMMUNICATION SILENCED, INFORMATION BLOCKED

The tax's impact on digital communication and access to information was immediate and severe. Research indicated that in the first three months, internet penetration in Uganda sunk to 35 percent from 47 percent. Another study warned the tax could cut the number of internet users by five million.

For millions of Ugandans, the cost was prohibitive. The Shs 200 daily fee, plus a 1 percent charge on the mobile money transaction used to pay it, represented a significant

portion of income in a country where about 25 percent of the population lives in poverty.

The result was a two-tier digital society: those who could afford to stay connected and a much larger group forced offline. This violated the fundamental right to access information. Furthermore, by making casual online conversation expensive, the tax served as a potent tool to stifle free expression and public discourse.

Perhaps the most profound and long-lasting damage has been to Uganda's digital economy. The policy directly contradicted the global consensus that affordable internet access is a catalyst for economic growth. By making connectivity more expensive, it erected a barrier to entry for e-commerce, digital finance, online education, and tech innovation.

The Alliance for Affordable Internet reported that following the tax's introduction, Uganda moved down four positions in its affordability rankings.

This is not just a statistic; it translates to lost opportunities for entrepreneurs, fewer customers for online businesses, and a weakened talent pool for the digital sector. The tax effectively sacrificed long-term, sustainable digital economic growth for a short-term revenue grab that never materialised.

Uganda's experience is not unique in the region, but it serves as a cautionary tale. Other African nations have experimented with similar taxes with equally troubling outcomes.

Tanzania introduced hefty annual licensing fees for bloggers and online platforms, a move widely criticized for stifling independent media and citizen journalism.

Conversely, the case for Kenya is instructive. Facing public pressure, it rejected a proposed social media tax, opting instead to focus on broader digital service taxes that target the revenue of multinational tech companies rather than penalizing individual users for basic access.

Uganda should abolish, revise and prioritize growth. The evidence is overwhelming that taxing basic internet access is a regressive policy that harms the poor, limits freedom and hinders national economic prospects. The OTT tax was a failure, and its replacement with a 12 percent data levy continues to burden the very

sector Uganda needs to thrive.

It is time for a complete revision. The government should considerably reduce or abolish the 12 per cent excise duty on internet data to make connectivity truly affordable.

Also, government can shift its focus to equitable

digital service taxes (DST) by targeting the revenues of global tech giants operating in Uganda, as seen in Kenya and several European nations.

And lastly, they can invest digital tax revenue transparently into expanding national broadband

infrastructure and digital literacy programs, creating a virtuous cycle of growth.

Eight years on, the OTT tax experiment stands as a clear example of how not to harness the digital revolution. For Uganda to compete in the 21st century, it must foster - not

tax - the connections that drive modern economies. The path to a prosperous digital future lies in enabling access, not erecting barriers.

The writer is a lawyer and youth advocate

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Deadline Extension for Licensing of Large Registered Societies or Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies under the Microfinance Deposit-Taking Institutions Act Cap.58 and Micro Finance Deposit-Taking Institutions (Registered Societies) Regulations 2023

The Bank of Uganda informs the public that the deadline previously issued to Regulated Financial Service Providers (RFSPs) to update their Know Your Customer (KYC) practices and transact only with licensed Registered Societies/Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOs) has been extended from 31 March 2026 to **30 September 2026**.

This extension is intended to:

1. Enable the Bank of Uganda to undertake a stakeholder engagement including further sensitization and public awareness on its role in licensing and regulatory oversight of eligible SACCOs. These engagements will inform changes to existing regulatory oversight, if necessary.
2. Provide eligible SACCOs—those with voluntary savings exceeding **UGX 1,500,000,000** and institutional capital exceeding **UGX 500,000,000**—with additional time to prepare and submit the required licensing documentation.

During this period of extension, all RFSPs are encouraged to continue with the support being offered to registered societies or SACCOs in the process of obtaining requisite licenses. The Bank of Uganda does not expect any RFSP to deny financial services to the eligible SACCOs until the expiry of this period.

For further information regarding the licensing and regulation of large SACCOs, please contact the **Director, Non-Bank Financial Institutions Department, Bank of Uganda, on +256 414 234652.**

MANAGEMENT

23 February 2026