“LOOK AFTER ME”

The Absurdity of Bribery Politics in Uganda

The Candidate (Centre) prepares to take the stage at one of his rallies in Bufumbira South Constituency, Kisoro district in February 2011

Anatomy of a Parliamentary contest in a rural constituency in Uganda

BY

Bernard Sabiti

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The Title: “Look after me” is an expression locals in Kisoro when asking a candidate some money or a favour so they can vote for him or her in return. The Rufumbira word for it is “Ndeberera”. Other terms used include “Kureka” (an analogy borrowed from water harvesting), “Vuga” (‘Speak’) and “Tang’inama” (Say something)
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Bufumbira South is one of the three parliamentary constituencies in Kisoro district. It is made up of five sub-counties, 16 parishes and 193 villages. It is bordered by Mt Muhavura and Mgahinga national park to the south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC to the west (at Bunagana border), Rwanda to the south west (at Kyanika border), Bufumbira East Constituency to the east, and Bufumbira north to the North East. It has the biggest number of registered voters in the district, at 53,000 and is also the most fought after constituency in the history of the area. The reason is that the main town, the head quarters of the district is found in the constituency and some of the wealthiest and most educated Bafumbira also originate there.

Former MPs include former labour minister and education minister in the Museveni and Obote regimes respectively and until recently district LCV and NRM chairman, Dr Philemon Mateke (1994-2001), and former culture minister, Sam Bitangaro (2001-2006) and the incumbent MP and Agriculture minister, Tress Bucyanayandi (2006-2016)

The ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) has traditionally won elections in the area, with Museveni winning record landslides since he began running. On two occasions, Kisoro has emerged the first district in giving Museveni the most number of votes in the entire country, with the NRM supremo garnering a staggering 95% of the vote in the 2011 election.

For MPs however, the races are always dead heats, with the two main candidates being separated by only a couple of votes. With the exception of Mateke, who is the defacto king of the Bafumbira, the 2006 duel between Bitangaro who was the NRM flag-bearer and Bucyanayandi who was an independent almost ended in a draw, with Bucyana winning by a couple hundred votes

2011 however was different altogether. After the messy NRM primaries in which Bucyanayandi emerged the winner with 2000 votes, like in the rest of the country, all the other candidates who lost rebounded in the general election as independents. Because of his financial muscle however, Bucyanayandi still prevailed, winning 53% of the vote, John Tereraho getting 44%, Bernard Sabiti getting 1.6% while FDC’s Joseph Munyaneza, got only 286 votes.
The Candidates

The 2011 parliamentary race in Bufumbira South attracted a total of four candidates;

- Tress Bucyanayandi, the incumbent 73 year old, whose fortunes include having new-year’s day 1938 as his birth date. A graduate of universities of Wisconsin and West Virginia, he is one of the most respected brains on agriculture in the country. Having earned his diploma in agriculture at Bukalasa Agricultural College in Uganda, he used the 1960s scholarship opportunities to earn a BSc and Msc in agriculture from the above mentioned American Ivy league schools. His tone-heavy CV includes accolades such as; Farmer & Consultant on Agriculture(2001-2005), Managing Director, Uganda Coffee Development Authority(1993-2000), Director of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (1990-1992), Deputy Commissioner for Agriculture(1988-1991), Assistant Commissioner For Agriculture(1982-1987), General Manager Kinyara Sugar Works(1972-1976), Area Extension Advisor & Deputy Regional Agricultural Officer, Buganda, and District Agricultural Officer, Kabale &Masaka(1962-1969). He is a staunch catholic and former Democratic Party (DP) diehard, whose party allegiance suffered the same fate as that of the multitudes of others in the wake of NRM dominion in the 1980s.

- John Tereraho, a seasoned educationist with several years’ experience as a district education officer for Kisoro and Rukungiri districts. The 49 year old holds an M.A in history from Makerere University. He ran as an independent after losing the NRM primary to Bucyanandi.

- Joseph Munyaneza, 45, was the FDC flag bearer. He holds an advanced political science degree from Makerere University, and is a former teacher there.

- Bernard Sabiti, is 28 years old, and is also a graduate of Makerere University. He also ran as independent. A former Radio talkshow host, he is currently a social researcher.
THE CAMPAIGN BEGINS

One day towards the end of 2009, a certain guy called the office where I worked. He told my manager that I was using my job to build a political career, and that I had to be stopped.

I had worked with company for three years. This caller’s allegation, though false at the time, was not completely baseless. I was indeed planning to run for parliament in Bufumbira South. I had for long wanted to test the political waters, to figure out how it is, but I had yet to figure out whether to give up my job. This guy almost preempted everything.

This caller, a young man of the same age as me had a few weeks before the call come to my house with a relative, and seen a sample of the pictures/campaign posters that I had rudimentary printed and, having political ambitions of his own, I had no doubt he was the person who reached out to my employers with the news. For part of 2009 and 2010, I had began strategizing, throwing in one or two visits here and there, but in a casual way. The youngman, a protégé of Hon Bucyanayandi, was also was running for youth MP for western region which he lost in the primaries for the NRM ticket.

His motives were clear. As his political godfather he expected to go in Bucyanayandi’s shoes after 2016. The emergency of another formidable young politico therefore, was sure to rattle him. He was also the editor of a local bimonthly newspaper so he was shrewed.

My manager though seemingly unbothered must have sensed some truth in the allegation. I had never hidden the fact that I was deeply political, in my conversations with colleagues at the office, and the way I wrote reports and did other aspects of my work. When he asked me whether that was true, I denied it was the case but he seemed unconvinced and unbothered, since what mattered was the fact that I did my work well.

The next action I took towards formalizing my run was printing 2010 calendars with my image on them. I declared “Ndikuza” (I am coming), in beautiful gold colours and also splashed there what was to be my slogan; “Abishize hamwe ntakibananira” (There is nothing the united can’t accomplish), a popular Rufumbira saying. I printed 1,500 copies and hired young men to distribute them through the constituency, pin a copy at every trading centre and gave some to people to put in their homes.
Then the absurdity also begins

While I was taking a box of the calendars to the bus park to be taken to my home constituency, I met there my former mathematics teacher, a man I fully admired in secondary school. I actually credit him with saving me an F in math. I got a Credit 6 and I still tell all and sundry about it. However, Mr. Rukirande shocked me with his comments when I handed him a copy of the calendars. “Yeah, why not?” he said of my intention to run. “Go and at least get yourself a Pajero as well. Why should we keep sending others?” A middle aged man, he is a graduate and smart. I was therefore surprised that he could harbor such an attitude.

The response was underwhelming. Enough people called though saying they were excited that I was running. I however doubted whether the goodwill from these voters was genuine, or whether it would run through the actual election.

By my calendar stunt, I unofficially became the first candidate to take the plunge before all the money bags so the voters weren’t sure yet who else was running. I kept working at STF, going in the constituency once in a while, and trying to gauge the mood of the voters. I attended as many funerals as I could, went to parties, and very opportunity that presented itself to showcase myself to the voters, I jumped at it. I emceed at weddings and all sorts of parties where I was requested to do so.

For most of 2010 though, I minded my business, took up another job, and actually was contemplating pulling out after hearing what had happened in the NRM primaries, which, as a party member I had thought of participating in but seeing the mess in organization had let the event pass.

My first real political event was to come a year later however. On 21 November, 2010, I held a mini-rally at Kisoro Hill, a trading centre overlooking the town. Most people here knew me well, as I used to hold FGDs and had given assistance to their savings organization while still at STF. (Offering support to self-help groups was part of my job description and wasn’t supposed to be political. When time came however, I couldn’t resist reminding the voters what “I” had done to their youth). I reached the place at a few minutes past six o’clock and people were waiting. Isaac Nshimye, the enthusiastic chair of the Kisoro hill group had mobilized them and I was welcomed warmly. The chairman LC1 who operates a shop at whose front we met was also present.

I didn’t take long and I immediately declared the intentions of my visit. I was on a ‘listening tour’, because I was running for parliament. I handed them the new general election posters and copies of my manifesto and other campaign literature in Rufumbira.
Isaac introduced me to the people, and said they still remembered everything I did for them during my stint at STF. Other members weighed in on my homecoming. Jackson, a feisty 50something old man, who used to be a pioneer of cultural performances whenever I could visit, began with a parabolic twist, saying, “Ugirumukwa ntaho aheragayo”, (a person with an in-law surely returns). He said he was happy I had chosen to visit them first. He also informed me that the person who succeeded me also came to visit them which, he said, meant I left them in safe hands.

Thereafter I launched into my manifesto and I rebuked the absurd practice of voter bribery right away. The chairman was the first person to critique my monologue, wondering why all politicians are hypocrites. He said he was happy that I had come to see the voters but asked whether I will be any different if I am elected. “It’s the same old song”, he sharply accused.

Then Isaac, who, at 30 is about the same age as me raised a shocker; “why have you decided to come as an independent? We waited for you in the primaries and you didn’t turn up”. This is the quiz I feared most as I knew that by skipping the primaries, people would attach me to the opposition. For the NRM losers who came as independents, they got a pass as the voters would regard them as stubborn but their own. Not that it is illegal to belong to the opposition in Uganda. But in this community unfortunately, it may as well be a sin to be guilty of a triviality as tiny as not having the right colour to your campaign poster.

I had to say that I had decided not to participate in NRM primaries because I was aware that the election would be rigged, and that in the wake of what had happened, I had been vindicated. I told them that even Tereraho and many others who had lost are coming back as independents. Isaac, perhaps realizing the damage he had caused, then asked me if I could assure them that I would do similar good things as I did while still at STF. I told him that I no matter would, even greater since I would now get a bigger platform if I got elected.

On my voter bribery remarks, a lady in the audience claimed that “it is the president himself who directed that you people should give us something when you come to ask for votes because he gives you the money for that purpose”. The lady was a leader of the women wing of the association and that made her claim even more absurd. “Umureko” [a term locally used to solicit a bribe from candidates] was coined by the president, she claimed.

They continued to implicitly pester me for money but I kept challenging their hypotheses, strongly making the case that voter bribery was evil and was holding their development prospects into the gutter. When it became apparent that I was not going to give them anything, some left the meeting early, dismayed, especially older people. One old man wondered aloud how I could dare come and just talk, having disrupted
people’s activities when they came to hear me. I was dismayed, little knowing that the worst was yet to come.

**NOMINATIONS**

I was by now preparing for the nominations, which were slated for November 25 and 26. I began mobilizing supporters who were to countersign the nomination papers on my behalf, checking their voter identification numbers and so on. The rule was that at least ten voters were to endorse a candidate, then two separate voters, one as the proposer, the other as the confirmer. I looked for approximately ten voters and was taken aback when during the nomination exercise the registrar, Laban Sabiti Muhwezi wondered whether I was serious enough. “Why only ten?” he asked. Apparently other candidates were using dozens, even hundreds of signatures. But I had no time of going into excesses

I remember when I went for a haircut in Bufumbira Salon on Main Street in downtown Kisoro (I had to be groomed for the big day). This guy did a good job on me and I handed him a sh10,000 note. He had three or four other barbers working on other clients. His other colleagues then said I should not claim my change; that they would share it amongst themselves. “Have you forgotten that we are voters too?”, one of them asked! I insisted on getting back my sh8,000 change. They said I wasn’t seriously running. I told them I was. Their leader, a one Bosco, a brown young man told me he was my passionate supporter, and has always been on the radio while I was at STF. He handed me my change and wished me well.

Nov 25, 2010 was a historic day for me. I was declared a parliamentary candidate at exactly 4:40pm by the returning officer. I was bee-busy from the morning, trying to pull off a good ceremony. I had told my interim campaign manager to make sure everything was going according to plan. Even small details like my suit were a concern to him. In my diary, I had a long to do list; call regional supporters, write a police letter, arrange logistics (open roof Ipsum, truck for supporters, P.A system, bodabodas for convoy, camera, fill supporters nomination forms, etc).

In the end, I didn’t get anywhere near accomplishing everything I needed. It was going to be a logistical nightmare that I had not anticipated. I had put an announcement on voice of Muhabura that morning, calling on supporters to come and escort me to the nomination venue. However, I had been left with lingering doubt of what I would feed them if they came in force. Luckily, not very many did come apart from those I personally invited.
After failing to get an open roof vehicle, I used a small Toyota Corolla instead, where I sat with two of my campaign agents. Getting a public address system also became a problem. Almost all outlets in the town that had PA systems to hire had hired them out and there remained only one. The owner, a mean, cold Munyankore from Bushenyi pressed me, shooting the fee to the clouds. A PA system normally goes for 150,000 from 8am to 5pm. This guy charged me the same amount, for barely two hours, from 4-6, even without a generator and its fuel, which I hired separately. “The time for eating has come for these goons”, my feisty head of logistics said of the PA system owner. I was to fully gulp the meaning of his statement in the days to come.

That same day I wrote the District Police Commander, a dark-as-soot fellow, notorious for his indifference to crime and is apparently related to the first lady. Since his transfer to Kisoro, he has always been accused of abetting and siding with criminals.

Titled; “Informing you of my intent to through the town in a Procession”, I informed the DPC that I was getting nominated at 4.30 pm. “My supporters may go through the town in excitement and in big numbers which I thought worthy of police notice”, the letter read in part. “The main purpose of this letter therefore is to let you know of this fact so that any unforeseen activities of some individuals that may warrant public order can be taken care of by the police...” I ended the letter by thanking the police for the ‘job already well done in partnership with the electoral commission”.

I handed the letter to the DPC’s secretary in the district police headquarters and left. I had left my phone charging at my campaign office down and when I arrived back there, the DPC had already rang several times talking to my brother who was then tending to the office. He told him to tell me to report back to the police right away. I rang him myself to get details. His phone tune was Museveni’s popular “Another rap!” I was shocked. This is a police officer who is supposed to be impartial. Anyway, he told me he is not allowing my procession and asked me to go to his office for details.

Reaching there, I found him in the office seated with two other men, who looked like they were detectives. He was red-faced and asked me why I wanted to cause trouble. I told him I wrote him just in case things do not go well, which is what the law says; inform the police first. There were rumors around town that I was the FDC candidate and I wanted to preempt any scapegoats the police was going to make by sabotaging my campaign.

The DPC said several absurd things which to me cemented the image many people have of the police; that it is a rogue force. He made many insulting remarks in Runyankore; “I will crush your head if you try anything stupid. I am not born here so do not joke with me. And if you are one of these FDC people masquerading as independents, we will crush you”. Even if I didn’t show it, I was shaken to the core by the remarks. “This guy can easily shoot me”, I thought. However, he thanked me for saying in the letter that
there was some good in the police, unlike many of the Force’s critics in the opposition. “You are a good boy”, he said. Now get out of here!

He gave me the letter back, having written in the right corner in black ink; “By our standing orders/bylaw your required to inform the IGP in advance to provide you security”.

At 3.30, I headed to the district administration headquarters, the nomination venue, escorted by two vehicles and 25 boda boda cyclists. My manager told me to board one of the bodas, so as to tout my humble means and show solidarity with poor people, and for clear visibility. We drove around town, the PA system blazing out the latest local hits. Bernard, the 18 year old able DJ was shouting out my bio all around. “Vote Sabiti, a young man, very able, your former proud host of Tuvuge Rwatu... the future belongs to him...”

I have never been keen of being praised and Bernard’s dramatic commentary over the loudspeakers was utterly embarrassing and flattering at the same time. We caused a stir in the town mainly with many people coming out of their shops to see what was happening. I was giving thumbs ups to both sides of the street and the people responded with more thumbs up. Only one vehicle was allowed in the nomination venue, so the rest of the party waited outside.

In the hall from where the nomination proceedings were taking place, I found there a long line of contestants and their agents. Silver Bahane, the incumbent MP for Bufumbira North was here too. Most FDC candidates were also present. I was the last to be nominated among the Bufumbira South contestants, the first having been Bucyanayandi, followed by Tereraho. None of the two had come in convoys. They had quietly gone there with their family members after which they went back home. This enabled me to have the town all to myself. I must say I stole the show, even if momentarily.

When the registrar signaled to me to go in, I realized that I had not filled all the three sets of nomination forms. The man was irked and annoyed at the same time. He wandered whether I was a serious candidate. When he realized that I only had names of the required minimum ten supporters, he looked at me as if I was something from mars. “So you only have ten, Mr. Sabiti”, he blurted as I nodded. The irony of us sharing the same name was not lost on either of us. I thought I was losing my mind.

After verifying the papers, he asked me to stand up. VOM’s Kamugish Kabawheza was on hand with a recorder and taped the proclamation. “...I therefore declare you a candidate for parliament in Bufumbira south constituency. Congratulations and good luck.”. My supporters cheered. There after we went out and were joined by the other members of the convoy and headed back to town in the same way we came. We had
used Mutanda road but now we went through the main street for maximum impact. These are the two streets that make up Kisoro town.

Before we left the district headquarters however, John Tereraho was outside, apparently waiting to see me. He gave me a bear hug (he is a very small man, perhaps weighing 50kg) in presence of the town’s Anglican Church big shots who were his supporters. He said he did not know me physically and had longed to see me. He added that we could ‘do business together’. What he meant was not lost on me. One of his supporters, an elderly, bespectacled man argued us to ‘gang together against that old man. If you don’t, you will divide the vote and he will go back to parliament”, he warned.

I thanked Tereraho but did not say anything in response to the absurdity that was his proposal. Little did I know that I had not seen the last of him and his agents!

The other part of the town which our procession went through on our way from the nomination venue was more ecstatic. Many people came out to catch a glimpse of our convoy. Some of these were not elated so much by what I stood for as by a ‘kid’ challenging political heavy weights. “Mwana muto” (A Youngman) they shouted from their shops in approval. I hosted my supporters at Mirembe guesthouse on Mutanda road. Owned by a friend, that’s the place I cooled off from every time I returned from the stump

The day ended well and many people congratulated me, expressing surprise that I could paralyze the town. I met Alex Matata, my former teacher of Religious Education and he told me that Tereraho had told him that he was terrified of me. I laughed

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After the nomination, I drew a strategy of raising some money. I was later to realize this was no easy task. People here expect a candidate to give voters money, not the other way round. I started writing letters of appeal, especially to prominent local people, who I thought cared about our community’s development, and perhaps had a heart for democracy.

I wrote to John King, the popular DJ on VOM, sending him my manifesto, in case he decided to do a few mentions in his popular morning show. I wanted him to know what I stood for. I then put posters at my friends’ shops so they can distribute them on my behalf. I also wrote to Andrew Sebutenga, a supporter and cousin of mine, and sent letters of appeal to several people
I in addition wrote to the district political leaders. In the standard letter that I sent to the district NRM and political leaders, I put it to them that I had bypassed the NRM primaries because my intuition had foretold me how messy they were going to be. I was running as an independent therefore, not because I was rebelling against the party and its founding ideals but because I was tired of the party wing nuts whose shameless practices were betraying the party and country. I professed my love for the NRM but said that if it has to change the course of this country, young cadres have to take charge. No one replied, but when I met the deputy RDC in town one day, he informed me that he had received my letter. Dr Mateke also called me after the election, and told me he had been following my campaigning and had been impressed by my message of good governance. In the parcel, I had also enclosed a poster, a copy of my manifesto and asked for their support.

**Taking the message to FM radio**

On 10 December 2010, a talk show was arranged for all the candidates by the district NGO forum. I traveled to Kisoro a day before by the night Kampala-Kisoro bus and was in the town by early the next morning. On a boda boda to my village home, Ngabire, a folksy, perhaps 20 year old who hails from Busenyi village (no relation to the district) rode me. I tickled Ngabire to tell me his reading of the political situation in Kisoro. He said Bucyanayandi is going all the way back to parliament again because independents had been stopped (he was referring to the NRM order that barred independents. Many disobeyed the order). Boda boda cyclists are the notorious middlemen of the political roumer mill in this area. Because they are patronized by Bucyanayandi and his family of rich patrimonial politicos, they pay thorough allegiance to him. As will be discussed later, their clout in deciding any election is astonishing. Ngabire may have been ignorant of the constitutional prerogative of independents to run whenever and wherever they could wish.

Ngabire further informed me that it was only Bucyanayandi who was selling. “No one knows Tereraho” he said. He cannot win. “Are those the only candidates in Bufumbira South?” I asked him. He said he does not know anyone else. I mentioned Sabiti Bernard. He said he does not know him. Phew! Here we were, barely two months to Election Day and some people had no idea who I was! I began realizing the damage my skipping the primary had caused. Name recognition is important and as some of my amateur advisors had told me, it would have been better to come in the primary, taken a beating and returned in the general election. I do not fancy time wasting unfortunately.

The show was slated for 8 o’clock but electricity went off and we started at 9.30. In the living room of Mugenga’s residence that was used as the waiting area for VOM’s guests, FDC’s James Barhiima of Bufumbira East was waiting patiently, perusing through his talking points. Two other men occupied the adjacent table. I joined them.
At 9:25PM, Gerald Ngarama, the knowledgeable host opened the show, telling listeners that it was sponsored by the Kisoro NGO/CBO forum. The Reverend Mfitumukiza, the soft-spoken coordinator of the forum, and Mr. Munyangabo, the former educationist board member sat facing us. FDC woman MP aspirant, Sylvia Kaus was also present. Absent was Bazanye Milton Mutabazi, the NRM LCV candidate, who was also scheduled to appear with us.

We were told to introduce ourselves, beginning with Munyaneza Joseph, the FDC rival of mine. He was followed by Sylvia Kaus, followed by Barhima. I was the last. Most of the guests took the chance to describe their biographies. Munyaneza Joseph, who had been the very first and had not spoke about his educational background asked to clarify something. “I am a PhD candidate in leadership management”, he said. “I am also a former lecturer at the school of political science at MUK”, etc. I was amused. I doubt any rural Mufumbira knew the meaning of PhD

For the next 2 hours, it was a duel that was unforgettable. I had planned to stand out from the beginning and I tried to do so. I knew there were rumors that I was an FDC sympathizer and I had to dispel that by clearly articulating my independent brand. Besides, the official FDC candidate was here and I thought that was to put to rest the rumors.

The first segment was about each candidate giving his/her manifesto. Briefly I did, talking about our declining agricultural fortunes, our Irish potato growers suffering high taxes with no public services like roads in return.

I made, almost insanely, a strong case against voter bribery. “Anyone who thinks he can buy leadership is a liar, a hypocrite and not deserving a virtue as noble as leadership. “Shun them”, I said. Munyangabo and the Rev. Mfitumukiza animatedly stared at me as I spoke and vigorously nodded in approval. The bile was rising in my throat

After the show, a woman named Majambere from Rurembwe called me and said I had done well. She urged me not to fear and to ‘stay in it to win it’.

The NGO forum, a national consortium of NGOs had developed a document titled; “The citizens Manifesto”, in which the civil society had identified the “top ten citizens development concerns and demands” including; widespread corruption, wide spread poverty, declining agriculture sector, climate change, growing unemployment and breakdown in health service delivery.

I talked about most of these, but connected the predicament to electing bad leaders. I stayed clear of criticizing the president. I left that to the FDC group because I knew that was their manifesto and they knew how to do it. They indeed outgunned one another in doing that job. Instead, I covertly defended the president, arguing that sometimes the voters send him wrong people. As a result, he lacks a team committed to work to
improve the lives of poor people, and I blamed this nexus for poor service delivery (In Kisoro you do not criticize the president, even if on genuine grounds, especially when that president’s name is Museveni. Nobody will listen, later on, understand you)

Even if I was independent, I had to struggle telling the people that I was NRM. Many were suspicious, saying I could be an opposition plant, masquerading as an NRM supporter. But I was a registered member of the NRM, I said, and I had a card, I told them. “Why then are you challenging the flag bearer?”, they could ask. I would tell them that the primary was botched, without merit and a total sham. I do not know how many bought that.

I was taken aback by a question asked by a woman board member of the forum who joined us towards the end of the show. As the only independent in the studio, she asked me, “How are you going to form a cabinet yet you are alone, independent”. I couldn’t understand, later on believe the question.

This woman was in essence saying that MPs form cabinets!. She fed the stereotypes I was facing everyday on the trail; people who have no idea what or how parliament works. People were saying they would be wasting time to vote me, as I would not be sworn in, or allowed to govern. “You will have no team”, they said. I grew weary explaining everyday how the constitution provide for independent MPs, how I will be the most objective without having to be rubberstamped by any party, reminding them that in 2006, they had sent there an independent, Hon Bucyanayandi, who has now grabbed the ticket, and he was rated as among the best performers by the African Leadership Institute (AFLI) scorecard, an independent parliamentary appraiser

I touted my work with STF, where I hosted a show on the same radio. Many people fondly remembered that and said so in the calls that were filed towards the end of the show.

One of my favorite bites against the voter bribery was this; “imagine this. You go to the market and you buy a basket of sweet potatoes. If you reach your home, you may eat them raw or cook them, peeled or unpeeled. Does the seller have any say on how you eat them? That is the same with selling your vote. The vote has been turned into a commodity. You no longer have any rights on this vote. The person to whom it now belongs can use it any way he likes. Sleep on it in parliament, or use it to enrich himself. It’s absurd”.

Without indicting the president, I mentioned all sorts of indicators of bad governance in Uganda. Sh650bn lost to corruption every year, our stadium size parliament at over 300. USA has just 450 in the House of Representatives, 100 in senate. Our GDP is 1 percent that of the USA. An MP earning sh15million a month, 840million over 5 years”. My foot!

Anti-bribery message catches on
Listeners were clearly horrified by these stats and they told me so on the trail. But still they would add; “you can speak well but you should also speak over something however little!. We won’t expect you to give us as much as those rich ones”. I gave nothing, much to their chagrin and consternation. “Not even one thousand for me”? One might say. “Nope” I would answer, respectfully. “That’s corruption. I don’t believe in it”.

I would be scoffed at, at some venues; others would be dismissive of my efforts. “Turn these stones into bread if you are Jesus”, one drunken fellow told me, accusing me of playing too nice, and adding that being omulokole (born-again Christian) doesn’t work in politics.

PATRIMONIAL POLITICS

Augustus Cesar Mulenga is a filthy rich Mufumbira businessman based in Kampala. More importantly, he is catholic, Bucyanayandi’s relative and bankroller. His net worth is estimated in hundreds of millions of dollars. When President Museveni visited Kisoro in January to canvass for votes, I was told, he called all the flag bearers to the front of his mega rally and announced them as the only NRM people that people were to vote for. The Bafumbira of course treasure Museveni’s word and they were listening, and most importantly, the rally was broadcast live on VOM.

After the rally, the president called all NRM independents and met them with the flag bearers that beat them. The president apparently tried to convince them to step down for the flag bearers but all refused. I will recount especially the meeting for Bufumbira South rivals with the president, between Bucyana and Tereraho. The account of what transpired in this meeting differs according to source, with either party trying to spin the proceedings in its favour.

Museveni reportedly asked Tereraho what his beef with Bucyana was. Tereraho said he would have stepped down only if Bucyana had not deployed Mulenga, who poured an avalanche of money in the campaign. “How can a person give 70million to one church?, he asked. “Who is Mulenga?” Museveni apparently surprisingly asked (Bucyana’s supporters claimed that Museveni sent for Mulenga, who simply said he was just a philanthropist. I have yet to confirm this account)

Smart Lawrence

On December 17, I met a gentleman named Smart Lawrence (as strange as that might sound, it was [is] his real name) a 23 year old from Sooko parish in Muramba subcounty. He found me at Mirembe guest house in Kisoro town, after frantically trying to reach me by phone for days. Lawrence claimed that he had a drama and acting group, comprising of 90 people, males and females.
He said they were all my supporters but they had one problem. They didn’t have a drum. They apparently had pooled sh30,000 from each member but they were falling short. That’s why he was meeting me. “We are behind you 100%”, he kept saying repeatedly. We do not disappoint those we support. We don’t abandon them. We are reliable and we stick with one candidate throughout, he said. “Uwo tuririye niw’uwo”, he concluded, meaning in Rufumbira; ‘whosoever’s money we eat, that’s the one we stick with!)

It was one of the most difficult 30minutes I had had so far. I had determined from the time I started the campaign that I was not going to bribe voters. Yet Lawrence kept on his charm offensive. The whole group had wanted to come to see me, he said, but he dissuaded them. He informed me that the following day, the group would be competing in Murora sub-county, in the “Inter sub-county cultural dance competitions” which were sponsored by the brewer of Senator Beer.

Smart said he had advice for me, given that among my opponents I had the least amount of money: “You should simply give people whatever little you have and they will appreciate and give you the votes. They know you are poor. If you fight on our behalf by supporting us, there is no way we can’t do the same for you”, he counseled. I don’t remember what I told Smart to get him off me, but what I remember well is that I gave him no money. For the next few weeks until the election, Smart harangued me, asking for ‘contributions’ to his ‘projects’. I was later told that that’s the same thing he did with the other campaigns.

‘Projects’ such as fundraising for schools, churches, etc, spring up during campaign periods all over Uganda. It’s one of voters’ ploys to squeeze money from politicians. Is it absurd? Of course! Did it a surprise? No! Politics in Uganda is a give and take endeavor. Some politicians call rural voters stupid and poor. I agree they are poor but they are not stupid. They know these local politicians, after getting elected can’t do anything in terms of bringing them public services. They try to get their cut from them before these fellas are elected never to come back. The politicians recoup their money after they get elected, by awarding themselves huge salaries, vehicles and getting bribes. That’s how the game is played. Everyone, including the ‘stupid’ voters knows this.

An unpleasant homecoming

Immediately after being nominated, I came back to Kampala to chill a little a bit. On 24 December, I again boarded a bus from Kampala to Kisoro for Christmas and further campaigning. I had reached the Kampala bus park late and all Kisoro bound buses had left. Reaching Kabale, I boarded an overloaded Toyota Ipsum to Kisoro, with some other Bafumbira, most of who I knew well. These had been in Kampala and didn’t know who I was, or, more complicated, whether I was a candidate. The chatter through the entire
80km journey was politics, with a few bouts on sex. I was quite all through. We sat ten people in the Ipsum that is normally a six-seater.

When the Ipsum touched the tarmac of the Kabale-Kisoro road, praises for Museveni started. (The president had promised to tarmac this road since 1986 when he came to power but had always negated on the promise. It has since been tarmacked. Some critics questioned the timing of the project). “He is a great man”, they said. “But these parliamentarians and ministers make him look bad. They are gluttons. Otaffire is brutal but developmental. He is not politically correct, that’s why I love him. He has given electricity to everyone in Ruhinda (Gen Otafiire’s constituency). Museveni too fears him. That guy can cause trouble. Nasasira has always rigged elections while Kutesa is filthy rich but is never satisfied” the politicking was sporadic and uncoordinated

Then the politicking came home. “Bucyana should rest. That guy is too old to represent us” one of the men said. “But he at least came back home to invest there. There are many Bafumbira who are rich but never bring that wealth back home in terms of investments”. The other man turned to Tereraho. “Let’s vote him. Museveni said independents are ok” They then talked about tribes; “The Banyankore are rich and educated”, one said. “The Baganda are mean, the other added”

“Kagame is no nonsense. Can you imagine he taxes the 4th child onwards and also the second wife? He is fixing Rwanda”. The conversations were sporadic and uncoordinated but it was interesting how informed these fellows were. There was no woman fortunately so when the conversation turned to sex, there was no one to get embarrassed

“These women are ever demanding; they never get tired man”, one of them said with the other adding that when he reaches home, even when he is this tired, he has to satisfy his wife. They laughed and talked about different tribes and their women. Banyarwanda, Baganda, Banyankore, etc.

On 30 December, I attended the cultural gala of the Bafumbira University Students Association (BAUSDA). The gala is an annual event and BAUSDA is a solidarity that brings together all Bafumbira students in universities across the country. Most candidates were there, and whether by design or coincidence, I was seated next to Bucyanayandi. He complimented my guts to run and said; “even if you won’t win, it’s good that you young people come up also”. We chatted at length and I found Bucyanayandi to be an extremely intelligent fellow, contrary to the parody his opponents portray of him. We even shared obushera a local soft brew, served in a gourd, a product of one of the several stunts BAUSDA female students were pulling, apparently to show their parents that they haven’t forgotten their home culture, a constant accusation levied on them
Christmas, 2010

It was Saturday, and I attended the church service at Seseme cathedral, the headquarters of Muhabura Anglican diocese. The morning was rainy but soon it cleared. The Rt Rev Cranmer Mugisha, led the 9 o’clock English service and the cathedral was parked to capacity. He preached about people he called “Drifters. Those with no idea of what they believe in”

The following day, a Sunday, I attended service from Rurembwe Church of Uganda Parish, after being chided by my feisty campaign manager for “praying away from where real voters are” on a day as important as Christmas.

Rurembe is at the foot of the magnificent Mt Muhavura, and the church is almost swallowed up by the steep slopes of the giant mountain. The place is heavily populated, courtesy of its fertile soils. It’s also about only 3 miles from my village home, in the same parish. Many people therefore know me very well here.

The church was filled to capacity when I arrived, with my sister Miriam in tow. Somehow I got space but sat nearly at the back as a result. The blue banner at the front had John 14:6 as the church motto, written in Rufumbira. The preacher of the day, Gad Munderi is a lifelong friend. Munderi was later to become a thorn in my foot when he supported Tereraho and repeatedly came to my office to ask me whether I was seriously running. He told me I should run to be known but not to win. He assured me that he was supporting Tereraho, which was ok to me, but on advising me to drop out, I told him to get lost. However, his preaching this day was great.

Then it was time for auctioning. I could see that everyone was occasionally glancing at me. I had gone to the church very smartly clad in my only suit, a dark, Italian made fabric with a white shirt and a striped blue tie. I had walked to the church and I reached with a considerable amount of dust on my shoes and lower legs. The auctioneer first sold sodas!(Christians here bring all sorts of items as offertory. It's a practice in much of the country. The cash is kept, while items are turned into cash after the service)

The auctioneer, Jack Ntezimana, a perhaps 45 year old short son of the Local Council 2 chairman had taught me at Gitenderi primary school and remains fond of me. In idiomatic tweaks of introduction, he said he had a son in the audience who was aspiring for a very big office and he said he wished I went forward, greet the people and sell the last item; a furry black she-goat that nervously looked on the proceedings from its lope at the side.

I had gone prepared, with just over sh50,000 and I was ready because I knew there was no way I was going to be spared, when I was such a high profile visitor, or so the people thought.
I shot up from my bench to my relief as we sat squeezed on the bench as worshippers kept coming in late. I was given a very loud applause. I greeted the people and introduced myself, saying I was one of the parliamentary candidates. Many people still didn’t know who I was even though the name was well known courtesy of my popular *Tuvuge Rwatu* radio show that I had hosted for three years. I could see many were surprised, like it was everywhere, marveling at such a young man that I was (my voice is a deep, soft baritone and many who listen to me think I am a very old man. Besides, some said I had such a mastery in mature Bufumbira social issues that it was impossible to imagine me as a ‘young boy’. I have my 86-year old grandpa to thank for that).

I was handed the rope that held the poor goat hostage and I started the proceedings. I tied the starting price at sh50,000. Anyone who wanted to buy that goat would start anywhere above that figure. I did this tactfully because the following action was a back and forth of prices among the audience, that excluded me from the price competition. One lady, a primary school teacher whose husband is also a teacher weighed in. She was buying it at sh70,000. Another man said 80k. These were the two main competitors and the congregation kept adding few hundreders and thousands for them.

Later, the Reverend offered to buy the animal at sh100,000. He asked me to count. I would count one!, two! As the choir leader hit the giant drum with a small stick. Then the other two competitors coalesced around the Reverend, transferred the amount on their accounts to the Reverend’s and he won the bid. I also pulled out the sh50,000 that I had staked in the beginning, handed it to the guy who was collecting and said I was also adding it to the Reverend’s account. Thus in the end, the goat fetched a total of sh225,000. One. Two. Three…. the drum was hit, and the congregation gave a thunderous applause. I handed the goat to the reverend and he thanked me.

After the service, I was swarmed by many people outside the church, all of whom wished me good luck. But they wondered why I had not come for primaries. There was a baptism party at Munderi’s, the preacher of the day’s home and he had invited me. As a family friend I did go and sat at the place of honour. He requested me to give a speech and I did. My sister Miriam, perhaps the most enthusiastic of my supporters, even for my sister, had escorted me here too.

I told the audience what a good thing it is to enter the family of Christ through baptism and quoted a few scriptures. Then I gave sh50,000 to the kids, as tradition requests and left the place early. I was later to learn that Tereraho had been informed of everything I had done in Rurembwe and had summoned Munderi, who had been his chief strategist in the primary, to his home. The conduit of the news had been Nambaje, a fat, brown 30-something fellow who had all along pretended to be my supporter. He and Munderi had worked so hard for Tereraho in the primaries where I had been absent and that’s apparently the reason they had switched camps.
These two guys are perhaps some of the most religious people I know. They are the cut-my-skin- and- my-blood-is-Anglican type of Anglicans. They accused me of threatening the Anglicans’ only chance to send one of their won to parliament.

Anyway, Munderi himself told of how Tereraho had called him to his home and told him even about the money I had apparently given to bribe him. I was hurt! I would do anything for Munderi as a friend. The money I gave him wasn’t a bribe, neither was the church contribution in Rurembwe. I take pleasure in giving to the Lord, even if I remain one of the strongest critics of the showing off culture in the church of Uganda where people are given numbers and each one has to publicly say how much he has paid. “

In the muhabura diocese headquarters church, Seseme cathedral for example, the pulpit has an embarrassing and hypocritical inscription. “DONATED BY TOM & MRS MUGENGA IN MEMORY OF THEIR FATHER..” Tom Mugenga of course is the filthy rich Kampala businessman of the famous Mugenga group of companies, Kampala club and Kwagalana group whose membership boasts of tycoons like Sudhir Ruparelia, Uganda’s richest man.

I told Munderi when he visited my office to plead for my understanding of his allegiance that he can follow his conscience and support a candidate of his choice as that was his constitutional right. (Munderi would later tell his/and my friends, falsely, that he had agreed with me that he supports Tereraho since I was just testing the political waters and not aiming for a win!)

**When everyone is a political strategist**

I was surprised by one particular development in the course of my cmapign; People who flocked to my home to offer me ‘advice’. Many indeed understood kisoro politics and offered genuine counsel. One of them was Moses Irankunda who found me home this sunny morning and began saying that I wasn’t seriously hunting for votes.

“Man, you are not moving”, he said, with a tone of disappointment. “Go around and talk to the people. You may just give them Waragi, that’s enough”, he said. “Remember not everyone will come to the rallies. Like now, you should have finished Rukongi (A parish bordering my village). You ought to have gone around these people you live near. Even in your own parish, some people do not know you! Go to Rwankumbagazi (a trading centre nearby). You should for example right now be there, buying sh300 waragi or tea (chai) for each person and they would be applauding you”

Moses then broadly discussed other candidates. “Eudia[kwizera, the incumbent woman MP and independent candidate] should have accepted her loss in the primaries. Museveni would at least find her something where she would get some money for a bunch of Matooke. Now here she is, going to lose again and she will quickly die”
(Rumors that Mrs Kwizera has HIV have been persistent for long and she has never done anything to dispel them).

On December 31, New Year’s Eve, there was an event for the Uganda Joint Christian council (UJCC) in the Mayors gardens in Kisoro town to see off the year 2010. The Anglican bishop and his counterparts from the catholic and other churches were there. There was colorful dancing and singing and it was enjoyable. Most contestants were also here. Nsaba Buturo, the state minister for ethics and integrity and the Bufumbira east contestant was there. Bucyanayandi was also there, of course, courtesy of his being the area MP. These are the only people that were allowed to speak. Other contestants were just seated behind and they were only casually introduced.

Nearly 500 people had attended and being introduced at a forum like this was a big deal. Being given a chance to speak was even priceless. But I came late and only wandered at the periphery of the event. I could indeed see that many people had yet to recognize who I was. Apart from the voice they had been hearing on the radio for nearly three years, they didn’t know who Sabiti was. This saddened me.

I went and greeted the clergy men in their flowing robes after the event. I also shook hands with Dr Buturo and introduced myself. He nodded, but seemed to be thinking about other things. I turned to Bucyananyandi and greeted him too. Some young people however would be seen whispering. “There is Sabiti Bernard” others would say, ‘are you sure, he is not the one. The one on radio is an old man…”

**New Year’s, 2011**

I attended the New Year celebrations at Gitenderi church of Uganda, which happens to be my home church. As is on most occasions of this nature, the church was filled to capacity, with a succession of many choirs singing beautiful songs of praise in Rufumbira. The first reading was taken from Roman 12:17 and the preaching was about “Real circumcision”, where the preacher emphasized that real circumcision is that of the heart.

Announcements were read, and it was mentioned that Christmas collection had amounted to sh1.8 million, an unprecedented figure in the history of the church!

The Reverend Nkundukozer Preached passionately about unity, arguing people not to give in to their enemies’ tricks as the latter are just having sound sleep. “The person you hate is not bothered”, he said. He cautioned them not to hate one another in the tense political environment they were living in.

I kept attending several functions the following days, mindful of the fact that everywhere I was called, people somehow expected me to contribute some money and I
was sure to go prepared, with some little to avoid embarrassment. One such parties was convened by a friend of mine from primary school named Francis Buyuki, who dropped out after primary seven and went into casual labour. He now has two wives and about five children so far. Two of his children were being baptized and I was asked to attend, and get chance to greet the people too. As a supporter who could not contributed cash to my campaign, that was the most he could do.

The home is located at the foot of Mt Muhavura, just near my former primary school. I walked there, with my brother Mfite and other friends, after ditching the car, preferring to enjoy the view, scenery and the breeze of the area I frequently trod as a school going child. I reached Gasiza trading centre and people greeted me enthusiastically, some whispering to me to ‘look after them’. I ignored them and continued to the party. But on the way, I met Rwihandagaza, a fellow who had been my classmate in primary two, but who now looked far older than his years. I had even forgotten about him and barely recognized him. He clung to me insisting that I must buy him booze, because I am rich while he remains in the gutter. It was like this everywhere but I kept ignoring such requests.

At the party, I was asked to speak, after the contributions or gifts to the baptized children (I dropped in sh20,000, and as is the tradition here, had to give a short speech, announcing the amount I had given the children and for what purpose). One speech might go thus; “As a family friend and my friend from the old days, Francis’s kids are also my kids. Like it is when everyone gives birth to children, he needs basic things like clothes and milk, so I am giving them sh5,000 for the needful...(applause”). Many would hold the note and a cameraman would be on hand to photograph the action, the giver posing with the parents or the kids and the sh5,000. It’s such a funny spectacle for a person who is not used to the fuss.

After my short contribution speech, I was asked by the MC to greet the people officially. I did and I said I was the Sabiti they hear on the radio. They were shocked. “He’s is too young, he’s a youth...” many would note the incoherence in my radio voice and my physical stature. Anyhow, I told them to vote for me, an independent candidate, and then vote Yoweri Museveni for president (In this part of the country, you don’t want to be suspected of being on the side opposite the president). My sign was a radio, I told them, and I will be clad in an orange shirt and a dark suit. The people applauded me severely, and with that, I boarded a bodaboda which initially was my transport means. That was of course after galloping down another giant metallic cup of Obushera.

THE REAL TRAIL

On January 17, 2011, I had a swing through Nyakinama Sub County. I met many of my would-be agents, recruiting others and taking their phone numbers. There are moments I can’t forget. On one trading centre, Mubuga, I found there a 40-something old guy who told me his name was “professor”, and that he was a teacher, working at the same...
school as my brother. He asked me to take his cell phone number and keep in touch as he was the defacto ‘king maker’ in the area, politically speaking. He asked me what had taken me too long to come to stump for votes in the area. However the way he was courting me told me something. Either he wanted musururu or wanted me to show that I was exceedingly appreciative of his gesture. I tried to do the latter.

Across the road in the same trading centre was a middle aged man, who I recognized. He was once a headmaster at my former primary school which was near my home. He was delighted to see me and he held my hand and led me to a bar to see people he referred to as ‘real men’. He introduced me to old men in old hats, who sat on benches that were arranged in a square form, chatting away. They were certainly ‘delighted’ to see me. One of the men even gave me a bear hug. He smelt local brew and I, for a moment wondered whether his fabrics were made of the gin. He then signaled me to a wooden office chair. I told them I was the Sabiti they have always heard about. But I added that I was just moving through and had not come for a rally, as I had already scheduled a day when I would come to officially visit them.

As I headed to the door, the headmaster physically restrained me, and asked me to first buy booze for those guys. I told him I would be back and somehow he let me out. I entered my car and drove off, only to be stopped by some youths at the far end of the same trading centre. They wanted just sh2000 for Obushera and they said they were genuine supporters. I told them I appreciated their support and urged them to continue canvassing for me, and again repeated my monologue against voter bribery, which was now an effortless task due to repeated use; it’s as if the words were now imprinted in my palm. I don’t think I convinced them though.

From there I drove to Maziba, a kilometer or two from the Uganda-DR Congo boarder. I found here a group of drinking men, who welcomed me with open arms. My assistant gave them some campaign literature, and they allowed him to pin the bigger posters at their bar doors and windows. They then ushered me quietly into a makeshift shelter, where they were drinking Tonto, a strong local brew squeezed from ripe bananas and fermented for weeks. So discreet were their actions that the next-door neighbors barely noticed what was happening. They did this not to alert them, so I could ‘look after’ only they. But I was a politician looking for everyone’s vote and I protested this trick. I wanted everyone to know I was around, for those who had yet to physically see me to have the opportunity to do so. My car was also pasted all over with the posters so people began looking around, wondering what was happening.

In the end, these men in the makeshift drinking grass-thatched shelter asked me to first buy a jerry can of beer before I even made my case. This was strange, because at least wherever else I had been, people would hear me out before asking for something. Others would expect me to know clearly how the game went and would tell me: “I think you know how things are done, we won’t remind you”. I told these guys that I wasn’t going to buy them nothing because that’s the kind of politics I had come to fight. “of
what use would this beer be even if I bought it for you and then went and slept in parliament, drawing the salary but doing nothing?”. They scoffed at what I said and one of the men, a furry, huge bellied man ordered me off the premises immediately. He said thus; “You have found us in peace, buying the booze on our own,. We don’t need you. Go and never come back here”. He then, as if to show me that indeed he had money of his own, ordered tonto of an amount I don’t remember for each of his colleagues in the tent. I was to experience similar stunts later in the campaign. I told them I would visit them again. They said I shouldn’t if I won’t bring them anything.

On the 18th of January, I was going to my village home for a rest, when I met a lady called Nyirahabinka. I knew her well because her home is in the neighboring village. When I attempted to greet her, she shrugged, even though she later extended her hand. Then she asked me a seemingly hypothetical question: “What did you swear on your baptism?”, she asked. I told her I couldn’t remember because I was baptized a long time a go. “Didn’t you say; “Nzaburira bose mpereye kubiwacyu”? (I will preach the gospel to all beginning with those of my own household) I said those were perhaps the words. Then she began lecturing me on what a mistake I was making, by ‘taking the money to other people’ while I took the home vote for granted. I told her I was simply following a schedule, and I would be in my home sub county in the final week, in which I would come to my own village to campaign. I further told her that I wasn’t giving money to anybody. She hit back and said that was not a wise thing to do. I would have started right at home, she said. She was skeptical that anyone would campaign without money to give to the voters. I left her and continued home

The next day, I went on a tour of Chahi sub-county. In Rutare parish, at Nturo trading centre, I found there many people, some drinking, others on their errands. The chairman of the trading centre, a large man with a freshly shaven head in a yellow Museveni T-shirt rushed inside his bar and brought chairs outside, arranged them for us to sit. My assistants were already busy distributing campaign literature. People in no minute gathered. The chairman however admonished me for having come without notifying them. I told them I wasn’t on an official visit yet, but surveying the geographical extent of the constituency. Even then, they said, I had to address them. I did, with a run through my manifesto, capping up of course with my disdain for voter bribery, and how it cheapens their role in their own government. I later told them that was all I wanted to say, and I was leaving. The chairman whispered in my ear to at least leave money for one jerry can of booze, but I flatly told him I don’t bribe voters, its unethical. The others argued that that would not be bribery, just an act of appreciation. I didn’t budge, and instead jumped into my car and drove off. They clearly were awed by my courage.

From here, I drove to Birembo, a smaller trading centre nearby where I did the same thing. The reception by residents here however, was the reason I kept going. After quietly listening to what I had to say, one old man pointedly said; “At least you are telling the truth. We have never heard anyone saying the same things. You can even go
now; there is nothing we want from you. We will vote for you”. I don’t know whether
this man meant it or not, but he looked genuine. I scored 9 votes here, out of 450 on the
voting day!

I proceeded to Kyanika, a border town with Rwanda. It’s a rather busy town, and a
stronghold of Bucyanayandi’s. Young men swarmed me and said they were happy to see
me. I contacted the chairman of the border post and informed him I would be talking to
people, even if I reached there unannounced. The young men haphazardly rushed me
behind their kiosks and told me address them. I knew the trick. Because the town had
many people, they too wanted to have me to themselves and leave out the others. They
were of course taken aback when I didn’t give them anything. Clement, a rich and chief
supporter of Bucyana and a friend of mine courtesy of his business partnership with my
cousin found me addressing a group of young men the other side of the centre and even
if he hid it, he seemed concerned. He immediately pulled me aside and loudly said that I
was in Bucyana’s territory, and I needn’t bother. I ignored him and continued addressing
the attentive youths

**Iryaruhuri trading centre**

IRYARUHURI is village that separates Bufumbira South from Bufumbira East. I reached
there in the morning of my 2nd day tour of Chahi Sub-County. The trading centre was full
of people, and I wondered where from. Women, men and a few children. Every one
seemed in festive mood. As long as people saw my car with the poster, they began
chanting. “He has also come”. I began getting a sense that some other contestant must
have been here. We had submitted campaign programs to the EC district office for
harmonization, and a crash event was the least expected. So I wondered who was here

I later learnt that it was the Hon James Nsaba Buturo who had been there in the
morning, and had showered the place with booze. Being the border and the aggregating
town that cuts across the two constituencies, it is impossible to segregate the voters so
he had brought booze for whoever happened to be the in the town. However, I arrived
when the drinking had ended, and residents were reveling in the aftermath.

That’s when they swarmed at my car, and were falling on each other to welcome me.
My mission here was not much about the rally as scouting for agents and vote
protectors in the area. I knew that some who claimed to be my agents had either sold
out or those who had not were waiting for the highest offer. My usual lieutenants in the
area of course came over to receive me

The next days, I continued my tour of the constituency, and listened to people, who
would be annoyed on realizing that I wasn’t going to give them any money.

On 21 January, I officially opened my office, and put an announcement on the radio
detailing its location. The following days many people did come to visit. Henry, my office
manager was busy the whole day, attending to people who claimed they had come for manifestos. Others would come with tones of personal problems. They would be upset whenever they would not find me there. An old friend, a veteran of Kisoro politics had advised me to spend in the office as less time as I could because people would simply come there for money. That might as well have been one of the best advices I got throughout the campaign.

The next day I met Rukirande, my former Math teacher I describe in the beginning of the report. He said that in his parish of Mabungo, not many are talking about my candidacy. Even if I didn’t say he was right, I knew he was because I had yet to venture into that parish which had over 3,000 registered voters.

Later in the day, Edison, a friend of my brother’s found me in the office with a request. There was going to be a F.O.C.U.S (Fellowship of Christian union students) meeting the following Sunday and he wanted my contribution to the announcement that he was going to put on radio. This was startling to me. He had the written announcement with him and when I counted the number of words, I pointed out to him that it was to cost only sh8,000. He knew that, he said, but the group didn’t have that money. I sent him away telling him to come back another day. He did, the following day and departed with sh5,000.

Such incidences were not uncommon. Many ‘associations’ sprang up during the election season to take advantage of political aspirants. I received countless invitations, requests for contributions from many shadowy ‘associations’ that I lost count of them. Fundraising to build churches, schools were also common and I was always invited. I will try to mention a few that have stuck in memory.

Kibugu Students Association (KSA) sent their representative to my office for a contribution towards their “end of year 2010” party! I asked this guy why he was bringing the card long after the year had ended. He claimed the party had not taken place on the earlier scheduled date due to insufficient funds. With a motto that bellowed; “Excellence in education and better future”, the appeal on the letter was written in plain English;

“The organizing committee for the party of KSA cordially requests an assistance of any amount or item to help the party scheduled for 28th December 2010 at Kibugu primary school”

A table with columns of pledges and contributions amount was appended together with the budget. Located in Muramba sub-county, I knew Kibugu parish well and I had campaigned there. But I had never had of an association of its students.

On 23 January, I attended church service at Muganza church of Uganda Parish also in Chahi sub-county. I had rang The Reverend John Nkundizana the previous night,
informing him of my intention to visit his church. He said I would be welcome. I reached
the church on time, as the service was beginning with beautiful hymns and songs of
praise. I enjoyed these local services immensely as I had not attended for a long time
during my spell of studies and work in Kampala. Most of the hymns were familiar and
reminded me of the good old days. I could sing along on most of them.

At the end of the service, The Rev Nkundizana introduced me and asked the
congregation whether anyone of them knew me. About ten people raised their hands
and I was grateful. I had not yet campaigned in this area and I didn’t expect many to
know me. However, all had certainly heard of my name on the radio and the looks on
their faces showed they either were startled or surprised. “Is this the Sabiti Bernard?” I
could hear them ask one another.

Rev Nkundizana gave me one minute to greet the people but warned me that church
policy doesn’t allow politicking in the church. If I wanted to address them, he advised, I
would wait for the service to end and address them from outside. Before he could reach
his throne after the introduction, I had violated the church policy. I told the worshippers
that I was among the contestants and, idiomatically asked them to vote for me on
February 18. “Remember me on that day’, I said, quoting one of the bandits that were
crucified with Jesus. This seemed to amuse them and they gave me applause. I also
rebuked the church leadership for staying silent on voter bribery and other electoral
malpractices, wondering if Jesus would be passive in the same situation

When I was back in the town, I recounted the visit to a reporter from a local radio
station who run it as a news story in the evening newscast.

**Playing on borrowed turf**

January 26 is Liberation day, the day the ruling NRM celebrates capturing state power
after a five year guerilla struggle in 1986. I was three years old then, and here I was, a
parliamentary candidate on the 25th anniversary! The irony of this was not lost on me.

The day was sunny, and windy, with the imposing Mt Muhavura the clearest as I have
ever seen it, seemingly presiding over the festivities. Celebrations were held at Ssaza
grounds in Kisoro town, and I thought it wise to attend. Because many people were
increasingly becoming less interested in my rallies since I was not giving money, I took
every chance seriously where I would be seen by and if given chance, address the
people.

The occasion was graced by the deputy Resident District Commissioner (RDC) who was
the guest of honour. Dr James Nsaba Buturo was also present. Dr Mateke, the LC5 and
NRM chairman was also there, in the front seats of the pavilion. All the district MPs
were present, and so were most of the aspirants. Because we were independents and
therefore not invited, Tereraho and I sat in one of the commoners’ tents that had been
erected on either sides of the pavilion. I had caught up with Tereraho on my way there, when our vehicles inconspicuously met at the entrance of the grounds.

The politics displayed here were the ugliest I had seen yet. According to Government protocol, the RDC wouldn’t have been the chief guest when a senior officer, a minister for that matter (Dr Buturo) was in attendance. To make matters worse, Dr Buturo was not even invited to speak. He sat animated through the event with the day’s speakers’ images from the podium reflected in his giant spectacles.

People began complaining of this anomaly from the periphery and the voices of Buturo’s supporters began to get louder. When the RDC took the podium to read the president’s message and dismiss the public, he realized that something was amiss. That’s when he invited Dr Buturo to greet the people before he could read the president’s message. He was given a thunderous applause for his gesture.

When Buturo had the podium, he exploited it to the maximum. He blasted people he called “ignorant” in the district’s political apparatus who apparently were witchhunting him. He gave an immaculately eloquent speech in English which, like the Gettysburg address was very short but effective. He was given a standing ovation.

Later we heard that the district Chairman, in collusion with some NRM officials had intentionally frustrated Buturo and wanted to embarrass him for running as an independent, Cleary flouting the party laws, when as a minister he should have gracefully conceded defeat. Being a minister apparently raised the bar for Buturo, otherwise there were many independents in the audience who were left alone.

James Hatega, the MC of the day, the chairman of VOM board of directors and a dear friend of mine was at his best. Yet he could not introduce the other candidates in the audience. Tereraho and I were seated together, which didn’t do the romours of a silent collaboration between us against Bucyana that had been doing the rounds any justice. I whispered to him to be ready for the biggest snub of his career; that fact that we were not going to be introduced.

Later Hatega, after introducing all flag bearers sheepishly declared; “if there are other candidates who are here, please stand up for recognition”. We did, and waved to the public. The snub was indeed a famous one. “We have a hill to climb”, I told Tereraho. He pretended he was not bothered but he was. Tereraho is a sharp fellow who knew very well the trouble we would face if the district party machinery was unleashed against us. Up to this moment at least, we had been left to make our case without any sabotages.

Later in the day, I attended a funeral in Mabungo Parish where again I met Tereraho. I could see he was jealous when I charmed women with some humor after the burial. My assistant was also busy distributing fliers at the sidelines of the burial. This was amusing to some of the mourners. On one occasion, Tereraho came and slapped my back, saying...
I should stop siphoning away his voters. I knew he meant it even if he pretended it was a joke.

I continued to Muramba Sub-County and stopped near a shop that was attended to by a certain old man. I stopped to greet him, and he was happy. When I handed him my poster, he asked what use that will do to him “without a soda”. A few meters in front, I found Mr. Twisunze, my former physics teacher who had become a drunkard and looked out of sorts. I was afraid his mental faculties were not even working well. He surprisingly is the one who rallied the entire trading centre to come and “be looked after”. I left nothing here as the people became hostile even to my posters. I continued and visited a string of more trading centers, establishing more contacts.

“Politics is a dirty game”

A certain incident happened one day that reminded me that indeed in politics, there are no permanent friends, even if the other end of the saying also stresses the opposite. Betty is my cousin, and I have no doubts she likes me. But she was supporting a rival candidate and, even if she had always denied that fact, her behavior increasingly told me she was Tereraho 101. She would be praising him: he had the books, he was fresh air, young, blah, blah, blah! I wanted to remind her that Tereraho is 48 and I am 28, and already have two degrees like he has, together with the 73 year old Bucyana. If those were the parameters, then I would have been her candidate. My conscience restrained my ego and I kept quiet.

One sunny Thursday morning, I took one of my giant posters to place it in front of her shop. Betty’s clothes store was strategically located on the Kabale-Kisoro high way and many would have a chance to see my image. The image had been beautifully designed, with the famous mt Muhavura in the background, and the image of a radio, my symbol on the side. It was also huge, so that even passersby meters away would see it clearly.

I called Betty before hand, and asked her whether I could display the image in front of her shop. She said she didn’t have any problem with it. My assistant took it there, and I joined him, helping to fix it. A day after, I got a call from Betty, saying that people were complaining, advising her that the poster would turn away potential customers. I couldn’t believe that!

For all the stuff I was or wasn’t, I didn’t know I was bad for business. I was later to learn that while that reason was plausible, Betty feared that she would be in a tight spot if Tereraho, a frequent visitor to her shop found the poster there. She certainly had assured him of her support and Tereraho knew her vote was in the bag.

GOING IT ALONE
On 28 January, I had my first ever talk show on VOM, in which I was hosted alone. For one hour, I delved into the reasons why I running, and what I intended to do if I was elected. I explained in clear Rufumbira (I was later told), the roles of a member of parliament. Representation, oversight and legislation. I explained to the people that anyone saying he would build a road is a liar.

Then I tore into my opponents who were bribing voters. “when was the last time you saw these people bringing you the goodies you are calling gifts, apart from the period of the campaigns?”, I asked them. Listeners called in to ask me questions; “What have you ever done yourself so that we could trust you with this huge responsibility?” one Richard from Gitenderi (My parish) asked. I later learnt it was a trick to let listeners know that even in my own backyard, there were skeptics. Richard [Kameri] whome we later identified was on Tereraho’s taskforce in Rurembwe with Munderi, the preacher I describe above. Many called immediately in my defense, almost rebuking the caller asking him whether I had ever been elected and therefore had a record to defend. But I thought that was an opportunity to highlight my achievements while I worked in the community as an employee of STF. I highlighted the talk-show, the support to savings groups, and the formation of youth groups among other things.

To give personality to the culprits of the clogged service delivery system, I told of a story of an Irish potato trader who I had found digging a road himself, with a few young men he had hired. “Why does he pay taxes”, I asked.

Then I rebuked my opponents for dividing the people along religious lines. What a shame, I exclaimed. Jesus has no business with religion, I told them.

On 30th January, my Aunt came to my office to see how I was doing. I was touched by the effort of my relatives to see me elected. Grandpa too repeatedly asked me questions and advised on strategy. I was surprised by his knowledge of organizing. “Have you visited your agents in Chihe”, he might ask. They need to see you to be encouraged, he would say.

The morning of 30 January, Bucyanayandi announced on VOM that he would be visiting some wards in the town council. During the announcement, he also mentioned people who had reportedly crossed from independents’ camps to the NRM during one of his rallies in Cyondo village, in Rukongi parish. “Hon Bucyanayandi also wishes to inform all those who are still out there that the bus is still open to whoever would like to enter” the announcer said, referring to the symbol of the ruling NRM. A day later, one of the purported defectors, the most high profile defector, Mr Bwanalensi, also my former Physics teacher, put an announcement of his own denying that he had defected to Bucyanayandi’s camp. “Wow!” the drama, I thought, was becoming very interesting. I called my assistant to escort me to church the next day.

Muramba church of Uganda
Muramba Church of Uganda is Tereraho’s home church. I called the priest the evening before my visit, introducing myself as one of the candidates running for Bufumbira South parliamentary seat. He said he had no problem with my visiting as long as I kept away from politicking. I said I would.

I arrived at the church a bit late and told a team of my campaigners to leave me at the church and continue, combing villages around. I would call them after the service, I told them. The moment I entered the church, the service leader was making some comments regarding a person who had brought political announcements in the church and he was saying he wasn’t going to read them because it was against church policy. Later, the same man announced that Bucyanayandi had fulfilled his pledge of sh200,000 towards the construction of the church, to the Faithfull’s applause!. Towards the end of the service, it was also announced that John Tereraho had been elected the chairman of the laity in Muhabura diocese, hence, the reverend added: “Since one of our own is in that office, we, the Christians of Muramba now head all the Christians in the diocese”. The announcement and the subsequent proclamation got a deafening applause.

Dr Mateke, Tereraho’s predecessor was later to tell me the politics behind Tereraho’s impromptu appointment. His backers in the church hierarchy wanted to make sure all Anglican voters saw him as the defacto leader of the district’s Anglican community and therefore vote for him enmass. Religious demographics in kisoro don’t favor Catholics and in fact if Anglicans voted 100% as a bloc, no catholic candidate would ever become a MP. But unfortunately most of the Anglicans are also the most educated and they don’t entertain that nonsense. They are also divided. On the other hand, no catholic vote goes the wrong way.

Back to Muramba church, I was treated like all the other visitors, which, having gone there to be recognized, was a huge blow. The announcer simply asked all first time visitors to stand. It was myself and another girl whose name I forget. We were simply received with a clap and we were told to sit down. This was a downer, and I immediately began wondering who was behind it. In front I saw David Uwera, the meticulous campaign manager of Tereraho. I wondered whether he was responsible. Later I saw the lay leader and the reverend conferring upon something, the latter whispering to the former.

Then the priest announced to the congregation that there was a special guest who was going to greet them. I remained in my place, since I was seated strategically in about the half of the church. I greeted them, but again with a few syntactical tweaks violated the canonical order that apparently barred politics in the church. “These guys are political too”, I thought. I was received well and outside everyone wanted to shake my hand. I told them the following week I was coming in their villages and they said they would welcome me.
Tereraho’s election as the diocesan lay leader may not have been political but the timing certainly was. The head of the lay leader is the defacto chairman of all the Christians in the diocese and is very powerful in the church. Tereraho replaced Dr Philemon Mateke, who personally told me he wasn’t informed of his impending replacement and added it was a pure plot.

Going retail

On January 31, I had a meeting with all my ‘agents’. I wanted to reflect on how we were doing, with them present. Henry did a fine job inviting them and they did come in full force. They helped me group up villages which I was to visit. This was the sensible thing to do since, unlike my opponents, I had no pleasure in meeting voters village by village. There were 193 villages and it would take me long to finish the ones I had yet to visit. So since I had all the agents around, we grouped the villages. We would do so basing on their geographical locations. “Villages A, B, and C, I will meet you at location X”, the radio announcement would read. These meeting venues would mainly be a primary school, a church, a hill or any venue of convenience central to all the villages. After drawing a list, we made a program of visiting and every morning, we would announce on VOM where the candidate would be that particularly day.

I would normally address 10-15 villages in one day. I had nothing much to say; just one hour interaction with the voters would normally be enough. I would explain my plan, and then describe policy and then end with a purge of the absurdity that is voter bribery which I was the most fiery about. I then would drive to the next location. I would meet the first group of villages at 9am and by 6pm, the legally binding cessation of campaign activities time, my campaign day would end.

In these particular agents’ meetings, I observed many funny and absurd incidents. Some of the advice these agents gave me was scaring and I would shoot it down right away. Most of these were battle hardened with experience in the art [and science] of Kisoro politics and I got a glimpse of the dirt from their deliberations. One particular agent, whose royalty I doubted is particularly hard for me to forget;

Many attendees had said we would need some people at the polling station to protect our vote, which I had agreed to. But this guy said we would need like six agents to sit at the polling station, then ten men and ten women to deploy in the paths leading to the stations to stop opponents from giving out money. “Then we would deploy primary school kids to help us steal votes by taking old people to assist them to vote!”

Mr Buregeya, as the guy was called, was a staunch Bucyana agent I was later to learn, who was a plant in my camp. But I later figured out that no official of the Bucyanayandi campaign had sent him, he had just come to collect the sh3,000 I was paying out as transport refund. I vigorously rebuked him for the suggestion of vote stealing, sternly warning all the agents that such behavior wasn’t condoned in my camp.
Buregeya didn’t budge and he added that if I was talking of cleanliness in Kisoro politics, I should be from Mars. He continued with his plan. “We need really strong people to head those groups at those polling stations. Each of those groups of ten should have one muscular, strong head who will keep the candidate informed all through. They should be able to contest any invalid vote that is ours”

Other attendees also had what to say. Merida Zihawe, a 21 year old genuine supporter from Iryaruhi, in her low tone submitted a bleak picture our campaign faced. “I am the only agent in my village for you. Those men for your rivals are very strong. I can’t stop them from giving out money. Besides, voters will be saying; ah! For you your stomach is full yet you are just telling us that Sabiti mantra without any accompaniment... In my own household, my brother is Tereraho’s agent. I need a team to offer me protection”

Throughout the meeting, I was mostly silent, taking notes, dumbfounded by some of the submissions. Henry chaired the meeting. Regarding Merida’s concerns, we agreed that agents were not to say anything to their fellow agents of mine who had not known about the meeting. If somehow they get to know, the sh3,000 they received was not to be mentioned at all, to avoid jealousy.

The next day, February 1, I paid a courtesy call on the NGO/CBO forum coordinator. The Reverend Mfitumukiza was busy on his laptop, his glasses lowered mid his nostrils. He was happy to see me. I told him I wanted a copy of the citizen’s manifesto at sub-county level. I wanted to enrich my talking points, basing on this comprehensive study his national office had done. I wanted to be conversant with the unique needs for every village and to begin every rally with a comment that is particular to the geographic, social or economic situation of the village. Portraying familiarity with a place while addressing its residents has an endearing effect.

As he tried to print a copy for the citizens concerns of the five sub counties in Bufumbira south, he asked me why Tereraho and I couldn’t agree so that one person can take on Bucyanayandi. He told me an astonishing story, chronicling Bucyana’s apparent failures as a public official over the years. He however zeroed on his time as the Executive Director of the Uganda Coffee Development Authority.

“He was the head of UCDA from 1996-2003. Do you know what amount of coffee we were producing before then right here in Kisoro? We had 40 nursery beds in the district, with 800,000 seedlings. That had capacity to generate our farmers sh52bn per annum. Do you know what Kisoro’s capacity was during his time? Ask him that question, or plant it at one of his rallies. He can’t answer. But the problem is that You and Tereraho are going to divide the vote and you will hand him another term. Think about it”
The real hatred for Bucyanayandi among the Anglican clergy was obvious. They badly wanted a person of their faith to win, after starving for five years. They saw me as a threat to their religious dream. They were wrong however, as final results showed.

That evening, Tereraho went on VOM and had an uninterrupted one hour, explaining his positions. I was intrigued by his temper that could be felt by listeners. Many people had for long said he was an angry man, and that he was burning with rage. I sensed a bit of that, even though I couldn’t blame him; Tereraho was being accused of outrageous and absurd things. That he had got money from Kagame, courtesy of his being Tutsi, but I knew that was false. (I knew the stuff had gotten to his nerve when, one morning he told me; ‘can you imagine they are saying that, Bernard? Do you know that instead it is Bucyanayandi who is getting money from the Vatican?”) I was about to feel sorry for him but his belief in the Bucyana-Vatican theory was astonishing to me. I had to withdraw my sympathies.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT RULING

On February 1, Parliamentary campaigns throughout the country were thrown into pandemonium. The constitutional court passed a ruling, stating that all Incumbent MPs who switched party allegiances were not eligible to stand for re-election, and should immediately vacate their seats in Parliament. Their nominations were declared null and void. The news of the ruling reached Kisoro immediately. I met David Uwera, the tough and no nonsense campaign manager of Tereraho. “Now that it’s the two of you remaining in the race, you work harder”, he triumphantly told me. I did not understand what he was talking about because I was getting the ruling news for the first time.

The news also threw Bucyanayandi’s camp into disarray. It was headline news on all the dailies. Kisoro residents receive a day’s papers late, between 3-4pm and as a result no one outside the political circles had known this because the papers had not yet arrived. I downloaded the story from the papers’ websites and spread the news to whoever asked about the rumors. An insider of Bucyana’s camp predicted that the all influential business community would now support me, if the ruling stood. (The Tereraho-Bucyanayandi feud was now personal, he told me. I knew that perhaps more than anyone, because I was the only candidate talking to both camps, apparently because later each realized that my presence in the race wasn’t significant to either of them).

The businessman assured me “we would even send to Kampala a tree than that Tutsi man”.

“You have eaten now”, many other Bucyana insiders told me. I was inundated with calls, from my supporters asking what was going on. I feigned ignorance, because I was skeptical of the ruling and didn’t want them to be excited for nothing. I pulled out my copy of the constitution and re-read the article that had apparently damned the careers of 77 MPs. Article 83 (1) g and h
“A member of Parliament shall vacate his or her seat in parliament –

(g) If that person leaves the political party for which he or she stood as a candidate for election to parliament to join another party or to remain in parliament as an independent member
(h) if, having been elected to parliament as an independent candidate, that person joins a political party...

The trouble had been started by a little known voter known as George Owor, who filed a suit against the Hon. William Oketch incumbent MP for Budama North constituency in Tororo district, who, having been elected to parliament in 2006 as an independent had ran in and won the NRM primaries this time around.

His main challenger in the primary was Fox Odoi, a former legal assistant to President Yoweri Museveni. It was later to be discovered however that Owor was no ordinary voter as he was found to be a close associate of Fox Odoi. Many legal minds were left baffled by how the gallant MPs would fail to read and understand the law they themselves make! The said MPs therefore were to first resign their seats before seeking fresh mandates.

Even though the suit had been filed against one person, the court in its wisdom ruled that all the MPs in similar category had to face the wrath of the law and resign their seats. Many independent legal analysts agreed entirely with the court.

Kisoro district has four members of parliament, and all of them had been affected by the ruling. All the four were also running for reelection. Dr James Nsaba Buturo, the minister for ethics and integrity and incumbent NRM representative had lost the NRM primary to Eddie Wa Gahungu in Bufumbira east. He chose to run as an independent, citing irregularities in the primary. Silver Bahane, the incumbent NRM MP for Bufumbira North had lost the primary to Kamara John Nizeyimana, a primary school teacher who was taking the plunge the fourth time. He also challenged him in the general election, on the same basis as Buturo Vs Eddie.

The 73-year old Bucyanayandi had gone to parliament in 2006 as an independent representing Bufumbira South. I remember how hard I campaigned for him then! This time, knowing what heck of a trouble it was to defeat an NRM opponent, he fought tooth and nail to grab the all-important yellow flag. He was thus the only one damned by subsection (h) of the said article 83

The Woman MP, Hon Eudia Kwizera had won in 2006 on the NRM ticket with 95%. She won by riding the NRM and Museveni coattails, with Dr Philemon Mateke holding the whip. Now she faced Dr Mateke’s own daughter Sarah Nyirabashitsi and she stood no
chance. Many wondered how she could not have known that. She lost the primary by 2000 votes and the general election by 15,000.

All these guys (with the exception of Bucyanayandi) ended up losing the general election as well. Such was the situation in Kisoro. Throughout the stalemate of the court ruling, our district remained unrepresented in Parliament until May 12 when the new government was sworn-in.

The following day, the details of the court ruling were everywhere. Tereraho’s supporters were celebrating with champagne. I told my supporters to remain calm. Andrew Sebutenga, a cousin I mentioned earlier who was following the proceedings from near the source, Kampala, called and told me to keep a low profile, to avoid showing an image of delighting in Bucyana’s fall as I might need him in the very near future. Buycanayandi’s most prominent supporters reached out to me. The message? “Even if it remains the case, you and not Tereraho, will be the guy.” Some began telling me how I was the luckiest man alive.

Inside my heart, I rubbished all that. I have been in the country long enough. I knew an appeal would be lodged, which would drag the thing until at least after the election which was just two weeks away. 77 MPs including nine ministers had been affected. I went into the list again to see which personalities these were, and which clout they held.

I realized that Museveni would not interfere. The ruling had felled a number of his opponents as well, especially from the FDC, DP and UPC. He could sacrifice NRM’s 45 but see those enemies, however few they were, go. I was right. Tabloids were running stories with sources from statehouse saying the president would not interfere in a court case. Of course, he had always done so when his interests had been at stake.

The morning after the ruling, I was strolling around downtown Kisoro when Tereraho passed by and stopped across the road from his office. He saw me and, waving a copy of the printed Daily Monitor story to him, he waved back, with a pile of papers, triumphantly. Tereraho had a copy of the ruling itself, with the hands of the 7 judges on it! I was shocked and I asked him how he had got it so soon. He told me a friend of his from Kampala had sent it overnight. By now I was friendly with Tereraho because as we moved towards the voting day, it became apparent that I was no longer a threat as he had earlier imagined. The feeling now was that I would not siphon enough votes off him to deny him victory. He was in fact going telling voters especially in places where I was popular that I am a very smart young man who had a political future. He would add that he and I were on the same side and hence had no beef. He said he would raise me under his arm so that I would succeed him. That was all politics of course, and he wouldn’t tell me that personally because he knew I wasn’t stupid.

Mr. Batoraine, the campaign manager for Eddie wa Gahungu was a man who admired me. In his sixties, everyone here knows him as the Karl Rove of Kisoro Politics. I had
befriended his sons who were my classmates in secondary school. He, like the rest, was predicting that I was the one going to parliament, given the circumstances that the constitutional court ruling had created. His man Eddie, of course had also benefitted from the ruling with Buturo who was slowly making inroads now out. That possibility had swept Batoraine off his feet. He was widely smiling to whomever he was meeting

Batoraine held my hand when he found me at my cousin sister’s shoe store and took me to where he said I would get a copy of the ruling. At this place we found a guy, perhaps Batoraine’s age who was selling clothes. He was extremely knowledgeable of the country’s political and government affairs and had a photo copy of the constitution. The man was happy to see us and he said the courts had even taken long to pounce. He rushed us to article 83 and read all the clauses word by word. I told him that the Supreme Court would overturn the ruling. I said the courts would be unfair to nullify these guys’ nomination even if it was right to kick them out of parliament. He would have none of that, saying that the Constitutional court was the supreme body where the law is concerned. He denied it could be overruled or that a higher court existed above it!

In here were two supporters of Tereraho. One of them is particularly hard for me to forget. “Now you and Tereraho should strike a deal with you just pulling out. After he wins, he will look after you (azakureberera). It’s not just about money, but it’s a matter of principle. You guys are all Protestants and have similar policies and ambition to unseat the incumbent. Now that he’s gone, give up for Tereraho”. He kept repeating this nonsense as long as I was in the shop.

The Supreme Court ruling on the matter came a week to elections. Of course, as is now known, I was proved right. The Supreme Court upheld the constitutional court ruling but said the affected MPs could keep campaigning for reelection until further notice. Tereraho told me that even if he [Bucyanayandi] wins “We shall eject him”. It was very funny a comment, I knew he was devastated.

Bucyanayandi is a smart politico who, like most of his peers exploits his constituents’ ignorance. In the aftermath of the initial ruling, he run announcements on the radio, asking people to ignore “the rumors and smears” his opponents were spreading around. And many believed him. “How come they waited when voting is nigh to pounce?”, many asked.

Of course Bucyana knew that no one outside the downtown where a swath of his voters lived, reads newspapers. The powerful Voice Of Muhabura also did not mention anything on the ruling until days later, to our utter disappointment. The reason was simple. The owner and chairman of the radio are staunch supporters of NRM and Bucyanyandi respectively.
On 5 February, I convened a meeting of my canvassers from my Parish, at my village home. I bought two jerry cans of *Umusururu*, a local brew and a crate of soda. I further bought one Jerry can of obushera (softer version of the local brew, normally taken by born-again Christians). This was Owen’s (my half brother’s) idea. He said even if it was a foregone conclusion that I would be hammered, it was not a good thing to lose at home. He therefore said I should plot a thorough strategy for the 4,000 votes in my own parish. I called key people, all men, from my village and those surrounding it to come home for a chat. My house was new and, even if I had earlier done a small house warming party for family members, I had not yet to sleep in it officially. Those I invited were happy, and patted me on the back for the grand thing I had erected in the village. “You are a wise man son”, one of the old guys said, gulping down a swig of *Musururu*. You haven’t forgotten your roots, he added.

I began my remarks by welcoming them into my home, and informed them the obvious. I was running...against lions. They all agreed. Many had heard about the Constitutional court ruling, so I thought to ease their anxiety, assuring them that the affected MPs had appealed, and the ruling would be overturned. I warned them against complacency, telling them to keep the hunt for votes, and leave out the outlier factors. Then I gave them an update of my campaign.

They heavily criticized me for taking Gitenderi, my home parish for granted. I told them that I still had 18 days and that the parish featured in my campaign program. The most vicious was a perhaps 65 year old man named Luka Ndazihawe. “Charity begins at home”, he said, perfectly shouting out the saying in thick Rufumbira. We have been gossiping about your complacency, he added. Luka was a genuine supporter and during a tour of the parish a few days later, he showed up at one of the rallies, grabbed the mic and castigated the people for “hating themselves”. “Muri ba banga mwabo” (You are self-haters) he accused them, wondering how sane voters could hate one of their own.

Luka talked at length of how we would pull off a surprise victory despite the odds. “Mateke used to tell us that if everyone tells 5 people, we would win”, he said of the legendary LCV chairman. All those that attended agreed. I guess the *Musururu* was getting into their heads though, as they were getting excited. Some even started confessing that they had been in Bucyanayandi’s camp, saying it’s because I had never reached out to them. “We are now converted” they declared, to applause (I wasn’t among those that applauded, for obvious reasons)

At my home meeting, we formed a parish campaign committee right there and elected leaders. For each of the 11 villages, we chose a subcommittee made up four people. We included those who were not present, after discussing amongst ourselves their possible allegiances. Anyone we were not sure about, we didn’t include him or her. Charles Bakenga, a former game ranger and a very intelligence person was chosen as the parish coordinator.
Later after the home event, a friend of his laughed when we discussed what had happened. “That guy had long been in Bucyana’s camp”, he said and warned me against sharing campaign secrets with him. He was right, as I was later to learn that on Election Day, Bakenga just absconded from his duty as my parish coordinator and disappeared. In fact over half of the 25 men who came to my home, I was told, each of them had been given money by the rival camps. I wasn’t shocked. The funniest was one Sentongo, a fiery 50 year old who was my agent at Mubuga Polling station and Bucyana’s goons intoxicated him with free beers and waragi until he was dead-drunk. They did this because he apparently was doing a terrific job thwarting their bribery acts around the station. One of Bucyana’s agents then asked him why he couldn’t be ‘looked after’ and gives up. With a lot of pestering, he gave up and was taken into one of the bars in the trading centre where the polling station had been erected, and enjoyed himself. This though was the polling area in the entire constituency where I got the biggest number of votes; 132, against Bucyanayandi’s 170 and Tereraho’s 325.

Terah Muzamuzi, a distant paternal cousin of mine who was at the meeting said he was at a campaign event in our own village and he heard people saying they didn’t know me! He said therefore I needed to go home to home to show myself to the people and ask for the vote myself. I halfheartedly agreed. While it’s true that I am rarely in my village, what people really wanted wasn’t to just see me, they expected money from me because like other candidates were doing, they didn’t expect me to just go there, talk and leave them empty handed.

Back in the down town office, things were getting scarier with people claiming to be agents coming in droves everyday and claiming ‘transport refund’. I had instructed my office assistant to take note of everyone who comes in and write notes of what they want. Henry did a fantastic job and I enjoyed perusing through the notebooks he filled over the period. One entry in Henry’s notebook might read;

“Serina Kamahoro, Jackline Kabanza and Vanisi Mukadisi complained about transport to take them back home and I borrowed sh5000 from somebody to help them. Mukadisi was saying that we would have informed them earlier that there was not going to be a meeting”.

Notes like these were not uncommon. I didn’t know we had scheduled a meeting.

After giving, them the money, Henry would make them write their names and sign. Sometimes I would feel for Henry, such an intelligent young man who had completed Senior 4 but failed to proceed due to lack of school fees. I would wonder to what extent his amazing talent would have taken him. Sometimes I felt it was for folks like him that I wanted to go to parliament and set it on fire, chide our rulers for ignoring their citizens’ plight.
Henry reminded me of my own childhood life and I was so sad after the campaign, when he had to go back home.

**More Church**

Sunday February 6 was an extraordinary day. I attended four church services, two of them from Anglican churches, one from a catholic one, and another from a church of some Pentecostal nature that calls its self “Apostles Church of Jesus Christ”. These latter guys are not allowed to attend any parties like weddings other than those that are not of those of their own. They have many rituals that some fear they may be a cult. I didn’t care about that however because I just wanted their votes. Besides, some of my relatives are members and the leader of their church is such a politically powerful fellow that in each election, everyone who is running to win goes there for his blessings.

I woke up at 6 and did my usual six kilometer road work. I called the driver early because I had not informed some of the church leaders. I had realized overtime that calling them was causing me some problems as those as who were not my supporters, and these included almost all of them, were not comfortable allowing my visit or if they did, they put stringent conditions on what I said as I ‘greeted’ the congregations. So I drove to Gasovu church of Uganda and reached there at 8am. I found the elderly pastor still in his night clothes and informed him that I was attending service from there. He didn’t have a problem with that but like his peers had always warned me before, said I shouldn’t do politics.

From here I drove to Nyakabaya Catholic Church sub-parish, three miles away and told the catechist the same thing. He said he will be happy to introduce me. From there I went to Nyagisenyi church of Uganda sub-parish, a further 5 kilometers away and I found the catechist at his home, preparing for the service. I introduced myself and told him I had come to greet the Christians. I entered with him and his procession which virtually was made up of only his assistant and me. There were about five people in the church but he began right away and decried the late coming that had plagued the church. It was around 11.30 and I was becoming restless.

However, worshipers kept coming in droves and by midday, the church was nearly full. I was given the chance to greet them which I swiftly did. I was uncomfortable when Henry started taking pictures of me as I addressed them. This took away their attention. I dashed out after giving my offertory and rushed to Nyakabaya.

The catechist, a man named Thomas knew me very well and I knew him too. He had been present, assisting the priest who had baptized me in 1990. During my speech, I reminded him of this 20 year old event, happy that he seemed to not realize that I was no longer a member of the Catholic Church. My mother is born in this village and I reminded the people of that fact.
I however made some blunders in this church. I kept mentioning some catholic liturgical terms and would address Jesus as “Yesu” which is the pronunciation among the local Catholics here. The Catholic literrely pronounce the Christ as “Yezu”. They were startled. The biggest of blunder of all was however my failure to bow low before the altar, which is done by everyone who comes closer to it. I was glad the ordeal was over. Maybe I need to mention that on polling day, I polled 8 votes in this area, which I suspect were from the family in which my mother is born!

I reached Gasovu church at 1:00pm, as the lay leader was announcing the recessional hymn. When I entered the newly constructed, unfinished church, many people stared at me. It was clear Most wouldn’t tell who I was even if I knew some of them, the place not being too far from my village home. The reverend retold the story of how I came to his home early morning to inform him of my attendance. I was handed a small, faulty microphone whose adapter was battery powered. I didn’t know if the people at the back could hear me. I contributed sh40,000 to their building project, and reminded them of the poor widow who had given just two mites in Mark 12:41-44. Jesus had commended her as having given than the rich who had put in part of the excesses of their wealth. I said this knowing well that the church had taken millions to build, and certainly some congregants had given more than 40k

I walked for 2 miles from here to the apostles’ church because there was no road to that place that a car could use. These people use a lot of Swahili and instead of “Praise the Lord” in Rufumbira, the say “Bwana asifiwe”. I had rehearsed that and I did greet them in Swahili. On my way out, women who waited at the door asked me for money. I pretended not to have heard and run back to the car which had remained at Gasovu Church.

The next day, the to do list in my diary was heavy with activity; find machines, edit campaign program, call agents who I will visit, go to the bank, hire pickup, take Programs to VOM, call GISOS, book talk show

Later in the day, I was called by a fellow named Mboneko, the Gombolola Internal Security Officer (GISO) for Nyarusiza. This was the second time in as many days. He told me he had been busy with keeping ‘our’ security and has as a result had not had chance to see me. He said again that he needed a beer from me. It is not very clear what the role of the Gombolola (sub-county) Security Officer really is. It is one of these positions whose mandate is not clear to much of the public but I hear they deal with “security issues” in the sub-county. Even with constant pestering, I never gave the GISO any beer.

As we drove to the next rally, my driver informed me that Tereraho had been offered sh200million by Bucyanayandi’s camp to stand down but he had refused. He had reportedly told them to use that money to extend electricity to Nyarusiza or use it for some other public good. Such insinuations were the first indicators to me of where a person’s allegiance lay, and claims as these were common among Tereraho’s fans.
Another boda boda guy had told me the amount was 600million. I knew these guys were Tereraho’s supporters, trying to cast him in good light by showing what a patriot he was, refusing a bribe. By this they sought to tout his character and integrity as beyond reproach. I wasn’t fouled. My investigations revealed that while Bucyana’s camp with his bankroller Mulenga would have offered money to Tereraho to drop out and save the old man the stresses of vote hunting, no such offer was given.

On 8th February, I was touring Muramba sub-county and I was inundated with questions; some genuine, others out of ignorance. “You are not giving us money because you independents just pocketed it. Didn’t the government give all candidates money to campaign”? I was baffled. Other genuine questions however were asked; “what experience do you have?, corruption has been here since independence, how do you intend to fight it? Can we sign a pact with you such that if you don’t serve us we can recall you and elect another representative?

Others asked whether the money the MP gets especially the constituency development fund really goes into his pockets, or is channeled through the ministries when the monies are released to be sent to constituencies.

Many rural people do not know that the right of recall is actually provided for in the constitution, under article 84. This is one of the absurdities of our leaders’ inefficiencies. Nobody explains to the people these issues. It’s just giving them booze and they give votes in return and that is the end of the matter. I did a lot of explaining that day.

Many did exclaim in familiar fashion; “Ah, even if you don’t go through, you have really educated us!”.

**Kibugu primary school**

I had announced on the radio that I would meet three villages here, and I reached there a bit late but was nevertheless welcomed. The chairperson LC ones of Matarama, Kibande and Mugwata villages had been informed. None was present however even though the chairperson of Mugwata, Mr Bernard Munderi was a longtime friend from my STF days. His deputy was however the person on the scene when I came and he ably did the function of introductions.

When Mr Munderi arrived, he reintroduced me to more clapping. I was asked a few questions here like what my symbol on the ballot paper would be! The chairman in a word of counsel told me that the struggle I was involved in was not a simple one and I concurred. I left them in under one hour, as I was rushing to the next stop, where my agents were repeatedly calling me saying many people had gathered and some had started leaving.

**Bukazi primary school**
This was a stronghold for Tereraho and I had been told so. The others had told me it was a split between Tereraho and Bucyana since there were many Catholics there too. Reaching the trading centre, many people had indeed gathered, with many old women waiting in keen anticipation. The usual men who hang out at bars most of the day were there of course. I was meeting the villages of Kagandu, Kanombe and Bukazi

The people that turned up were around 200, and this was my largest rally so far. I told my staff to leave the car at a distance since the road was rough. We left it 100 meters away. We were told by the people in the centre to move ahead to the primary school where many politicians congregate with the electorate. On our way to the venue, I would see many women along the road. A bridge separated the trading centre and the primary school and there I found a group of women, some of whom were holding little babies in their hands. “He is such a young man!” I could hear some exclaiming

On the grounds, it so happened that the chairman of the area was not around, so I was shown an old man who they told me would take his place. The man, perhaps in his seventies with a wrinkled face, was dressed in a checkered coat and wore gumboots. He was reportedly the NRM chairperson for the village where our rally was taking place. I nodded but again I realized what a misnomer that was, a partisan person taking charge of official village affairs.

It was another indication of the little knowledge people have about the multiparty dispensation. This wasn’t an isolated case. In many villages in rural Uganda, the chairman of the movement (NRM) may have equal if not more decisive powers than the executive LC1 chairperson. People sometimes cannot differentiate the two. This could be because there is no opposition party with branches in rural areas and for Kisoro’s case, in almost all of the district, with the exception of FDC and more recently UPC opening party branches in the town. Apart from that they have no party officials at village level or even sub county level. Again it is at the district/town level that some have a chairperson and a small executive committee.

This old man was respected as the defacto leader, even if he was supposed to head only a partisan group of NRM supporters. But all the people here say they are NRM any way!

My speech was brief and I didn’t divert from the themes I had been articulating most of the time, only that I made use of their road which was pathetic, and the fact that they are in a water stressed area which makes their life in the dry season hell. They said all that was true and I invited the questions
Many were asking about my independent candidature. What did it mean? Was I anti-NRM? Whose interests would I serve if I am elected? I repeated for a thousandth time that independents are legally free to contest. What was I going to do differently, what if you don’t return throughout the five years? I tried to reassure them as much as I could. Still people asked me if in my manifesto I promised to allow voters to recall me if I didn’t perform. ‘I don’t need to write it in my manifesto’, I told them. “It is your constitutional right”. I told them the requirements and conditions for the right of recall as outlined in the constitution.

On the issue of water scarcity, a sharp eyed fellow asked me how I would bring water “if you don’t become minister for water?” he added; “If you are elected you will go as independent and you can’t be appointed minister in such a status’. Smart point, I thought. I informed them that I would lobby and advocate, which are among the indirect functions of MPs. Another cited the bad road in the middle of which, the rally convened. I told them that the road, among other pathetic services is what results from not voting wisely.

Many who attended the rally were satisfied, or so it seemed. But as I was leaving the venue heading for my car, I could hear one or two drink-lunatics throw in a statement of protest; “not even ten thousand?” the other one dismissively remarked; “This one is the father of all embarrassments”!

I sighed heavily when I reached my car and drove off.

I was remaining with three venues in the same day and time was running out. At Kampfizi in Sooko parish, I was taken aback when I found here the notorious Jacqueline, the woman with her baby who had remarkably taken a break from her sweet potatoes business to go to wherever there was a rally. Here she was, and she was the first one to ask a question when I had finished speaking. This was the same woman who had come to my office, asked for an appointment letter and said she was going to be an agent of mine in her village. And yet here she was, pushing me to the wall.

In fact hers was not a question. It was an opinion. She warned me against calling the money candidates give villagers “a bribe”. “It is just like you can visit someone and take along a gift. Now that’s not a bribe”. I dismissed her claim profusely and told her that even if she clothes a pig with nice clothes it would remain a pig. “When else have these guys come to ‘visit’ I asked her, “with those gifts”? People applauded, meaning they had got the point, but had they? In this place at Kampfizi primary school, four villages had gathered namely, Mataba, Bizitiro, Gasuri and Gakware. People were many. After making my case, I just left them, and I would hear and feel the shock on my heels.

Two physically powerful young men followed me, pleading that they had spent the whole day mobilizing villagers for me. I therefore had to give them something for their efforts, they said. The road to Kampfizi was too bad that we had left the car 2km away.
These guys followed me all the way, and when I was in sight of the car, I handed them sh5000. They looked elated! Meanwhile three other young women had camped near the car, and I certainly didn’t ask them who they were waiting for. I simply drove off.

Everywhere I passed and my car was sighted with the posters pasted on the side, many would flag me down, shouting;

Waduha igihumbi (Give us one thousand)
Watureberera (why don’t you ‘Look after us’?)
Sabiti wampayo izagashera (Sabiti, give us some money for bushera...)

9th February, 2011

The next day, 9th February, an NGO called National foundation for democracy and human rights in Uganda (NAFODU) was holding a forum on the citizen’s manifesto and had called several political and civic leaders, and candidates to the event. None of my opponents showed up, I guess they had more important things to do. They were in some village giving money I guess. Only me, and the FDC parliamentary candidate for Bufumbira North were present. I was out of cash so I hadn’t gone to the field, I barely had transport.

This NGO is located in Kabale district and was sensitizing voters on exactly the issues I had been articulating in the villages. I thought it important to attend. Here again I found Jackline, with her baby! She apparently was a local leader of some women’s group in her village. I listened to the deliberations and I thought the NGO meant no harm. They were educating the people on civic issues related with the looming election, with the director saying that up to now some people do not know the voting day. He proved he was right when he asked the audience whether they knew the dates for all the elections that loomed; local councils, presidential and parliamentary. Many knew the date for presidential and parliamentary but most were green on dates for local elections.

Jackline Nyirarukundo kept breastfeeding her baby throughout the workshop. She was also among the first people to ask a question when they were invited. Her question was striking. She played nice. She accused incumbents who are voted and through the five years they just remain in Kampala. Because they have money, she reasoned, they bribe their way back and so the voters ignore poor but capable candidates! I couldn’t believe it.

Early morning, Smart Lawrence had come to my office to ask for sh10,000 for traditional outfit that his dancing troupe apparently needed! He was also at the NAFODU event. I could see the disappointment when the meeting was dismissed. I knew most of these people had come in anticipation of allowances.
I returned to my hotel and I found there a man who told me he had read a monitor story about me. He said I was smart and knowledgeable, compliments I acknowledged. But he
warned me to stop playing nice lest I would not win. Allegedly courting Plato, he said; “If you join politics and you think you are too smart to involve yourself in the dirt of the game, idiots will beat you to the game.” Point taken, I said, even if I was not convinced of the source of the philosophy.

**INVADING ENEMY TERRITORY**

On Feb 11, 2011, I visited Bucyana’s home sub county. The place I am in today is called Mukabyigo, in Rwaramba parish, Nyakinama subcounty. We reached their approximately on time, and we were to meet residents of three villages here. We found none. Instead I drove to the next trading centre where I was sure that at least some people would be gathered, doing their errands. So we drove back to Nturo. Nturo trading centre is not new to me as I have many people there who know me. They congregated very fast and in no time the place was full of curious listeners. It was a jolly interaction. The place is located along the main road from Nyarusiza to Kisoro town and I got an unsolicited for rally. Tereraho passed by in his Toyota Corolla and he waved with a sly smile.

I drove back to Mukabyigo, and still found no body waiting for me. On the way however, I passed by three young men and one lady digging, who told me they had heard the announcement on the radio but couldn’t tell why no one had shown up. The garden was in a valley, and I jumped into the field, introduced myself and handed them fliers and posters. The lady refused, protesting the indignity of being given “just papers with no accompaniment”. “Is it the poster we shall take to the bar”? She asked.

**Rwaramba primary school**

I arrived here at 9.15 am, and as soon as kids spotted my car from their classroom, they began chanting; “abishize hamwe ntakibanira”, and shouting; “watureberera” (look after us). The teacher persuaded me to drop in and say hello so they could proceed with their class work quietly and I did. When I got in the class, the pupils kept asking for money, one telling me she would tell her mum to vote for me.

After the class I headed to the staff room to have a chat with the teachers. I knew some of them from my former work where I could visit schools which is how I had become popular among the young kids especially those who are in school who enjoyed my radioshow. I was well received in the staff room and I handed the teachers some fliers. One of them dryly remarked; “You are coming [campaigning] so that we may know you but you also know you can’t win!”. I kept silent.

I must note that I hadn’t come here to visit the school, but the village nearby but it so happened that I was to meet the voters from the school playground. The villagers had not yet come, only three were on the venue and we agreed that I could be chatting with the teachers as I awaited more villagers. They never came. During the long wait, one of
the teachers said that since the villagers hadn’t come, I would leave the teachers the money I had brought for the villagers. “I am not bribing voters”, I said, for the umpteenth time.

Afterward I climbed a hill behind the primary school to the secondary school. Rwaramba secondary is a place that was familiar to me. The school of 500 students soon recessed into break time. Beforehand I was in the staff room, chatting with the teachers many of whom I knew so well. One of them, Erasmus Musafiri was once my Agriculture teacher in Senior 3. He had earlier passed by my office and asked for a copy of my manifesto which he had got. He had thereafter photocopied it and given the school a copy, which had now faded perhaps from too much handling. Students kept peeping inside, naughty boys saying loud enough for me to hear; “Turabwirirwa?” (are we going to spend this day hungry?)

Now that was absurd. The school does prepare some food though many do not eat here because only the paid up do. It is also important to note that this school, like majority of the schools in Uganda has two separate arrangements; the students who pay fees, and those under the universal secondary education (USE). The school, being private is given some money to cater for these government students which the headmistress decries as insufficient.

Before I was allowed to address the students, I visited the head teacher in her office. She was happy to see me after a long time and she was awed at my guts of taking on such rich guys in Bufumbira South. She expressed her disgust at the voter bribery going on and I concurred. Thereafter she told one of the teachers to ring the bell so students could assemble for my address. I addressed them in both English and Rufumbira.

At the sidelines of the assembly, I could see Bernard, my assistant giving out fliers. The boys were in an intense argument that continued after the address as I exited the school. One of the loudest one asked him; “Why are you so merciful of his money. Is it yours?”

I headed to a trading centre that is inconspicuously called Soweto. It is also in Rwaramba parish, the home of Bucyanayandi. It’s a small place with a few bars but many drunk people. Mr. Emma Kabanza welcomed me to the place and regretted that most residents had gone to the fields and so few were here to hear me. But still about fifty people turned up, which to me was a big enough number. I made perhaps the most powerful case against voter bribery, yoking it with the pathetic social services in the area.

I told them that their area is home to the most powerful politician in the whole district but he hadn’t helped them. “My car could barely make it here”, I thundered, respectfully pointing a finger to the representative. As I left, I heard a loud cheer, and
nobody was mentioning something about money. “For the words you have them”, an old man said. I didn’t wait for what he was going to add to the sentence.

I proceeded to the parish headquarters, a small place with only three bars and one shop. Few people were here, seemingly bored. A well refurbished heath centre 111 is located very close to the centre. Here I was meeting the villages of Gahembe, Bihanga and Bukere. The moment I pulled over in the giant trees, I was confronted with questions. People were asking; “Why are your posters not here yet”. I asked Henry who our agents in the village were. They had apparently been attending our meetings and had also brought a bundle of large and smaller posters from the office. I smelt a rat. Where had they put those materials? I could see Tereraho’s image on one of the doors staring at me as I wondered what was happening.

There was particularly one woman who kept mocking my campaign. I was to later learn that she was Tereraho’s agent here. “Where is the music? That noise is important, it pulls people even out of their gardens,. Now for you are sneaking in the village quietly, even your agents didn’t inform anybody...” I sat quietly, not out of contempt of her. I knew what she was saying was probably true. How was I going to explain to her my logistical nightmare because I was broke and couldn’t hire a PA system every day?

After perhaps one hour of waiting, about 20 people had gathered and the chairman of one of the villages opened the function.

I was involved in a sharp exchange with one guy who was defending bribing voters, saying politicians must pay because they are also ‘going to earn’. My position was trying to make him see the connection between that absurdity and the pathetic public services delivery but he would have none of it. “Nto turi kuburana, igendere” (we are not in court, just go on your way”), he concluded after our sharp exchange went on endlessly.

The chairman of Gahembe village on his part simply said; “Even if you won’t win, God just gave you the words!) And then yelled; “Movement Oyee”, to which people echoed, “Oyee”.

Ndakiriye........kucyuma

A hill top is where meetings for this village take place, and I am here to meet residents of Ndakiriye village. From the hill you can see almost the entire village, sandwiched between banana plantations and freshly tilled fields. There is a non-functioning borehole here, hence the name “Kucyuma”, “icyuma” meaning ‘piece of metal’ in Rufumbira, reference of which were the borehole remains.
As we sat there waiting for more people to arrive, people would see us from their homes courtesy of the venue being on a hill, and they would come. In the immediate valley below, I had a woman who was digging say; “Nanje kanje Kureka” (Let me also go and get something). She left the hoe in the garden and came uphill! One middle-aged woman came running excitedly towards me and greeted me, saying she knows me courtesy of my radio show. She turned and, facing the people told them to vote for me.

The meeting here started with a prayer led by a catholic lady known as Beniconsila. In her wonderful prayer she asked God for guidance and protection on me since I had joined politics to give him glory! After the prayer I addressed them, using the long-dead bore hole as an opening metaphor. I mentioned the fact that it was the nonfunctioning borehole which has given this place its name, it was clear failure of delivery of a social service by the leaders they elect was there for all to see. I went back to my anti voter bribery mantra and finished the address pleading with them to vote issues not money.

As I talked about the indignity of rich guys buying off voters, an old man who was lying down from exhaustion said; “we are not sparing you either, you certainly will leave some money here even with those words you say”. He was wrong and was indeed taken aback when I simply walked away after the rally! One of the old men asked why my assistant constantly took pictures. I tried in vain to explain to him that I was simply documenting my campaign.

Kigata

The next stop from here was Kigata, whose only Catholic Church here is also called Kigata. I found at the venue perhaps 40 people who had been patiently waiting for me. My agent in the village, Kazungu had done a superb job and numbers kept swelling as the ceremony began. It was coming to 4 o’clock and I was dog-tired yet I still had two more rallies to address and a deadline of 6pm to beat.

Now, Kazungu was in town when I visited the village and he had told me he was busy. He is a trader whose trade I forget but at least on his village standards, he is doing ok. Kazungu’s support for me was too much to be categorized as normal. At 25 years of age, he said it’s the era of young people and he added that I was the right candidate, the most eloquent, the most genuine; I SHOULD be the next MP from Bufumbira south. He refused to look at the odds I faced and actually thought I could win. I sometimes thought he could lay his life down for me.

When I made my way into the venue, women began to sing songs of praise to me, while bashing Tereraho. But they were silent on Bucyana, who even if none would admit it, Tereraho and I knew was the frontrunner. I had gotten used to these scenes and was mostly not bothered but had to put on a face so I would not appear as some not
enjoying these entertainers. They normally did this for money and I would stop them wherever I could, informing them that I had no money. They normally went on.

I had been told that this village, for its high catholic numbers was basically Bucyana country. But I didn’t want to remain with any regrets after the election, so I went wherever I could. I worshipped from Tereraho’s church, went to Bucyana’s home village and didn’t stop stumping at places where his nine sisters are married and have large family spreads. (Yeah, Bucyana is that influential; even by marriage).

The residents neatly laid out chairs and the village hierarchy, beginning with the LC1 chairman, began the proceedings after a prayer by the catechist of the local Catholic Church. I somehow remembered him from my younger years, when he could come at Sooko catholic parish among the white robed men of God on important functions. The men sat with me on the lined chairs while women sat down facing us, on the naturally kempt grass.

After addressing them, they asked several questions, some of them really tough. “Can leaders really give us everything?”, a middle aged man asked me, referring to the scathing criticism I had made of the elected leaders’ inefficiencies. “On which ticket are you standing?”, another asked. He clarified that he wanted to know which ticket I was on. Questions like this were normally a trap and I could almost tell that such a questioner was Bucyana’s supporter. Because they always wanted to remind the people who the NRM flag bearer was, and portray the “otherness” of the opponents, Bucyana’s supporters at every opportunity sought to remind the people that their man had won the ‘birthright’ of being elected! Bucyanayandi himself, after winning the NRM primaries redesigned his huge A2 campaign poster and included below his image and name an inscription in deep, bold red font that read “Niwe Ufashe ibendera ya Muvumenti” (He is the NRM flag bearer)

I always said that I supported President Museveni in many respects but here, one of the men was hell-bent on showing the people how hollow such an argument was; “How can you support the President without supporting other NRM candidates?”, he asked. I answered him by saying I wasn’t the only NRM supporter running as an independent.

Now here was the dilemma; most people here do not know what an independent is. The truth is that I believed in the NRM party whose faults I believed and still believe can be fixed. Local voters here also expected someone, even if he was independent to be aligned somewhere, which to them I wasn’t . This particular guy, even if his question was smart didn’t know the whole picture. In fact he thought “Independent” was a political party and he accused me of being in cocoons with Walter Lubega, the only independent presidential candidate. “So you are Lubega’s representative on parliamentary level!”, he stressed
The catechist wrapped up with another prayer, this time asking God to “send us your Holy Spirit”. I walked away and I could hear the murmurings in the background; “So he is not leaving us anything, it can’t be true!” when I was off the venue but still within hearing range, I could hear bouts of sarcastic, if not disapponted laughter. I met Kazungu a few meters from the venue as I walked to my car and he was profusely apologizing for not having been there to welcome me. I told him not to worry.

Kazungu then said I should wait for him so that he first goes to the venue before people disperse so that he could give them something, a jerry can of booze to drink. I told him that was against the policy of my campaign. It is inappropriate. It is unethical. My campaign will not bribe voters. Kazungu knew all this because he had attended our meetings and was one of my most active campaigners. But he could have none of these. He wanted to do it *for me*, maybe as a favor, I don’t know. Henry seemed touched. I thanked him and drove off, telling him to meet me at the office the next day.

I could tell that Kazungu, as my point man in Kigata village had gained some social capital from his work and couldn’t face losing it. He was respected as one of the well off people in his village and couldn’t be caught on the side of a candidate of my type, who “had no money to give, who was a disgrace”. I therefore believe Kazungu did this not just for me but also to protect his reputation.

He would call me in the night with the line thick in the background of happy noise, saying he is buying people booze on my behalf and they were happy and voting me on February 18. I got only 6 votes at Kazungu’s polling station! I had always told him not to believe peoples words, explaining to him our politics in vain. He felt betrayed and was devastated when the votes were counted. He called me and it took me an effort to console him. I told him we had even performed beyond my expectations.

**Kagano primary school**

My next stop was Kagano, where I was to meet four villages; Gatyazo, Gatete, Burihira and Gasave. Located in the same parish as Kigata, the school is also atop a hill and our car could not climb up there. On the way there, a few meters before we arrived, we passed by two men, one of whom was chairperson of one of the villages and they flagged us to stop. The chairman entered, while his companion asked for sh200. “You can start [looking after people] on the way. Even if it is sh200”. He clung onto me saying I should ‘touch his hand’ ‘since no one was seeing’. The strategy was simple. He wanted to snatch his share before I reached the huge crowd ahead which was visible from the place of our standoff. When it is a crowd, well, he thought he might not share as much!

His colleague sat in the car and said nothing. On the venue, there must have been over 100 people. It was along a foot path so many people who would be coming from work would stop to listen. The fading evening sunset made the visible hills at the horizon of
Bunagana border with DRC provide one of the most beautiful sunset pictures I had ever imagined.

Back on the ground however, people looked at me with great anticipation. I could tell from their eyes. Some still had their hands filled with dust and mud from a daylong work in the gardens. Primary school kids also stopped by to listen. I could see my OB, from eleven years earlier, Mr. Mudanga in the audience. He was coming back from his teaching job, a profession that reminded me of what different paths we had taken when he stopped at senior four while I continued. He nodded to me as he leaned on his Hero bicycle.

The chairmen of the three villages assigned one of them, David Ndakiriye of Gatete to lead the function. He welcomed me to the area and said I was there legally and therefore ‘free to talk”

My address must have taken 20 minutes. I didn’t say anything new from my addresses to the villages I had addressed before, only with new style, idioms and syntactical tweaks, and, triggered by a local issue my agents had tipped me about, would tear into my opponents and how out of sync they were.

There was one problem here; the owner of the chairs we sat on, and the owner of the bar whose verandah we used was a man whose mental faculties I couldn’t trust. He looked drunk and began tearing into me, trying very hard to embarrass me. “I own those chairs you are sitting on and you are also going to leave me like that?”, he asked. “Did you ask for permission from me before coming here?” I always made sure my agents took care of small logistics like these but they didn’t always do it, and I was suspicious this guy was right, but then he had brought the chairs himself when we arrived at the place!

One of the women raised her hand to ask me a question and I gave her an all clear. “Iyo uraritse abahinzi, ntubahemba kandi ukabashashura?” (When you invite workers to dig for you, don’t you feed them and again pay them at the end of the day?) Impulse told me to be blunt and tell her she was no worker of mine but I restrained myself. “You do ma’am, but this is a different issue here. I am talking about buying a vote for sh300, compromising your integrity and equating your value to sh300. That’s insulting. A vote isn’t for sell.” I must have gone on for five to ten minutes because I knew many had similar questions.

But a chorus of several other people hit back; “Ko yaje arumushitsi, honyine mwewe mwamuzimanira? (Since he has come as a visitor, then you also give him some food as is traditionally done in our culture” other women answered her

The bar owner and the owner of the chairs, a fellow named Ndabereye went inside his bar. He later emerged with a huge bowl of boiled sweet potatoes; which is the staple
food here and offered them to me. I couldn’t believe my eyes. In front of over 100 people and several primary schools kids, he stood still in front of me there, holding the bowl of the tubers dismissively looking at me. He loudly said. “Now since you have come to us without anything, let’s not be like you. We are giving you some food because you must be hungry. Now take and eat it”

A section of the crowd, especially the youngsters burst into laughter, while the older ones were visibly embarrassed and angrily shouted at him. One woman begged me not to take this picture as the nature of the residents of Kagano and painfully tried to explain how they had enjoyed my words. Ndabereye then took the potatoes back. Henry was throwing a glance at me and was also clearly embarrassed. He is born in a village not far from here and I could see that many people knew him and he knew them too.

On our way back in the car, I laughed off the incident and told my team to always be ready for I even expected worse stuff in some days to come.

Our last rally for the day was at Mubuga Trading centre, and we reached their 15 minutes to six o’clock. According the electoral laws, no rally was supposed to go beyond six o’clock. This was Henry’s home town and I could see he was worried that even his people might give me hell. I told him to relax, and that I was having fun and learning a lot about Bafumbira society.

As I drove into the centre on the newly tarmacked Kabale-Kisoro-Bunagana highway, kids run behind the vehicle, one of them shouting; “Natwe twenda kurekesha”, (we are also going to get something”. We were immediately rushed to the playground behind the bars where people flocked in seconds. I told Henry and his team that I had 15 minutes and I had no desire to break the law. Besides that, I was dog-tired, having started addressing rallies at 9 o’clock in the morning. At the venue was also a nuisance, a man who spoke at the speed of a machinegun, was drunk and could barely support himself but then spoke a lot sense that it was hard to ignore him. I was startled. His name was Evarist Safari.

“In three days, if this guy has not brought 3 trips of sand to that health centre, we shall not even vote”, he said of Bucyanyandi. We should instead vote you so you can help us here. These goons; they eat the Constituency development fund yet our health centre here has never been finished” later I was to learn that the health centre he was referring to was indeed of concern to the people. Construction had lasted for over five years and no one seems to care. Residents had pooled money and built a foundation but no help had come from the MP. I am not insinuating that it is Bucyanyandi’s role to have built it and I knew it but had no time nor the desire to carry his cross. This parish, Rwaramba was Bucyana’s home parish. It took time to make this man stop because while he spoke, we couldn’t begin the rally.
Calm later returned and the chairman LC1 welcomed me in the area, saying, as if to issue a proclamation; “We welcome you as we do others. Be free”. My speech lasted ten minutes and it’s the usual rumbling against voter bribery and the dying ethical soul of the country. As I left, the other loud mouth man ambushed me; with a small piece of paper where he had apparently wrote his concerns; “I am sending you to tell those people: we have a small health centre we have attempted to build, and what we have done on it so far there is no money whatsoever from those so called MPs”

Mbamba

On February 13, I came back to Mbamba also in Nyakinama. It was my second time to come to this place, the first one having been a complete disaster. I had been talked into going to the volatile parish by one of my diehard supporters, a 24 year old man called Evary, whose complexion makes him look more Puerto Rican than Ugandan and more paradoxical a Mufumbira . I had been accosted by a swarm of people for money but had as usual, given none.

This time, it was different. The election was one week away and people thought that I surely had come with something in monetary terms. At the entrance of Buhayo trading centre, one of the places where villagers of the parish converge for drinking and other socialization, I found a woman who was not looking like she was in her best moods. “I will not vote until my son is released from prison. Release him and you will get my vote”, she was shouting. She was no doubt drunk. She stood in my way and she seemed to be telling me something about her son which I couldn’t rather figure out. “...He developed a disagreement with...” I could barely hear all of what she was saying.

I continued towards the heart of the trading centre and by now, I was endlessly shaking hands introducing myself and asking each person to vote for me is the polls that were a week away. A drunk woman, with a Rosary dangling around her neck greeted me and claimed she knew me. Such a scene was not new. In every village that I visited, or a trading centre where I made a stopover, I saw people who seemed not to be able to remember the last time they were sober.

I was finally ushered into the LC1 chairman’s office, which was part-office and part a bar. Two dirty benches stood opposite each other and I was handed a visitors book to sign, whose last visitor had signed six months earlier. The rally was to be convened at the extreme end of the centre and the chairman and a few of his executive members took me to a place where two benches were set and several women and men were seated in waiting.

The women were already dancing, shouting and singing their hearts out, praising me. “Abishize hamwe ntakibanira’, my signature song was being danced to. They looked drunk, at 9 o’clock Sunday morning. The people were too many here and I wondered what they were doing. Evary informed me that this was a day when most savings associations gather to contribute or share their savings and that was the reason. When
the women at the rally venue saw me, they even increased the tone and the tenor. It
clearly looked like a choreographed thing. The chairman was my friend as he knew me
from my previous work at STF and I had visited this place before to campaign,
encounters that would have clearly informed him that I don’t give out any money. Why
were they dancing for me?

Across the path was an FDC diehard, who was throwing around FDC slogans with a half-
drank Senator beer bottle firmly in the grip of his hand. He looked to be looking for
some trouble. I was told he was a candidate for LC1 chairmanship of Bugwene village
whose residents were also here to hear me speak, and I actually later saw a high quality
calendar with his image and full FDC insignia on it. I was to learn later that the man is a
local tycoon, and had held the LC1 position for a long time even though he is FDC, an
unprecedented thing in rural Kisoro. I was told he is generous and very influential
because of his wealth. When I met him later in town, I learnt from a few minutes of
discussion that he has genuine reasons for his political beliefs. He sounded very
intelligent and he intimated to me that on many occasions, NRM functionaries from as
far as the national level, have, through the district NRM leadership tried to buy him out
of the FDC but he has refused. I didn’t have a way of proving such claims.

The rally began with a blessing from the chairperson who said that I had all the liberty to
address my voters. I spoke less of my policy positions than the subject of voter bribery
which I knew was the game changer in this election. I had been informed that
Bucyanayandi had met these same two villages here a few days earlier, leaving sh
150,000 for each. Tereraho had also come here, leaving 70 thousand for a bigger village,
50,000 for a smaller one. I was, they informed me, the only one remaining. I was
shocked at how few people spoke of the other candidate in the race, FDC’s Joseph
Munyaneza Kanyoni! Many said they knew only three people in the Bufumbira south
race, saying the FDC fellow had yet to come to visit them, while others didn’t even
pretend that they wanted to see him at all.

After my speech, I invited questions as I always did. The first was from the FDC firebrand
I describe above. His name is Vallence Maniragaba. “You have spoken well indeed. Do
you agree with me that it is the NRM and Museveni that are thugs and what we see
down here is a result of the rotten top”? He went ahead in a five minute rant,
mentioning several government ills with shocking precision. I told him that I was running
a campaign of myself and won’t speak for or against any party because I was
independent. I was very uncomfortable with his words as he pushed me to the wall. Of
course I knew that some of the claims he made were credible. But this was no place to
criticize Museveni especially in front of the people I hoped to give me some votes. In
effect, I ducked Maniragaba Vallence’s questions.

The second question came from a man named Innocent Muhawe, who wanted me to
enlighten him, even though his question smelt of sheer slyness: “We have been told that
independents are liars, opportunistic and thugs and that only NRM people are for real. Is
it true?”. Most people here thought every independent was a disgruntled NRM member. Because of Tereraho’s status, I was mistaken in many areas to be a disgruntled NRM loser yet I never run in the NRM Primaries. I told the gentleman, that that was propaganda by the state and the NRM machinery because it wants to win.

After that, the rest concurred that I shouldn’t be asked any more questions as I had never served. I walked away, to their astonishment. One of the women who had danced bellowed; “Ye mwana ntanizumusururu udusigiye” (Young man, you aren’t even leaving us some money to drink?!). I didn’t look back. My only regret was that my car was a little far. The chairman however stuck on me up to the car, and I stashed sh2000 in his pocket to thank him for ‘organizing’ for me, even if it had been done by my agents.

My next stop was Mbuga parish headquarters where I found multitudes waiting. They numbered perhaps 150, without counting children who surprisingly always outnumbered adults!

The parish house was semi permanent, but the first organized parish office I had yet seen. Most parish administrations exist only in name and one barely sees any structure for the chief’s office. Many LC2 chairpersons have long ceased to function. I respected Mbuga people for this uniqueness. Bernard, my 23 year old bare-knuckles mobilizer was here, and he gave me a fiery introduction. He then invited the LC2 chairman, who in effect is the parish chairman to officially introduce me and invite me to speak.

“It’s my first time ever to see you!”, he slyly began and said that he was happy as a result. Then he faced the people and told them; “To vote is your right. No one should force you. Choose whomever you want”, then he sat down. Bernard protested the chairman’s tongue-in-cheek snub of me by immediately adding, “vote for Sabiti Bernard!”

I addressed the people, most of whom were women. After the speech they said they were not going to ask me any questions since I had never served, saying I had no record to defend or sell. But one of them, Emmanuel Nsengiyumva said he had some requests. I looked at him and wondered whether I had seen him before. I realized he was the mole from Bucyana’s camp who had attended one of our strategy meetings. Bernard affirmed this fact to me as he hailed from the same village as him. I would see his discomfort as he spoke. He is born here.

Anyway, Nsengiyumva continued with his ‘request’. He first drew my attention to the parish building that was hosting us. He then mentioned the health centre which apparently was in a mess and the road whose condition I had witnessed myself as I came to the rally. Later Bernard told me more about Nsengiyumva.

“He goes to every rally, even those in Bufumbira East”. That’s how he is surviving in these elections.
Kiduha church of Uganda

From Mbuga I went to a church in Chihe parish, which is behind the tall hills that surround Mbuga. I was in the church by 12:15 and preaching had obviously ended. Three young women were standing in front of the congregation, giving testimonies after which they presented a special song. Two of the testimonies touched me;

The first woman was thanking God for healing her. She had gone to the health unit and hadn’t found the health workers there. She returned home and prayed to God who healed her. She decried people’s stubbornness and rebuked those present for the nearly empty church. “Those people who don’t come to church are your responsibility. Preach to them so they can come to church”, she said

The second woman was dressed in a floral dress, holding a young child in her arms. She testified of how the complications of her pregnancy with that child almost took her life. She thanked God for delivering her.

The third one was a girl, perhaps 20 years old. She was thanking God for helping her pass her senior six exams. She also narrated an ordeal in which there was a strike by students at her school, who tried to drag her in the insurrection but she finally survived. She dwelt on the strike story for a longtime and I would tell the faithful were bored, just like I was.

Thereafter they sang a very beautiful song. The church’s youth choir then made a song presentation. They were smartly dressed, the men in blue trousers, the women in blue skirts and all in white shirts. I could see some giggling at me, others acknowledging me. They must have realized who I was.

I had not yet been introduced and I didn’t mind since I was enjoying the service. A young girl, perhaps 3 or 4 years clung onto my leg as I followed the proceedings. I wondered where her mom was or whether she has been sent by somebody. I was later introduced and asked to say something.

I gave them a brief bio, and told them I was a parliamentary candidate. A middle aged daughter to my step uncle who is married in Chihe was in the church and I recognized her, giving her a nod. She took me aside after the greeting and updated me on the political situation of Chihe Parish. She first apologized for “having failed to get you an agent in this village” but I told her not to worry as I had taken care of that a long time before. She then embarked on explaining to me the odyssey in which Tereraho had ring fenced the royalty of all the voters in Chihe. “Tereraho bose yarabafashe” she told me, meaning; “Tereraho won all their hearts”

Of course she wasn’t completely correct. On February 18, the voting day, it was a rout for Bucyanayandi! As my sister talked to me, kids stood aside in waiting, saying amongst
themselves, “Turareka, Turareka” (we shall get him give us money!). After that we went back inside the church where the service was concluded. Before that however, the churchman said that it was a fundraising Sunday and he called upon the Christians to bring something for the rebuilding of the church. “Ntatwaritubizi” The Christians whisperingly protested, meaning, “We didn’t know”

A woman went and stood in front with a basket as beautiful singing went on. I could see that nobody went forward to put something in the basket. I did move forward, wondering whether the churchman’s announcement was targeting just me! A few others however later did move forward and put money in the basket.

The service at Kiduha church of Uganda ended at 2pm and I proceeded to Russia trading centre, where I had a rally scheduled at the same time.

Apart from the usual drunkards who were here, the centre was nearly empty. There were three men and they told me that people were aware of my coming; they had been mobilized and had even heard the radio announcement early in the morning. I was offered a bench to sit on as I waited, a gesture for which I was grateful. As I chatted with one of my agents, the three guys who were playing omweso were in a heated political argument, wondering who would take Bufumbira South in the looming decider. It was a tactical argument, I realized, because they began weighing my chances, well aware that I was hearing. “I can get the entire Buturanya (a nearby village) to vote for him, one of them said. The other agreed, but cautioned; “this Sabiti didn’t choose energetic and influential agents”.

**Along came an old lady**

An old lady, perhaps 90 years came shortly and asked whether Sabiti Bernard had arrived to address a rally. She had come to listen, she said. The men pointed in my direction and she came over to my bench and sat with me. She said she had heard my show on radio and said I indeed have good plans for the Bafumbira. She then began asking me about my place of origin, mentioning many people who I knew well, even some of my relatives, to my shock. She said she was related to some of them and therefore I too was her relative.

Sofia Nyaramanzi was her name, and I learnt later she is born from Gitenderi, the same parish, whence I am also born. She then began pestering me for money. “Nkorera mugahago mwana wanje” (get something for me from your pocket, my son). I felt very uncomfortable. I had intended not to give anything to anybody but this old woman’s pestering began getting under my skin and I was close to break my own vow. Instead I began telling her the gospel of how bribery has messed the government and public service provision. I don’t think she was listening, for after every episode of my bribery bashing, I would feel the tickle of her rough fingers again; “Nkorera mugahago...”
I began stroking my hair, wondering what do with this woman and she asked me why I looked worried. I told her I wasn’t but she insisted, telling me, “Courage, son. You might win”, she said, adding that “Ibyimana birizanaga” (God’s ways, no struggle”). Then she pleaded again; “Nkorera Mugahago...”

The guys on the omweso were now getting nasty. They were exchanging F-bombs and the women who had already gathered for the rally would not hide their embarrassment. The people kept coming in droves, whispering to one another to determine whether the guy in a suit at the bench was the Sabiti Bernard. One of them, a brown, large woman came up to me, greeted me and stubbornly said; “I am now going away because I can’t keep waiting, so why don’t you take care of me?”. I was a little shocked with her boldness. The others though cheered her guts. I thought it was time to begin the rally.

Alex Duhimbaze was my agent in Kinoni, one of the three villages that I was meeting here, and he gave me a powerful intro, reminding the people of my first job on radio and the development projects. Women ululated at that. I was told to address the gathering, that now comprised of about 40-50 people. I explained my agenda to them, mainly the themes from my manifesto. Then I attacked the culture of voter bribery, so powerfully that I surprised even myself. I had felt hungry and tired and was wondering whether I would make it through the day. I then asked for questions and they said they had nothing to ask me. They instead said that the only remaining item on the agenda was to “look after them”. I didn’t.

It was at the next stop, Kumuruka or Chihe parish headquarters where I was also meeting three villages that only one person asked me a question. Few people kept around to hear me answer it as majority had started leaving in droves, as I reduced their expectations of money during my speech. But Peter Mutija said in his question; “If we don’t accept the money they are giving us, we would be cheating ourselves because after all, those millions they are paid, they won’t bring them to us, so we better take whatever we are offered”. I answered him by informing him of the absurdity of his view, saying it is attitudes like his that had kept our country in the dark of development. An argument arose from two men who were saying that I should leave if I had brought nothing to the people. A number of women who seemed to be enjoying my talk shouted them down, asking them to leave if they were not interested. The men left.

Among these women was my sister whose encounter with me at the church I describe above. The women, God bless them, encouraged me greatly and I was touched. They begged me to ignore the indignity of the drunk men and continue enlightening them. I gladly did for the next 20 minutes.

“These rich fellows are hoodwinking you”, I told them. They are coming to buy your soul, your integrity. Can you imagine that? To them you are no more valuable than the sh200 they are offering you. In their eyes, that’s what You, a whole human being is worth. I explained to them the role of MPs according to the constitution which I used to
carry everywhere. Where does it say that an MP will build a road? I could ask. They are telling you lies! How many of you still survive on the sh500 of five years ago? Yet the guy went and never came back to help you because he had bought that leadership mandate. Do not sell your vote! I thought they had heard. I was wrong, for I got only four votes here on Election Day!

Mubuga primary school

I pulled into the bushy playground at exactly 4:20pm. I was supposed to meet three villages here but all I could see was a reverend of the nearby church, Mubuga church of Uganda who I greeted and introduced myself to him. He said my agents never mobilized the people otherwise they would be here. He was right. Even though I had put the usual announcement on radio, it makes a difference in rural politics when a person is physically reached out to and a vote physically solicited from him or her.

The kind reverend asked a young girl who I guessed was his daughter, to assemble chairs under the huge pine tree in his compound for us to sit. I thanked him as he went his way. In a few minutes however, many people had come. The reason was that the place is near a Natete trading centre, about 50 meters away which, as always was full of people. Word spread there that a parliamentary candidate was at the playground, so I imagine people said in a chorus; Lets go and be taken care of!

Before a flood of people came, one man, out of the few who were coming in droves was clearly drunk and he kept saying things to suggest these people here were not for the other two bitter rivals of mine and were therefore up for grabs. I couldn’t be fooled. “The DEO didn’t do anything in his time”, the man said in reference to John Tereraho’s tenure as a District Education officer. “The incumbent did nothing over the last five years, and even during his time in Agriculture. This young man here is the real deal”, the man kept bubbling. I was silently laughing at his trick to get my attention.

At 15 minutes to six o’clock, I addressed the rally, after a volunteer, an elder from the area took on the duties of LC1 chairman. There were many youths especially young women in this audience and I thought this was a good target. After 15 minutes of anti-voter bribery rumblings, I told them to free me because I had one more rally ahead and didn’t want to break the law. There was a young man who claimed he was my old boy in secondary school although I didn’t remember him. He almost self-appointed himself as the spokesman of the gathered villagers and, in a mixture of Rufumbira and terrible English warned me to stop taking people for a ride.

“There is no way, Mr. Sabiti, that you can call people all the way from their homes and you don’t leave them anything. So touch your pockets. They also know you are the poorest of you opponents so they don’t expect much”. I told him off, and reiterated my stance that I wasn’t bribing voters. He tried to dispute my calling the practice bribery, using broken words of English that I can’t remember. He Cleary had the ear of the
youths and women and old men who nodded vigorously as he spoke. The absurdity moved from pestering to argument, almost to violence. I told the people to dismiss, to hold their peace till February 18. The younger girls were excitedly jumping up and down, enjoying the thrill of having to vote for the first time. “aduhe, aduhe!” they shouted. (He should give us!)

I somehow jumped on a bodaboda and sped off. I don’t remember whether they didn’t throw something my way.

**Mukabaya**

Two villages, Mucyamo and Gatovu had gathered here, and it was only two kilometers from Mubuga. I could sense the anticipation as I reached for the well laid office chairs and benches. The women sat atop raised ground while the local officials and I sat in the depression as the people looked down at us.

The meeting was opened by Andrew Hatanga, the general secretary of one of the LC1s who emphasised how happy the village members were to see me. His elder bosses sat behind and seemed to approve of everything he said. He cautioned me to tell the truth; “You politicians these days lie to us a lot”, he sharply accused. He then invited me to speak.

It was now past six thirty and I was getting restless, imagining what would happen if the DPC passed by. We were meeting along the tarmac Kabale-Bunagana road, and it was heavy with traffic, with oil tankers heading to DRC which was 4miles away. Police aren’t normally far-off from such traffic.

I must have spoke for only ten minutes before inviting questions. Only an old man asked me “how different” I was going to be since they send representatives who enjoy the cake in Kampala and do not come back. I told him the leaders don’t come back to them because “you don’t vote them; they buy you, so you have no more right to demand effective representation since you sold your vote”. They started listening. I used the same “Sweet potato and the ‘goods once sold-are-not-returnable’ analogy and I had them. I warned them that they were about to repeat the mistake they have been making since 1994; voting money and not issues. Then I bade them farewell.

It was getting dark and the people had this sense of resignation on their faces that clearly betrayed their portrayed feeling of déjà vu. I thought I was through, until the elderly chairman of Muturanya held my hand and asked, almost pleaded, with me, to “give these people something”. “Even if it is 10,000”, he pleaded. I told him I wasn’t bribing voters and would never, under any circumstances. “No”, he aruged. “It’s a gift. You know our culture, we don’t visit anyone empty handed!” I gently brushed him off and walked towards the bike which had waited for me. He kept following me, and another group of young men tagged along. The place wasn’t far from Kisoro town and I
kept walking with them, some praising my performance, others expecting me to “touch my pockets” when we reached a solitary place. I never did, to their astonishment.

The bike guy was following the spectacle slowly so after around 500meters of a difficult walk-along, I signaled him to come for me. It was 7.30PM now and I went home, wondering where or how this drama was going to end. While I slept, I got a phone call from my agent in Rukongi and Gitenderi that Tereraho and Sam Bitangaro (former MP and Minister of gender and Cultural affairs) had been moving together the whole day, giving money across the two parishes. Phew! I told the fellow to relax and go to sleep.

VISITING THE CAPITAL

On February 14, I toured Kisoro town council, the main town in the constituency that had over 7000 registered voters. One of my scheduled rallies was to take place at the play ground of a government primary teachers’ college. I faced the wrath of the principal who questioned why I was bringing politics at the school yet it was not allowed. I was shocked. The students here were voters and it was my right to address them. More disturbing was the fact that I wanted to meet villagers around the school and not students, but using the play ground, a public property. He calmly told me to go somewhere else, so I may not “bring him trouble” from district leaders. I had no time to argue so I went and gathered the few people who had turned up to a nearby open area and addressed them.

Another venue where I had scheduled a rally, at Rukeribuga road, I realized, I had clashed there with Sarah Mateke, the woman MP aspirant. I found there perhaps 300 people, feuding over money. One of my agents had tipped me to come and take the advantage of addressing so many people in one place. There were three villages that had gathered here and I rushed there on a boda boda. They listened as I trashed the practice of voter bribery. The irony of my message and the bank notes they held in their hands was not lost on either of us, I guess.

Rukeribuga is the Kololo of Kisoro. The who is who of the town has a home here. But the people that had gathered to hear Ms Mateke were from the outskirt villages and were poor, scampering for the money with the respective chairpersons of the villages, each of whom was distributing the money to members of his village.

I could tell the affluent residents from their poor counterparts. The former held their smart and beautiful babies on their front porches, just enjoying the drama of a political campaign. The later were dressed in traditional clothes, some in rags, shouting over money.

As I spoke, I had the attention of half of the audience. I gave out fliers and as I left the rally, I found a bunch of them thrown in the middle of the road by some of the people who were leaving the rally. I was heartbroken. They were very few and I wasn't even
sure whether they would take me through the Election Day. And now these goons were throwing them away! Why did they pick them?, I asked myself!

**Chahi trading centre**

I was welcomed most enthusiastically to this place, and at 9 o’clock people had indeed gathered in anticipation of my arrival. The place is almost in the town centre. My agents here were a fellow named Milton, and his wife Munezero who must be in their late twenties. They operate a bar of local booze and when I arrived, they didn’t look sober. Munezero is the most interesting one. She had always come to my office to update me on the political situation in the two villages that I had entrusted with her and her husband. She would normally request for money which I never gave her, save for transport refund on a few occasions. She lived in the town, a few meters from the office so I wondered for what she always needed ‘transport refund’

On this day that I was to visit their villages, they were frantically calling me, saying people are waiting for me but that others are going back to their day’s work because I was delaying to show up. Since the place is near town, I would easily walk their but to avoid dusting my shoes, I jumped on a boda boda and rushed there

The chairman LC1 of the area was not there and Munezero herself introduced me. Many people present were drunk already (at 9am!). I particularly remember one who, it appeared had become a nuisance due to excessive alcoholism. He approached me and pointing one of his large fingers an inch from my face, asked whether it was true that I was the one seeking the office of the MP. “Weho?” he dismissively asked, meaning; “You?!” As if he wasn’t ashamed of the indignity of his acts, he then bloated; “Cyompereza” (then Give me money). Well-wishers pushed him away and I went on with my address

I castigated them and their patron politicians for making our politics a money affair and eloquently made a case against voter bribery. “I am, as a result,” I said, “running against a lion and a leopard. It’s a lion that will win not because of its hunting prowess but because of its dirty tricks. The leopard will fall short because the lion will outgun it with the coins”. They applauded me because they clearly understood who I was referring too. Bucyanaynadi and Tererah respectively.

I could see that some of the old men that had attended had their eyes fixed on me, wondering what was taking me long to do the obvious, give them the money for booze. In fact Munezero came and whispered to me that people were grumbling, they were going to the market. I wasn’t shaken and I insisted on finishing my address. Some had already started leaving. Afterwards I bade them farewell and went away. Munezero came running after me and pleaded with me not to go without leaving anything to these people who she had invited as they were going to tear her apart after I had left. I told her I could only facilitate the four people that had helped her mobilize the people for
me, but I wasn’t going to bribe voters. I then handed her sh20,000 which she said she
was going to share with the rest. I saw her get a jerry can of *musururu* from her own bar
which she took to the rally and those that had remained began emptying it of its
contents.

The drunkard who had embarrassed me at the beginning of the rally followed me up to
my boda, begging for sh500. I ignored him, jumped on the bike and rode off.

From here I went to Muhabura Shine College, a new A-level school whose proprietor
was once a student with my brother. The headmaster was happy to see me but
informed me that most of the students were not of voting age and that only those in
senior five and senior six could vote. I didn’t mind, I told him, since the babies also had
chance to tell their parents to vote for me. The kids were excited and I could tell that if
this was the entire constituency I was dealing with, perhaps my chances would have
been better. I was through in just 3 minutes and was on my way to Kisoro primary
school, where I was to meet the villages of Cyintare and Nyamirimima in the North Ward
zone of the town.

From Kisoro primary school, I headed to a place called *Ku sewage, kugisayu* where I was
to meet the residents of Kamonyi village. The place simply means, “At the playground,
near the sewage area”. It is interesting how the Bafumbira people name places! Later I
met Nyagashinge and Gishegera villages at Seseme church of Uganda

The most memorable however, of my campaign visits through Kisoro town council was
one in which I paid a visit to Zindiro and Gase villages, at a place called Kagina. The two
villages, I was to find, were extremely rural even when they were located in the town
council. I had put announcements on the radio and the residents told me they had
heard them clearly. One of my most passionate supporters here was Bernard (the one I
describe above on my visit to Rwaramba SS. Note the difference with the Bernard of
Mbuga!) who was from Zindiro village. At the venue where we met, there was a health
unit which had lay unfinished for many years

I reached Kagina 15 minutes late and I found there three young women. They told me
people were aware and so I should wait a bit as they would all be here in no minute.
Young boys were sent to the home of the chairman LC1 for Zindiro from where they
came carrying brand new plastic chairs, with the village name engraved at the back of
each. They arranged them well and we waited for perhaps 20 more minutes. I visited
these villages a few days after my one hour radio show, and many people were already
praising me for what a terrific speaker I was. One woman even said that when I had
introduced myself on air, she had recognized the name of my mother and she said they
were friends while she still lived. She claimed that my mum was a sister in law to her
cousin. She therefore counseled that I should feel at home as I was among “relatives”
The chairperson, a huge woman perhaps in her late fifties opened the ceremony with a prayer and handed me the floor. I repeated my themes, dwelling on the evils of voter bribery. I finished saying that I was ready to receive only one vote rather than winning the election with shameful and self-defeating methods like voter manipulation through bribery. I told them the likes of me are the future of the Uganda, while my rivals were the past, the ugly past and, with fury mounting in my voice said their time was running out. After handing the kids who brought the chairs sh5000, I headed for my vehicle.

Then hell broke loose. The old men pleaded with me that they had left work in their gardens and they couldn’t go back empty handed. One of them told me he was very thirsty and he indeed looked so. He said even sh500 would make the difference. The chairlady said I was the first candidate she had ever seen who behaved like I did. I told her I was proud of that. Then the woman who had claimed she was friends with my late mum came running after me as I headed for the car; “Lero yemuhungu niba ntacyo ubahaye; Nto bazagutora”, Rufumbira for; “Young man, if you are indeed not giving them anything, they won’t give you their vote”. I told her those who cherish the truth would, but without looking back in her direction. I got 16 votes at their polling station on polling day, a huge surprise. I didn’t expect anyone to vote for me.

From Kagina I dashed to Kisoro Vision school, a private secondary school that is nearby, whose proprietor is also a friend, who I worked closely with during my work with straight talk foundation. Students here knew me all too well because I always interviewed them for my radioshow on youth issues. All of them were mobilized and they assembled filling their large square.

Their headmaster introduced me and told the hundreds of beaming students clad in neat blue uniforms that the school had a very important visitor that day, who was potentially a member of parliament. He said my visit is a signal to bigger things, which might mean that the school would also host a presidential candidate, but in this case it would only be Yoweri Museveni as his government had brought freedom in which private institutions like his had come to exist. Here was an irony; a public figure publicly campaigning for a candidate, knowing well that some of his students might be divided. This to me was an indicator of immature politics and perhaps show the struggle the opposition faces in making in loads in the countryside where the NRM machine permeates every level of local leadership

I gave a short speech to the students, in a mixture of funny Rufumbira and English and reminded them of the good old days of Tuvuge Rwatu.

THE BITTER END GAME

That evening at 10pm, Tereraho again went to voice of Muhabura for a one hour presentation of his ideas. I listened to him and realized what an eloquent person he was. However, Tereraho’s ideas were sometimes hollow. Immediately I switched on the radio
from my hotel room in kisoro town, he was making outlandish claims. It was clear that Tereraho wanted to distinguish himself from Bucyanayandi, the incumbent. He identified many problems affecting the Bafumbira but he was vague on his planned solutions. He sounded so much like an FDC flag bearer. He claimed that there was no electricity in many parts of our constituency which was true. But he said if he is voted, this would change. He was clever to mention many villages and parishes that suffer this lack by name, a known trick by politicians to show the constituents that they personally know and identify with their areas and hence are locally aligned with their suffering which may not necessarily be true. He said “I want to make sure that electricity reaches Gitenderi, Rukongi parishes and ease those peoples transport problems especially with their Irish potato growing”.

I personally live in Gitenderi parish which is a parish bordering Rwanda and the famous Mufumbiro ranges. It is remotely located, about 30km from Kisoro town. I couldn’t believe my ears. But because few people follow politicians’ promises or pay attention to their claims, nobody ever put Mr Tereraho on the spot to explain how he was going to extend electricity to Gitenderi parish, when there are even no roads to the place.

In the same talk show, Tereraho listed his credentials, notable of which was his time as a District education officer in Kisoro for Ten years. The host of the show, Felix Nduwayo, put Tereraho on the spot; “You have identified all these problems. What is your plan to deal with them”?. I was jumping on my bed. That was a beautiful question.

Tereraho dodged the question. He instead began decrying the money that was changing hands, the bribery his opponents were executing. “Don’t vote money”, he urged his listeners. He claimed that the money his main challenger is pouring in the race was enough to bring many development projects to the area like extending power to Bunagana and Nyarusiza. “If this money was in my hands”, he said, “I would use it to pump water to Nyarusiza, Muramba, etc”. “You voted me in the primary without money, do so again”, he said.

Of course Tereraho wasn’t being sincere. He too bribed voters with the little money he had. Here therefore didn’t say this of principal, but he was outgunned in the bribery game and lost the primary, a loss he contested. It was bound to happen again. This was the hypocrisy I hated and when I went back on air two days before the polling day, I laid bare his and others’ pretentiousness.

Tereraho however mentioned other issues which were spot on. He for example informed listeners not to be duped by immediate projects the incumbent was bringing to win their vote. In fact, Bucyanayndi himself never did this, but his network of filthy rich individuals and a the local business community was

**Murenga strikes again**
I used to joke to one of my supporters that Mr Murenga would prove a complicated case even for Sigmund Freud. As mentioned before, he is a wealthy man in every measure, fortune he made by being the first person to venture into post-conflict southern Sudan where he invested in telecoms. He is catholic and devoted to catholic causes. He is also Mr Bucyanayandi’s key financier. He has patronized the entire local business community, where he conspicuously initiated formation of a trade organization known as “Yes Ducyuruze Hamwe” (Rufumbira for; “Yes, Let’s trade together”). This organization (read Murenga) gives all local traders interest-free loans to the tune of millions.

Mulenga dishes out money in a way that is unprecedented in its carefree-ness. He is such a spender that people wonder what he is up to. He is certainly not stupid. He holds a Bachelor of commerce degree and this adds to the mystery of his behavior. He can easily walk into a church in a village, give them sh70million and tell them to destroy that building and put up a new one the following day. He will then attend as ‘guest of honour’ at the commissioning of the new building, in a large ceremony, funded by him. I have come to figure out his behavior. Mulenga must have a Narcissistic personally disorder, where he never gets enough of fame and high regard for himself.

When Tereraho went on air, Yes Ducyuruze Hamwe officials had been in the same studios a few hours before him. They were inviting all local traders to come and join their group and get interest free loans. Tereraho was at pains to portray the group as a possible racketeering gang, which will in the long run fleece the unsuspecting members. He compared it to COWE, a savings organization which had fleeced poor locals of millions of money and was disbanded by government, and its officials jailed

Tereraho therefore warned the listeners that these poor traders may also be fleeced in the short or long run. He seized on the fact that new traders were being asked to pay a membership fee of sh200,000. This was true but the way Tereraho framed the picture was not completely honest. YDH may have genuine intentions, with Mulenga’s generosity at the heart of the process even if it is too early to know how this is going to end, if, say Murenga becomes insolvent. The beneficiaries are however extremely royal to their patron and it would perhaps be fair to say they would also lay their lives for him. They praise, worship him, and he enjoys every bit of it. But Yes Ducyuruze Hamwe is no ponzi scheme and Tereraho knew it. The group has lifted low income small-scale traders off their feet.

The cult that Caesar Murenga is in Kisoro’s socio-economic politics is difficult to comprehend. Mulenga didn’t start big. He was a Samosa seller in his hey days at Makerere, and then ventured into exporting products until he was the first person to venture into the post conflict southern Sudan where he made a killing in telecoms, in collusion with the SPLA generals.
Anyway, Tereraho continued his monologues on how he was a better candidate. Why is the money coming now? he kept asking listeners. The politics based on money is sad. “Abafumbira bari mugusuzugurwa”, he said meaning, *The bafumbira are being cheapened*. He alerted the listeners on the other phenomenon that was coming. That of the buses that were going to ferry People from Kampala to come and vote for Bucyanayandi. They were going to come in force and he and I knew it because we had witnessed it before.

The fear of the Kampala buses wasn’t unfounded. A bus carries an average of 70 passengers. Bucyananyandi normally hires about six of them. If all those could vote for him (and a majority would, for saving them sh50,000 to and fro Kampala, some have not had chance to come home to see their relatives in a long time), they indeed would vote for him. Besides, when they arrive in Kisoro, the passengers create such a chaos that an illusion of momentum for their candidate is created across the constituency.

I will not forget how these buses caused commotion when they came two days before voting day. They drove around the constituency and found me at Nyakabaya trading centre in Nyarusiza sub-county, where I had a scheduled rally. It was my last day of campaigning. The convoys had an advance party of pickups that carried PA systems that blazed latest local hits which easily silenced my smaller one. They stopped, harassed my aides and grabbed all the attention of all my rally attendees. I regained their attention long after the monster vehicles and their crazy occupants had continued towards Cyanika border.

“Kampala buses are coming. This guy is spending too much money on the project, which money would have done several many things”, cried Tereraho. But he also ended on a positive note, a trait of all smart politicians. He denied that he was an NRM rebel. Then he sang praises for Museveni;

“Thanks for your support for president Museveni. He is the real driver of the bus. He needs an able conductor and that’s me, who will work with him. You see the bible even says that the last will be the first and the reverse is true. Museveni is the last on the ballot, and I am also the last on the ballot. Vote for the last guys on each of the ballots. My symbol is the table which signifies togetherness.”

Tereraho kept reminding the listeners of how the entire district had no representative after all of them switched party allegiances and were thus thrown out by the landmark constitutional court ruling. He warned them that if they elect Bucyanayandi even if he wins, his win may be nullified in which case there would be reelection. I doubt anybody believed him

*Feb 15, 2011: Chahi subcounty*
I had a second swing through Chahi sub-county. The 8,000 voters could not be taken for granted. Chahi had long been known to be a stronghold for Bucyanayandi. But it would be stupid to forfeit an entire sub-county to this man. Clement, one of the firebrand members of *yes ducyuruze hanwe* and a friend of Bucyana’s is a demigod in Chahi. He had apparently sworn to go into exile if he didn’t deliver the sub-county for Bucyanaynadi. He is wealthy and commands respect from his poorer residents.

I started my journey by making a stopover in Busamba, where I addressed a rally of about 40 people. As I reached the centre however, Pascal Semafara, a Bucyana supporter and one of the most prominent members of my village was trailing me on his Honda motor cycle. He stood curiously on the sidelines of the rally and kept stroking his chin.

The chairman of Busamba village welcomed me nicely and suggested we take the rally off the road and go behind the bars so we may not attract unnecessary attention (I knew they didn’t want many people to come to share the root ‘I had brought them’)

He thanked the residents who had heard the announcement on radio and positively responded. “Our job is to make all candidates comfortable, so you can address your people now’. This day I was determined to give some money so that I gauge the response. After my address, a fellow named Kalori Nzabonimpa raised to ask a question when I invited some. “A jerry can of local brew is sh20,000”, he said. One for Bushera is 10.k he was informing me of the prices so that I could gauge how much to give. I gave them 20,000 and the chairman said that was better than nothing.

When I exited the hideout from where the rally had been held, I found Pascal still standing there, and in a minute Bucyanayandi’s pick up, driven by his own son also passed by and continued in the direction of Muganza primary school which was to be my next stop. All this looked suspicious to me.

**Muganza primary school**

I was to meet three villages here, Busamba, Busaro and Buhinga. I had put radio announcements on the air and many people had heard them. I pulled into the play ground and primary pupils swarmed my car, all singing “Abishize hamwe…” clamoring to see me. Their teachers later drove them back into their classes with whips.

At the venue, elderly men were in some sort of savings scheme meeting, with 5,10, and 20 thousand notes spread on the ground. One of the elderly men was jotting something in the book. He informed me that they were aware I was coming and that soon other people were going to join us.

As people kept coming in droves, a one legged middle aged man joined the others most of whom were sitting on grass. He was called peter and one of those who came earlier
quipped to Peter; “Nawe zirakuzanye” (You have also been forced by money to come).
He laughed. Many people kept coming. Youth on bicycles and motorcycle taxis who were hobnobbing in the nearby trading centre joined in. Some began scolding me for having announced an inconvenient venue on radio, saying the trading centre along the road to Cyanika, border would have attracted more people.

As we awaited more people to come, one bald, elderly man looked transfiguratively at me and said; “You are a very young man. Why should we vote for you”. Before I could respond, he was roundly rebuked by the others, who reasoned that age is but a number.

At Muganza I gave a spirited speech on my policy proposals, and hammered the practice of voter bribery again. “These guys think you are fools, that’s why they would think they can buy your vote at sh500”. They seemed impressed and wanted me to keep going but I had another rally nearby to attend so I left. I could hear some of them mutter as I left; “What a bright young man”, “If only he had even some little money...”

**Buhayo trading centre**

Moses, my agent here had organized the place, and mobilized the people for me. Here I was to meet the villages of Buhayo, Bugahe, and Muganza. About 60 people must have been present for this rally. My address was not different from that I was giving everywhere, with the exception of a few tweaks. When I called for questions here, a man named Ntabajana raised his hand. “How can you invite people for the rally, they leave their work and jobs in the gardens to come and hear you and then you leave them without anything? You go but know that “Ingemu watuzaniye, natwe niyo tuzaguha kumusi witora”, meaning, “what you have brought us is exactly what we will give you in the same measure on Election Day”.

Ntabajana kept cursing, saying he had wanted to go to Busanza, perhaps 50 miles away near D R Congo border to buy his merchandise which he resells here but claimed he had cancelled the trip because of my announced coming. The crowd burst out laughing, mocking his lie. I told him I was sorry for jeopardizing his business trip, but scolded him for thinking that the purpose of my visit was to deliver money or goodies for the citizens. That’s the politics I was standing against, I politely informed him.

An old man in the same audience instead offered me a spirited blessing, saying he agreed that my way was what politics was supposed to be like, but my colleagues and national rulers had messed it up. “Go in peace my son. You have spoken very well”, he said, in the most powerful blessing I had ever received on the campaign trail.
Kukabazungu

I continued with my tour of Chahi, and headed for a place named “Kukabazungu”, a spot where I was to meet the villages of Masaka, Bukingo and Kabara. The place is in Nyakabingo parish and is not far from a large trading centre named Iryaruhuri. My rally venue was atop the same hill that houses the famous Mateke family ancestral home.

I reached here at 12:05PM and found two young men in their 20s seated in front of the lone bar that is in the place. One of them told the barman who was the third man inside the bar; “Bring me some Bushera man. The honorable is here and he won’t surely leave without leaving something here so he will pay”. I almost told him to make sure he had his own money to pay not to bank on me but I quickly realized I would be arguing with futility.

I was told that they had heard the radio announcement and my agents had also informed them of my coming so they counseled that I wait as people are going to be in the area in few minutes.

The hill over looked expansive plantations of beans. People kept coming one by one and one of the men asked me if he could call the chairman of one of the villages I was to meet so he could officiate at the ceremony. I hated those officiators as they brought me trouble, by pleading with me to give their subjects some money or asking for their own. I always preferred addressing a rally in an informal setting and on many occasions had done so, by being the first and the last to speak. When the silly hierarchies came in, I always had problems.

Anyway the man rang the chairman who, it appears was far away as he took long to arrive. By now people were about 30. A young lad clad in a Kizza Besigye cap and a Museveni T-Shirt come into the venue in such a swagger, that I mistook him for a teenage Jesse James. This reminded me of the politics of campaign memorabilia of the ruling NRM and other parties. It’s possible that the ruling party printed a T-Shirt for every Ugandan which it gave to each one for free. Not all of those wearing these branded campaign clothing were necessarily supporting the parties. But people here are poor and any piece of clothing is a welcome gesture to the recipient from the donor and may in some cases be a basis for support. That’s how cheap African politics has become. For this young man, the campaign clothes didn’t mean anything politically. For him, they were just clothes but I think he would be grateful to the one who gave them to him, at polling day. The question would perhaps be; who, between a T-Shirt and a cap gave more and therefore was more likely to be rewarded back in the booth?

People kept coming to the rally. One woman came pacing downhill and abruptly stopped where we were gathered, with two young children in tow. “We even left the food we were eating”, she said between gasps. Meanwhile the people became impatient and one of them, who looked to command respect when he spoke and I was
to later hear that he used to be a teacher asked aloud why we wouldn’t begin without the chairman’s presence. She spotted a Manchester United hood on her head.

40 people were already here. As we waited for the chairman, people kept talking to one another. “The old should go so that the young can take over”, they murmured among themselves of course referring to Bucyanayandi. “We don’t want old people. They should rest”. These folks also remembered well my radio-show and kept marveling at how ‘younger’ I looked as opposed to how I sound on the radio.

I saw a familiar face among the people and I scratched my head to remember where I had seen him. I had found Master Hategeka, a teacher at Kisoro high school as I was stumping for votes at the school and I had gotten involved with him in a heated discussion involving the role of money in politics. Hategeka’s views were absurd. He seemed constantly out of his sober self and he was busy telling the people here at kukabazungu that “That guy is all talk. He won’t give you money”. They could believe it when I vindicated his prediction after the rally.

When the chairman, Mr. William Habyara came, the teacher had done some damage. The ceremony then began. There was conflict on who to lead the opening prayer. One guy named Elia offered to do so but he was shouted down. Then a lady in her middle years was allowed to do the job.

I addressed the people and after that called for questions. Unfortunately I had been obsessed with bashing the evil of voter bribery that here, I forgot to mention anything else in my manifesto. That’s is when the woman in the Man United hood asked me; “By the way, what is in your manifesto?”. I was embarrassed but quickly outlined the main points in the manifesto and offered to leave the villages a copy which they can photocopy, if they needed one.

I told them I wasn’t going to bribe them to vote for me as that would be unethical and un constitutional, and illegal. The woman who asked me a question remarked; “I wish everyone does campaign like this. No money, only debate. After all, how much is it that these big shots always give to us?” I was humbled by her observation.

My last act of the day was appearing on Voice of Muhabura for a one hour show, and I was exhausted, which must have shown through in my voice. The show was however lively and many people called afterwards patting me on the back. I made a closing argument, asking people to make history by rejecting to vote money. They didn’t.
MY JOURNEY on the campaign trail continued and ended on 16th February, 2011 when I visited the sub-county of birth, Nyarusiza. In Nyarusiza, I visited Gasovu parish where I addressed residents of Gasovu and Gishita at Gasovu primary school, Ndago Karambi, Bunama and Kaziba villages at Mubiko trading centre.

I then visited Kabaya, Nyagisenyi and Bushoka villages which I addressed at Nyakabaya trading centre. From here, I visited Gitenderi parish where I addressed residents of Butaha, Mubuga, Mataba and Ndego villages at Mubuga trading centre, Kabaya, Mubande and Rukeri at Rugina store, Nzogera at Nkurungiro trading centre, then Kabande, Rucyantege, Mwanjari and Bitongo at Rurembwe primary school.

My last parish to visit was Rukongi, still in Nyarusiza, where I visited the villages of Musasa and Kabonero, meeting them at Kanyakwezi. I ended my rallies at Gasiza trading centre, where perhaps 200 enthusiastic residents had waited for me. I reached there at past six and I told them I couldn’t hold a rally past the legal time limit. They could however have none of that, and insisted they wanted to hear my good words live, even if they hear most of them on radio. I relented and addressed them for ten minutes.

On February 17, I mainly rested and told my agents to cool down, assuring them that we had done out best. On voting day, it was Henry and my other sub county coordinators who were driving around, taking allowances to agents and monitoring how the voting was unfolding. I spent the entire day at my girlfriend’s place, after being warned that if I moved out, people heading to the polling stations would accost me for money. This was indeed the case for a brief moment that I went to a nearby shop. A man confronted me saying; “hey candidate. Now do something very quickly because I am late for voting. I am heading there now”. When he saw me staring at his indelibly marked index figure, he was embarrassed and moved on!

The results were officially declared in the district council hall on Feb 19 by the returning officer. The entire district brass attended the ceremony, with the RDC, DISO, LCV and other officials present. I dressed in casual wear and sat between Hon Bucyanayandi and Dr Mateke. Tereraho was seated next to Mateke.

At about midday, the returning officer declared Bucyanayandi the winner, after which his supporters jubilated. I shook his hand and congratulated him, while Tereraho rose and gave him a bear hug whose half-heartedness was notoriously evident. The RDC in his speech thanked Tereraho for his grace and recounted how he himself had lost to Kiddu Makubuya (then attorney general and justice minister) by 40 votes and had conceded. Tereraho hugged me and told me of what a run it had been. It was some self consolation. Radio journalists later interviewed each one of us, and each was graceful including the winner, a soft spoken man who normally has few words.
Many of my enthusiastic supporters were sad that I had lost but I wasn’t, and I told them that our effort was victory for democracy and good governance.

It was a journey I enjoyed immensely however stressful. I witnessed the absurdity that is voter bribery, the sheer ignorance of policies and democratic rights by their supposed beholders, the people, and how ignorance and manipulation affects the electoral process. I am grateful for the support of the voters who cast their votes for me and countless others who offered goodwill.

END

Cover Picture: Bernard Sabiti (holding a microphone), Independent Parliamentary candidate for Bufumbira South, Kisoro district awaits to address residents of Gishita and Gasovu villages at Koranya Trading centre, Nyarusiza sub-county, Kisoro District, February 16, 2011