

The “Garbage Lady” Cleans Up Kampala

Turning Quick Wins into Lasting Change

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Judith Tukahirwa Tumusiime, PhD, a self-described technocrat, had run out of moves. In more than four years of heading solid waste management (SWM), among other responsibilities in the city of Kampala, Uganda, she had built a reputation as someone who could inspire her team to “do more with less” and “do something with nothing.” But by late 2015, her ability to squeeze more efficiencies out of her staff and equipment had reached its limits. In Tumusiime’s mind, there was no denying it: the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA)’s SWM system was not only stalled, it was not sustainable.

Tumusiime had proved her effectiveness early on. In 2011, she began working as an unpaid consultant for the newly forming KCCA, and by March of 2012, many had already noticed a difference: one newspaper reported that the KCCA had made “tremendous achievements in garbage collection and fighting littering in the city that has for some time been ranked the dirtiest capital in East and Central Africa.”¹

Before Tumusiime’s tenure, residents saw the garbage heaps piled around the city as permanent fixtures. Mounds of uncollected waste mixed with sewage during rainy season floods and caused public health crises. With an urbanization rate in Uganda of over 5 percent, trash generation would only grow.² The backlog of uncollected trash was especially pronounced in the city’s poorest neighborhoods, where nearly three-quarters of Kampala’s residents lived in informal settlements.³ These areas were prone to flooding and lacked roads, making access for trash removal difficult and expensive. The KCCA took responsibility for these settlements, as well as public spaces, while the affluent population paid private trash collectors to retrieve their garbage.

But the KCCA’s capacity was no match for its responsibilities. For starters, the KCCA had only about a quarter of the garbage trucks it needed, so gaining ground in cleaning up the city’s backlog of trash had been a herculean effort. This was on top of general maintenance of Kampala.

To Tumusiime, there was only one answer to a more robust and sustainable SWM system, and it was simple. She wanted to charge fees to all Kampala residents—including the poor—for trash collection. “Trash collection is generally seen as a public service, but even in developed countries, they charge for it,” she said. “I’ve never seen it covered by tax revenues alone. It’s just not sustainable. Paying fees for trash collection is normal and necessary.”

However, 2016 was an election year for President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who had appointed Tumusiime back in 2012 after he created the KCCA. He was squarely against levying a fee on the urban



poor, an important voting bloc. Similarly, Lord Mayor Erias Lukwago—who harbored a fierce rivalry with both the KCCA’s executive director, Jennifer Musisi, as well as President Museveni—opposed charging the poor for garbage collection and was also up for reelection in 2016. Lukwago, called by one columnist, “an acerbic-tongued opposition politician”⁴ came to power the same year Musisi was appointed; he led the KCCA’s “political wing” (as opposed to the KCCA’s “technical wing” led by Musisi).⁵ Regarding garbage collection fees, Lukwago said, “. . . we have people who cannot afford to pay and we have to cater [to] them.”⁶

Tumusiime reasoned that a fee adjusted for a person’s income would provide residents with the necessary buy-in to keep the city clean. “We appreciate that people are poor, but having a fee that fits a person’s status is something that I think is very important. It holds people accountable and also makes them more responsible,” she said. However, she did not have the authority to instate this fee system for all residents.

Tumusiime had come up against dire resource deficits, legal battles, corruption, and fierce opposition, but as the February 2016 elections approached, she and her team were caught in the crosshairs of something else: politics. She had tried to stay out of city politics, an environment that she saw as corrupt, greedy, and fickle. But without being able to do what she thought was right—establishing garbage collection fees in support of a cleaner, healthier city for the long term—much of her gains in SWM would quickly unravel. And this was not just a case of a tidy city; it was ultimately a matter of public health and economic vitality. She reflected, “While everybody wants the city to be clean, no one wants to pay for it.”⁷

Tumusiime’s experience told her that without everyone paying for trash collection, there would be no clean city for anyone.

Judith Tumusiime and Her Home of Kampala

As an undergraduate in Uganda, Tumusiime studied biology and chemistry and earned her master’s degree in environmental and natural resources. She also earned a doctorate in urban sanitation and SWM from Wageningen University in the Netherlands. In her studies and work abroad, she had seen innovative SWM systems that treated solid waste as an opportunity. She often dreamed of seeing such programs in her home city of Kampala, like generating electricity from waste and transforming waste into fertilizer and fuel.

In 2010, Tumusiime could ignore it no longer; it was time “to follow my passion to improve my City and make a contribution,” she said. “Diseases like cholera were spreading. People were losing lives, hospitals were overwhelmed.” She continued, “At the time, Kampala was seen as a garbage city. The mindset was to throw garbage anywhere.”

Meanwhile, in April 2011, President Museveni appointed Jennifer Musisi, who had served thirteen years at the Uganda Revenue Authority, as the executive director of the KCCA with a mandate to transform city services, which had been ravaged by gross mismanagement and corruption. A breath of fresh air to many, Musisi often said that she was not a politician and objected to political interference.

Tumusiime was an acquaintance of Musisi, and because of Tumusiime’s rare expertise in SWM, Musisi planned to reach out to her when the KCCA had a budget in place. Musisi recalled, “Soon after I had arrived at my new office—which had no running water, no furniture, no equipment—Judith showed up. She pulled out her laptop and said, ‘I’ve come to work. We need to clean up the city.’”⁸ Musisi told Tumusiime that she still had no budget and didn’t know when she would. Explaining her willingness to begin months of work without pay, Tumusiime said, “It was my passion and love for my country . . . and Jennifer needed me to help start cleaning up the city.”

A Change Agent Enters a Broken System

In 2010, before the KCCA had formed, the city collected an estimated 16,000 tons of waste per month, though city residents were generating roughly triple that amount.⁹ The uncollected garbage blocked drainage, caused flooding, and spread disease. It also fed the rodent population and attracted marabou storks, a scavenger bird that one conservationist called “an indicator of the state of hygiene.”¹⁰ Many residents also burned their trash, contributing to the city’s dismal air quality.¹¹

There were two types of trash collectors: those that worked for the city and those operating as private collectors. Roughly one-third of city residents paid private collectors for the service, while two-thirds depended on the KCCA, who collected garbage mostly from informal settlements—an expensive process and a tall order for a drastically underfunded SWM department. The KCCA also collected garbage from public spaces, such as squares and markets.

From the outside, and then as a volunteer consultant, Tumusiime saw not only an under-resourced SWM system, but a corrupt, inefficient one in dire need of transformation. But her biggest challenge was the existing team’s lack of expertise. “SWM was being handled by civil engineers without a lot of interest or supervision,” she said. This team that Tumusiime would soon inherit ultimately reported to the director of health services, a medical doctor. Without oversight, opportunities for corruption presented themselves. For example, city truck drivers collected garbage only from those willing to pay bribes, and waste in public areas was mostly neglected.

The other obvious deficiency was a lack of resources. Even with more streamlined collection and transport, the city would need at least fifty additional garbage trucks to collect and transport the trash for which they were responsible. The expanded fleet would cost UGX 40 billion (\$11.7 million)—not including the additional drivers and laborers needed—an astronomical sum compared to the SWM operating budget.¹² Aside from trucks, public bins where residents deposited their garbage were inadequate. In fact, one publication reported that “truck-size green rubbish bins overflowing with garbage were city landmarks.”¹³

Illegal dumping was another challenge. One newspaper reported that to avoid paying private collectors, “. . . in the dead of the night, some of those smartly dressed people you see in Kampala drive out of their posh homes in their posh cars and dispose of their household garbage by some roadside or in deserted areas.”¹⁴ And it was not just residents who were illegally dumping: sometimes private trash collectors avoided the landfill to save fuel and time and unloaded their haul elsewhere.

Hazardous waste handling was another alarming issue. Tumusiime recalled, “I’ll never forget it. I was approaching one of our public hospitals, and I saw some stray dogs fighting over something. As I got closer, I realized it was a placenta. The hospital had just thrown it into an uncovered pit. When I questioned the staff, I found out that sometimes the hospital even mixed hazardous waste with their normal trash to dispose of it. It was so dangerous!”

Waste collection was broken, but the other end of the waste management chain also posed challenges. The Kiteezi Landfill, built in 1996, was over capacity, overdue to be closed, and leaching into the surrounding community. Muisi said, “Because of weak oversight, people had been allowed to build too close to the landfill,” which led to public health issues. Also at risk were roughly 500 trash pickers (sometimes called scavengers) who informally worked the landfill to find recyclables and scraps to re-use. Most of them were women and children.¹⁵

Tumusiime also felt that recycling was under-appreciated, although it was happening at a small scale. “A Chinese gentleman had put a shack near the landfill and was shredding plastics and sending them to China,” she said. And because more than three-quarters of the city’s waste was organic,¹⁶ Tumusiime thought there was significant opportunity to capture it and turn it into fertilizer for greening the city, urban agriculture, and other uses.

A Vision for Transformation and Initial Steps toward Change

When Tumusiime began her consulting role, she wanted to develop a formal Integrated Solid Waste Management Strategy (ISWMS) to rethink the entire chain from disposal to treatment. That would have to wait, however, since she had no formal authority yet.

Though Tumusiime knew Muisi would be cleaning house and replacing the old guard staff, she was eager to make progress with the current SWM leadership team, a group of thirty. “Jennifer cautioned me not to work with them before we had authority, but I took the risk,” she said. Tumusiime met with the then-head of SWM and requested to meet with his staff. He obliged.

It was clear to Tumusiime that she faced an entrenched team at an unstable time. She was also younger than virtually everyone on the leadership team and likened her situation to working with a group of people who were close to retirement. “You have to change their mindsets,” she said. “They were de-motivated.” She knew she had to create trust, build buy-in, and sell her vision of a clean Kampala. She told her team, “It’s a basic need and human right to have a clean environment. With a filthy environment, there’s nothing you can do—it affects economic development, tourism, it increases disease, it even affects education. How can your children learn if the school is in such a filthy environment?”

To engage the team, Tumusiime began meetings by hearing their ideas and barriers, encouraging them not to fear open dialogue. “My strategy needed to be shared and also discussed. I needed more input from others,” she said. “They were used to just doing what they were told. I wanted more independent thinking.” Tumusiime set norms for meetings, encouraged rotational chairing, and emphasized that people needed to be heard, even if they held divergent views. Slowly, the team began functioning more in line with her expectations, and they began producing results.

Early Wins

Although Tumusiime’s authority was far from established, she was able to make substantial progress early on.

Tackling the Backlog

To help tackle the backlog of garbage that clogged city streets and neighborhoods, one early solution the team came up with was changing one of the three daily garbage collection trips to nighttime. It proved to be more efficient, as the trucks could avoid the crippling daytime traffic and save on time and fuel consumption.

To further address the trash piled in the informal settlements that lacked access to roads, the team introduced a new system of residents self-loading the garbage trucks instead of trucks collecting garbage from dumpsters that were constantly overflowing. “At first there were no routes, no scheduling, no targets,” said Najib Lukooya Bateganya, part of Tumusiime’s team. “A truck would come at 10 am, and already by 1 pm, people would be illegally dumping their garbage, because they didn’t know a truck had come. We engaged local leadership so that our schedules were known,” he said.¹⁷ They also painted the trucks in bright colors “to make sure everyone knew *We are here*,” said Musisi.

SWM Contracts

As part of her review of all service contracts, Tumusiime canceled several expensive mechanized street sweeping contracts that were underperforming. To replace them, she boosted the number of manual sweeping jobs to roughly 4,000, which mostly went to women and vulnerable individuals. The new teams of sweepers on foot could also help with some trash collection, unlike the mechanized sweepers.

Tumusiime also improved the working conditions of the sweepers, who previously touched “all kinds of dirt, including human waste from street kids, condoms, urine and many other things,” said one supervisor.¹⁸ Tumusiime worked with local business sponsors to provide sweepers with boots, gloves, headgear, raincoats, and road cones. The sweepers received a raise and were paid on time, a contrast to reports of eight-month stretches without pay before the KCCA took over.¹⁹ One supervisor shared in 2012, “We now earn Shs250,000 (approximately \$100) and we get it promptly every first day of the month. I save Shs50,000 and with the rest, pay my children’s school fees, and can afford to have two meals a day which we wouldn’t afford before.”²⁰

To eliminate the dangerous hazardous waste disposal practices at hospitals and clinics that Tumusiime had witnessed, she contracted with a private vendor to collect and properly dispose of it. “They did a good job,” she said of the contractors, and she emphasized it was something worth paying for.

Tumusiime also evaluated landfill operations managed by a contractor, who she felt was overcharging. She realized that operating it in-house would be much cheaper and took action. She sent a team member to oversee landfill activities along with specialists, rented equipment, and purchased supplies such as sand to cover the landfill as necessary. She also sent an administrator to the landfill to head up community engagement and work with both trash pickers and the neighboring residents who were

affected by the landfill’s operations. The administrator impressed her. “I found him typing and inputting data and recruiting more people. My passion rubbed off on him,” she said.

Supervision and Cracking Down on Corruption

Tumusiime began supervising the trash collectors more closely—even the nighttime collections. “I remember once at 1:30 am, the president paid a visit,” said Musisi. “Judith was out supervising trash collections, and I was out supervising road repair work. It was crazy. We worked eighteen hours a day, weekends, holidays, Christmas Eve, everything. Judith is very firm on deliverables and extremely hardworking. So, the team had no option but to work beside her.”

Tumusiime recalled, “After church on Sunday, I would drive around the city to check up on people’s work.” If she saw neglected areas, she called the collectors to have them rectify it. She remembered one man who said, “I told my wife that they brought a lady who has a PhD in solid waste, and she is really putting us in order and making me work on a Sunday!”

Before understanding Tumusiime’s and the KCCA’s zero tolerance for corruption, some trash collectors approached her family members to give them money saying, “This is what we’ve been doing.” Tumusiime explained, “A monthly allowance, they called it. I remember confronting them and telling them that I am not in need of any allowance.” She further instructed that the money they wanted to give her should be put back into their businesses to increase efficiency and staffing so that they could deliver better services to city residents. “They were shocked; they had never heard that before,” she said.

Tumusiime would regularly convene the trash collectors to engage them in the SWM strategy. “They started opening up and sharing,” said Tumusiime. People started calling her the “Garbage Lady.” She reflected: “I was very proud. I loved it. In many countries, a career in SWM is looked at as something for someone without an education, for the lowest class of individuals. I wanted everyone who worked to clean this City to be proud of their jobs.”

From Early Wins to Strategic Decisions

While initial momentum was strong, certain strategic challenges were more difficult to address.

Hiring a New Team

By the end of 2011, the longstanding SWM team that had helped Tumusiime make so much short-term progress was purged. “I really felt bad, because I felt the old team had really transformed despite their weaknesses,” she said. “I was very proud of us.” Of the thousands of SWM employees, the sole group retained were the truck drivers. “Frankly, if I was head of the institution, I’d have retained more of the team. They had been operating under bad leadership. But there was already the mindset that they were corrupt, non-performers . . . and some of them really did have criminal records.”

Tumusiime handpicked a new, leaner SWM leadership team of seven that reported directly to her. The new hires all had graduate degrees in environmental science or SWM. “Judith is a very good team builder,” said Musisi. “She can mobilize and envision and empower teams to do their best. She’s very supportive. But she’s also very firm.”

“We wanted people to be able to step in and improve the city—we wanted to develop systems that were non-existent. Now we really, really worked so hard,” said Tumusiime. She was motivated by “saving lives, making an economic contribution, helping the young generation.” She added, “For me, it was really fulfilling.”

Lukooya, who was part of Tumusiime’s transition team said, “Many of us brought on the team caught the enthusiasm. I don’t know how to explain it.” He continued, “This city, it was becoming more vibrant, things were happening, and everyone wanted to be as involved as possible. We were young, well-educated, identified to be part of this change; we were motivated to deliver impact in our own competencies and areas of expertise.”

Changing Mindsets and Behaviors

Because of the SWM system’s lack of capacity, Tumusiime could not solely blame residents and their garbage disposal habits for the uncollected trash in the city. Yet, she felt that residents could do much better and that they urgently needed a wake-up call to cut down on improper trash disposal.

“When we cleaned up an area, sometimes the next week it would be full of garbage again,” due to illegal dumping, said Tumusiime. She was literally kept up at night: she thought about how she could change residents’ behavior so that they did not dump garbage in the wetlands and waterways, or so that they did not throw weeks’ worth of trash out their car windows onto streets and lands that her crew had just spent their hard-won resources cleaning up.

To raise awareness, the team revitalized a campaign called “Keep Kampala Clean” to engage schoolchildren, business owners, and others in community cleanups. They also educated the public around proper waste disposal, recycling, and even tree planting.

Tumusiime felt her team had made some progress in changing the behavior of one resident group: those living in informal settlements. “Some had set up community policing, where they were looking out for each other and making sure that garbage was actually disposed of in the right places,” she said. But trash disposal of those living in affluent areas did not seem to be improving.

To help change mindsets of the more affluent residents, Tumusiime tried several different initiatives. “We even tried ‘name and shame’ where community members could post pictures of people littering,” she said. But she was not pleased with the progress. “And that’s why at some point I said, ‘You know what? We need to be more radical.’” In late 2011, she began researching the municipal laws to determine whether she could press charges against those disposing of waste illegally. She found legal support existed, and Musisi as well as Museveni supported the idea. “I decided to start with the big fish to send a message,” said Tumusiime.

By the first week of 2012, more than three dozen people had been arrested, including a bank manager, a hotel manager, and the CEO of a casino.²¹ That week, one reporter noted “roads usually littered or heaped with rubbish are impressively clean this week.”²² While some applauded the enforcement, others thought they should have had more warning. “The idea of having a clean city is good but I think the approach is not proper—there are too many laws people don’t know about—at least you need to

tell them that this is going to be imposed,” said one resident.²³ By the middle of 2012, authorities had made more than 1,000 arrests.²⁴

Lord Mayor Lukwago was unhappy with the KCCA’s actions. *The Observer* reported that Lukwago believed “the law requires KCCA to provide dustbins and garbage [dumpsters] all over the city, which they haven’t done. . . . ‘They needed to first work out a public awareness drive and provide the basics like litterbins on the streets,’ Lukwago said.”²⁵

Advocating for a Bigger Budget

Though early initiatives had included placing more than 700 litterbins in areas such as the central business district, schools, and hospitals, Tumusiime admitted it was not enough. They had only managed to add five garbage trucks to their fleet—some through relationship building and corporate support—and they needed dozens more. And though the KCCA had doubled collection, an estimated 10,000 tons of garbage were still going uncollected each month.²⁶

Because of Tumusiime’s “pushing and really advocating for my budget any chance I got,” she was able to double her new team’s first fiscal year budget to UGX 17.33 billion (\$5.0 million).²⁷ “It still wasn’t nearly enough, but it was much better than the budget we had,” she said.

Residents and politicians were noticing the city becoming cleaner, giving the SWM team’s work high visibility and helping Tumusiime convince others of her need for a larger budget. “Everyone was talking about how clean the city was becoming,” said Tumusiime. In fact, the World Bank reported that public satisfaction in solid waste service delivery had increased to 60 percent from 44 percent.²⁸ Because of the results she had achieved in SWM and other areas, in December 2012, Tumusiime was appointed to deputy executive director of the KCCA.

From 2010 to June of 2014, the monthly garbage collection had more than doubled from 16,000 tons to nearly 34,000.²⁹ Because the KCCA was collecting more waste, trucks were making more trips to the landfill, which meant an increase in fuel and other expenses, necessitating more resources. Tumusiime also wanted to increase truck driver pay and hire part-time drivers to help relieve overtime. Furthermore, she was maxing out the capacity of her team and equipment. Simply put, she said, “We needed more money.”

Public-Private Partnerships and a Chance at Sustainability

With her new team in place and a larger, but nowhere near sufficient budget, Tumusiime finally saw the opportunity to develop an ISWMS. She felt an overarching strategy would help “make a leap” in modernizing the city’s SWM systems. Partnering with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, for technical assistance, she laid out a formal plan. The KCCA’s plan aimed to do the following: increase solid waste collection to over 90 percent by 2017; increase the number of garbage trucks, dumpsters, and waste bins across the city; roll out a comprehensive waste handling/disposal system with the private sector; minimize collection and transport costs by sorting at the source; undertake initiatives to convert waste to energy and other uses; improve landfill management; and acquire land for a second landfill.³⁰ The KCCA would also continue its work to increase awareness with campaigns on waste management.³¹

The IFC was also engaged to study a waste collection public-private partnership (PPP) to relieve pressure on the KCCA. The PPP would be the first of its kind in the country and a cornerstone of the ISWMS. After studying the city’s waste stream and collection landscape, the IFC proposed a PPP to greatly increase the private collectors’ role from serving only affluent customers (which represented about a third of the city’s residents) to collecting all domestic and commercial trash. The IFC expected that private collectors could take over collection at informal settlements from the KCCA, while the KCCA would continue to be responsible for collecting waste from public places, such as markets, schools, taxi parks and health centers.³² The city would be divided into seven zones, each of which would be designed to have a balance of businesses and higher- and lower-income areas. With the new plan, private garbage collectors would bid for a zone and the KCCA would grant exclusivity for a certain period.

Whether or not to charge the urban poor for trash collection was a hot button issue. With the 2016 elections approaching, the president, the Lord Mayor, and other politicians had made it known that they would come out against it.

Chris Olobo, who led the study at the IFC, said, “Our financial models said revenues collected from one-third of the people was enough to fund collection from the entire city.”³³ Tumusiime disagreed. “In my experience, the World Bank is very careful with situations that involve politics,” she said. She saw no reason why the private sector would do a sufficient job collecting garbage from non-paying customers in informal settlements.

She also knew the KCCA could not continue providing domestic garbage collection as a free service. “It wasn’t sustainable or realistic. It was getting more expensive, competing with other services, and we didn’t have the money to do it.”

From the IFC’s recommendations, the KCCA proposed a range of charges based on service type and garbage generated (known as “pay-as-you-throw”). For example, residents would be charged UGX 3,000 (roughly 80 cents) per month for bring-to-truck services (allowing three bags per week), while premium services would be capped at UGX 30,000 (roughly \$8).³⁴

Before implementing the strategy, several hurdles had to be cleared, including government legislation around PPPs and fee approval by the city council, among others. In 2014, without knowing whether the KCCA had support for the collection fees and with PPP legislation underworks but not passed, the KCCA opened bidding for collection zones. But the private trash collectors were agitated. Lukooya said, “We were disrupting the status quo. We had to manage expectations and egos, the community, and political figures.” At the end of 2014, Tumusiime reached out to Olobo. “Judith called me while I was on holiday in London and told me that the garbage collectors were going on strike and that we had to do something,” said Olobo.

The collectors—many from small businesses—lacked the resources necessary to bid for a zone and feared the new plan would put them out of business. They were also wary of giving up their longtime clients who may not be in a new, assigned zone. Furthermore, they had long been operating without much oversight, and they felt the KCCA was overstepping. Olobo flew to Kampala and convened the collectors. He explained to them how they could form partnerships and work together to qualify to bid

on the zones and how each zone had been designed to be profitable. “It calmed them down,” said Olobo.

While some collectors got to work forming consortiums, Musisi recalled that other collectors were loath to partner and threatened lawsuits. Still, Tumusiime saw the consortium building as an innovation in service delivery, and she was proud that the new strategy would continue to provide local companies with business opportunities.

Soon, more pieces of the puzzle fell into place—the PPP Act of 2015 passed, clearing the way for upcoming PPPs (although this did not ensure fees could be charged to all residents), and the KCCA signed agreements with the contractors in June 2015. To build support for the rollout, Tumusiime approached community leaders and politicians to discuss her ISWMS, including collection fees. But the environment was only getting more difficult with the approaching February 2016 elections. “At that time, there was a lot of political hostility and disagreements between the Lord Mayor and Jennifer. It was not very easy to convene a meeting,” said Tumusiime. She met with only a handful of leaders “interested in improving the situation.” She said, “Some political opponents saw how the proposal was good for everyone. But they wanted to use a free service as a carrot for their constituents.”

The Politics of a Sustainable Future

At the end of 2015, Tumusiime sat in her car, enveloped in traffic, on her way to discuss support for garbage collection fees—what she knew was the linchpin of the PPP—with a member of city council. With upcoming national and local elections and such little traction on collection fees, she was beginning to lose hope in not only further improvements in SWM, but also in maintaining the gains she had achieved. “I had thought initially, let everyone see the good job we can do. Our results would help us convince everyone that SWM was a necessary investment. We had to show them, and then they would know that we need to sustain this and not go back to where we started,” she said.

However, the politics of the situation were not so simple. Tumusiime felt several politicians were essentially saying, “Just pause on your work and keep getting paid. Then you can pick back up in six months when I’ve won the election.” But since the beginning, she had not tried to transform Kampala’s SWM system simply to collect a paycheck. With her passion for a clean city, she couldn’t “just look on as the city got worse,” she said. And how was she to know that six months would not become twelve months or even longer? Or that even less cooperative politicians would not be elected to office? Her vision had always been to make a difference, a contribution. What if she could not do that anymore?

Tumusiime was beginning to see that she could either accept the fate of making small tweaks that might achieve short-term improvements at a slow—and even halting—pace, or she could put herself on the line and push for a more radical, sustainable solution that might keep Kampala clean for years to come. But getting a radical solution pushed through would take diving into the world of Kampala politics, a world that she and Musisi had prided themselves on steering clear of.

As her car pulled up to her meeting, she realized she had a decision to make: could she stomach playing a political game with what she felt was her life’s work? Getting involved in politics could definitely ruin her hard-earned reputation and would distract her from her technical work without any promise of success. Was it worth it? She was not so sure.

Endnotes

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