

Take *Forbes'* ranking with pinch of salt

It's heartening for *Forbes* business magazine to list Uganda's Sudhir Ruparelia as the wealthiest East African. Though it is remarkable for Ruparelia to graduate, in a mere 27 years, from being London cab driver into a respectable dollar billionaire, we need to take *Forbes'* claim with a 'pinch of salt'.

By [Kintu Nyago](#) 6 Dec 2012

Certainly, quite a few East Africans are much wealthier than Ruparelia. For instance, the inheritors of Lord Delamare's vast estate in Kenya, who have owned and been productively engaging, up to 100,000 hectares of prime Kenyan land since the early last century, being a case in point.

While the Delamares' forming the Kenya Cooperative Creameries (KCC), in 1925, and the Nakuru-based Kenya Farmers Association in 1930, cemented their racist monopolisation of economic accumulation, from animal husbandry and agricultural sectors respectively, Africans remained a captive market and source of cheap labour, enabling Delamare's uninterrupted 'primitive' accumulation for 30 years, long before Ruparelia was born.

Independence never diminished the will and capacity to accumulate by the Delamare and Mackenzie, etc, settler families. This is old, entrenched white settler money, that can't easily be surpassed by the nouveau riche.

Kenya's independence offered opportunity for those with, or close to power, to also primitively accumulate wealth on a grand scale. Fortunately, many had capitalist instincts, and wisely invested their 'loot' into the production and service sectors.

It is estimated that Mzee Jomo Kenyatta accumulated up to 200 000 hectares of productive land while in power! Land that was bigger than Kenya's Nyanza province, or a collection of Ugandan districts.

And this has been productively used since the 1960s, and indeed also took over Delamare's KCC. However, the Kenyatta portfolio is diverse, covering the industry, media, tourism, insurance, etc, sectors.

Additionally, individuals such as former president Daniel arap Moi or Nicholas Biwott were dollar millionaire when Ruparelia was still a child in Katwe-Kabatooro, while neither time nor age has diminished their appetite and ability to vastly accumulate.

In Uganda, sustainable wealth creation has only been possible under the leadership of president Museveni and the NRM since 1986. The Amin regime murdered people for being successful in business, notably through the murderous struggles over Mafuta Mingi properties.

Consequently, conspicuous consumption became the norm. Also, stifling macroeconomic instability and political uncertainty were commonplace, right through Obote II.

However, even then, a few Ugandans successfully ventured into serious business, contributing to nation-building. Most prominent of these was Michael Kabali Kaggwa, grandson of Sir Apollo Kaggwa, and the son of Capt Ernest Kawalya Kaggwa, Katikkiro of Buganda after World War II.

"Ebirwa byerabirwa..." so the Baganda say; simply put: "Today's events will long be forgotten tomorrow." F Kabali Kaggwa, the pioneer doyen of African enterprise, is now long forgotten, even in an era that champions private investment and market-led growth. Moreover, even after his pioneering successes led Amin murdering him in September, 1971.

Kaggwa's genius was the more remarkable because he was a part-time entrepreneur. For as one of the pioneer Ugandan lawyers and the exemplary public service background of his family, he opted to work for government throughout, as a magistrate, judge and first African President of our Industrial court.

Kaggwa's achievements are the more inspiring because racist colonial laws had denied Black Africans the opportunity to engage in meaningful business. Additionally, he did not wield direct political power.

However, in that decade he involved himself in business, his company, KK Investments, competed favourably with Indian and white capital and graduated into a leading government 'tenderer.'

Furthermore, Kaggwa in 1964, bought today's 10 square mile Kaweeri coffee estate, Mubende, and established a commercial farm. Also, unlike most rent-seeking mailo landlords, he transformed his vast estate in Mukono into an ultra modern commercial farm, and as an accomplished pilot, inspected it daily, early every morning, in his private plane, before attending to the affairs of the Bench.

Before Amin murdered him, Kaggwa routinely exported horticultural produce to Kenya and Europe! Had Uganda had a stable government and rational political and economic policies, he and others, would have transformed into our industrialists, etc, with Uganda being a much different place. May the soul of this visionary pioneer entrepreneur rest in eternal peace!

Source: [allAfrica](#)

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