

Uganda Overview

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Environment

A gateway from Central Africa to the Horn of Africa, Uganda lies on the equator and borders the Democratic Republic of Congo in the west, Rwanda and Tanzania in the south, Kenya in the east, and Sudan in the north. Most of Uganda consists of fertile, wooded highland plateau, and has a tropical climate, but there are also swampy lowlands and a desert region. The country encompasses much of Lake Victoria in the south-east, as well as several other sizeable lakes.

Peoples

Main languages: English (official); numerous local languages; Swahili is used among some communities, especially those bordering Kenya and Sudan.

Main religions: Roman Catholics 10.2 million (41.9%), Anglicans 8.8 million (35.9%), Islam 3 million (12.1%), Pentecostals 1.1 million (4.6%), Seventh Day Adventists 368,000 (1.5%), Indigenous beliefs 242,000 (1%).

Peoples: Baganda 4.1 million (17.3%), Banyankore (Bahima and Bairu) 2.3 million (9.8%), Basoga 2.1 million (8.6%), Ankole 1.9 million 8%, Bakiga 1.7 million (7%), Iteso 1.6 million (6.6%), Langi 1.5 million (6.2%), Banyarwanda (Bahutu, Batutsi, and Batwa-the latter also listed here separately) 1.4 million (6%), Acholi 1.1 million (4.8%), Bagisu 1.1 million (4.7%) and Lugbara 1 million (4.3%), Batoro 700,000 (3%), Bunyoro 700,000 (3%), Alur 475,000 (2%), Bagwere 475,000 (2%), Bakonjo 475,000 (2%), Jopodhola 475,000 (2%), Karamojong 475,000 (2%), Rundi 475,000 (2%), non-African (European, Asian, Arab) 240,000 (1%), Batwa 4,000 (.02%).

[Source for all statistics above: 2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census, except for the figure for Batwa cited in the MRG report 'The Batwa Pygmies of the Great Lakes Region', taken from Kabananyuke, K. and Wily, L., 'Report on a study of the Abayanda Pygmies of south-western Uganda for Mgahinga and Bwindi Impenetrable Forest Conservation Trust', unpublished report, 1996]

Uganda is a country of very great ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity, whose roots lie in a complex early history of overlapping migrations and interactions. Gross abuses of human rights, with a considerable ethnic dimension, took place under the Amin, Obote and Okello regimes of the 1970s and 1980s. Although more recent years have seen a degree of comparative stability, the legacy of these conflicts remains a powerful mobilizing factor in Ugandan politics. Factors behind the conflicts have

been complex and multi-faceted; economic, religious, ideological and regional aspects have all been significant. In addition to the unstable and overlapping nature of ethnic categories, conflicts have themselves featured a variety of complex alliances.

For the sake of simplicity, Uganda's major linguistic groupings may be summarized as follows.

(1) Speakers of Bantu languages, who are largely agriculturalists, living principally in the south and west of the country, comprise about two-thirds of the population. Historically they include centralized societies governed by royal families (Baganda, Banyankole, Banyoro, Batoro), as well as many others with less elaborate hierarchies, including the Bakiga, Bafumbira, Bakonjo, Basongora, Batuku, Banyabindi, Banyaruguru and Batwa. In parts of western Uganda two pastoralist groups (Bahima and Batutsi) established ascendancy over the agriculturalist communities (Bairu and Bahutu) among whom they settled and whose languages they share. The Batutsi population in Uganda surged during the genocide in Rwanda, but many Batutsi have subsequently returned. Other Bantu pastoralist groups include the Basangola and Batuku.

(2) Speakers of Western Nilotic languages in northern Uganda, traditionally agriculturalists organized in chiefdoms, include the Acholi, Langi, Alur and Jonam tribal groups.

(3) Speakers of Eastern Nilotic languages, primarily in eastern Uganda, include Karamojong and Iteso (as well as Kakwa in the north-west). Traditionally pastoralists, they have a social organization that is based on clans and age sets. Karamojong are generally nomadic pastoralist, but a few ethnic clans (sub-groups) are agriculturalists.

(4) Central Sudanic-speakers such as the Lugbara and Madi inhabit the far north-west of Uganda (as well as neighbouring regions of Sudan and the DRC); traditionally they are agricultural peoples with a non-hierarchic social organization.

Baganda and other Bantu-speakers

Collectively Ugandan Bantu-speakers comprise the majority of the population. Under the northerner-dominated governments of 1962-86 they suffered varying hardships which during the second Obote regime culminated in the Luweru triangle massacres. Such circumstances could return only if Uganda were once again seriously destabilized and the current regime replaced.

Despite its ideological opposition to ethnically based institutions, the government has permitted the re-establishment of the Baganda (1992), Batoro (1993) and Banyoro (1994) monarchies with largely symbolic status--a guarded attempt to accommodate ethnic sentiment. President Museveni has often been able to count on political support from Baganda and other Bantu speakers, which may explain his cautious concessions on symbolic ethnic issues. Yet as these groups began advocating in the mid-1990s for a federalization of Uganda that would give them greater autonomy, that political relationship came under strain. Meanwhile, some small chiefdoms that were part of the bigger monarchies, such as the Bakokio, Baluri, Lo, Japhdola, Alur, and Ateso, have since re-asserted their individual identities.

North-westerners

Tensions between the NRA and many predominantly Muslim inhabitants of the north-west of the country have eased since the end of 2002, although discrimination and mistrust remain. Much of the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF), a militia derived from the Amin-era army and largely consisting of Lugbara and Nubian members, demobilized when Yoweri Museveni came to power in

1986. UNRF leader Moses Ali has filled several senior government positions in Museveni's governments since 1986, with a two-year gap from 1990-2 when he was detained on treason charges. While 1,000 members of the small UNRF had laid down their arms in 1986, another faction, UNRF II, remained active (often in Sudan rather than Uganda), causing friction between those of Lugbara and Nubian ethnicity and the authorities, persisting human rights abuses by the army, and a spirit of alienation similar to elsewhere in northern Uganda. UNRF II enjoyed Sudanese government support in retaliation for Museveni's support of the Sudan People's Liberation Army. In December 2002, following five years of negotiations, the 2,000 UNRF II rebels agreed to end the conflict in exchange for 700 of them being taken into the Ugandan army and the rest receiving demobilization and resettlement benefits. Because of their past affiliation with Amin, Lugbara and Nubian groups still face implicit discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds in employment, and sometimes hide their identities to find work. Meanwhile, Lugbara and Nubian civilians have faced attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army, another rebel movement backed by Khartoum.

Bairu, Bahutu, Bakiga, Bahima and Batutsi

Although Bantu-speakers, Bairu and Bahutu have traditionally been in a position subordinate to the pastoralist groups who inhabit the same areas, the Bahima and Batutsi. Bakiga are in a similar situation to Bahutu, to whom they are closely related. Many Bairu were sympathetic to Obote and opposed to Museveni, a Muhima. Bahutu - those who did not leave for Rwanda in the early 1980s - were mistrusted by Batutsi following the Rwandan genocide and wary of the alliance between Uganda and the post-genocide Rwandan government. However, despite the earlier involvement of many Batutsi with the NRA, their position in Uganda remains somewhat precarious, the defection of Batutsi from the NRA to the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) from 1990 greatly increasing this insecurity. Though an estimated 700,000 Batutsi moved to Rwanda following the RPA victory, others remained in Uganda. In view of the unresolved regional conflicts the position of all these groups must be considered vulnerable.

Ugandan Asians

Ugandan Asians expelled by Amin in 1972 have been able in recent years to submit claims for the repossession of their confiscated property, a major incentive for their return, though only some are interested in doing so. Asians have benefited from the comparative stability, improved human rights, and official disavowal of ethnically based politics. But the unpopularity generated by their privileged economic position could easily make them vulnerable once again if instability returns.

For Acholi, Basongora, Batwa and Karamajong see individual minority profiles.

History

Bantu peoples migrated to the area of today's Uganda in around 500 BCE, and over the next thousand years developed three major kingdoms: Buganda, Bunyoro and Ankole. In the late nineteenth century Uganda was a powerful magnet for missionaries, traders and later colonial authorities, lured by the fertility of the country and stimulated by Anglo-French and Arab-European rivalry. From 1894, the territory was a British protectorate, and a significant Indian population settled in Uganda. Missionary competition, initially focused on the most powerful Ugandan institution, the Baganda court, left a legacy of division between Roman Catholics and Protestants. In the south and west of Uganda the fertility of the land and the absence of wholesale expropriation for European settlement meant that the introduction of cash crops such as coffee and cotton, along with accompanying taxation and control, was less oppressive than in many parts of the continent. Economic development was heavily weighted towards the south, where missionary activity and educational opportunities were greater. The Baganda

monarchy, despite its earlier resistance (followed by capitulation), was granted recognition and a degree of autonomy. The Baganda came to be widely seen as favoured by the British colonial authorities.

Northern and eastern regions remained comparatively isolated and disadvantaged throughout the colonial period. Southerners comprised the majority of the civil service and of the educated and commercial elite. Later, however, northerners came to be recruited to colonial military and police forces, to which they were drawn by economic necessity and for which imperial ideology deemed them suitable for being taller as well as more 'warlike'. This division into 'warrior' and 'educated' groups, reinforced by the policies of the later colonial period, increasingly became part of Ugandans' own perceptions.

Politics in the run-up to independence in 1962 were contested by three main parties. Within the Buganda heartland Protestants loyal to the monarchy were generally in opposition to the largely Catholic Democratic Party (DP). Elsewhere Milton Obote's United People's Congress (UPC) was generally dominant. Although initially combining against the DP, the monarchists and the UPC soon fell out violently over the status of Buganda and the other southern kingdoms. In 1966 government troops bombed and shelled the king's palace; hundreds were killed and the Kabaka fled into exile. Obote abolished the monarchy and later declared a one-party state, strongly repressing Bagandan monarchist and nationalist sentiment. Increasingly government came to be dominated by Obote's fellow Luo-speakers (Acholi and Langi) as well as Teso, whilst the army commander Idi Amin (a Kakwa-speaking Nubi Muslim) recruited soldiers from his home region in the north-west, and increasingly from across the Sudanese border. In 1971 Amin mounted a successful coup, supported initially by most southerners as well as by the British and Americans opposed to Obote's socialist policies.

In 1972 Amin's wholesale expulsion of Ugandan Asians, a community of around 75,000, was only a foretaste of his growing ruthlessness. Extensive purges of both government and army, especially of those suspected of loyalty to the exiled Obote, continued. During Amin's eight-year dictatorship between 100,000 and 500,000 Ugandans were killed. Economic collapse heaped further burdens on the country. The Tanzanian army, acting in support of the Ugandan National Liberation Front, deposed Amin in 1979. Obote's UPC and the DP were once again the major parties in the 1980 elections, retaining their traditional ethnic and religious support bases. The UPC victory was widely regarded a fraudulent. Several guerrilla armies began to operate against the government - notably the National Resistance Army (NRA) of Yoweri Museveni in the west and south, as well as north-westerners loyal to Amin. Obote's UPC government was dependent on the army, itself dominated by Acholi and Langi. Extension of army control to the far north-west was accompanied by widespread abuses as revenge was exacted on people considered sympathetic to Amin. Estimates of those killed range from 5,000 to 30,000, with over 200,000 refugees fleeing to Sudan and Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 1982 another wave of ethnic persecution began in the south-west, with around 100,000 Banyarwanda (Bahutu and Batutsi) as well as Bahima being forced out of their homes and fleeing to Rwanda or to refugee camps on the border. The operation was orchestrated by UPC activists and officials in co-ordination with the police. The causes are complex and relate not only to Banyarwanda support for the (essentially Catholic) Democratic Party but to competition for land and resentment against the traditionally dominant position of Batutsi and Bahima. Worse was to develop in the 'Luwero triangle', the rural heartland of central Uganda where anti-Obote feeling was widespread and where Museveni's NRA guerrillas initially operated. The army implemented a policy of starving out the guerrillas and punishing those held to sympathize with them with massive reprisals against the civilian population. Estimates of those killed range from 100,000 to 500,000.

Though belated international pressure and the growing success of Museveni's NRA played their part, Obote's regime eventually collapsed from feuding between Langi and Acholi factions in the military. Acholi troops overran Kampala in July 1985, looting the city and forcing Obote into exile. Tito Okello became head of state. Six months later the NRA took over the city, installing Museveni as president.

NRA discipline, generally much better than its rivals, deteriorated as attempts were made to pacify the north of the country where remnants of the Amin and Obote armies continued to operate.

In 1986 Alice Lakwena's charismatic Holy Spirit Movement mounted an insurgency in the Acholi region which has continued in various guises ever since. Attempts were made, with limited success, to pacify the traditionally rebellious and, since 1979, heavily armed Karamojong. Other rebellions took place among the Teso in the north-east (following which thousands of Bakenyi were expelled from the region by the NRA) and the Bakonjo in the west.

Governance

Nevertheless, under Museveni security and human rights improved by comparison with the preceding fifteen years. The 'resistance committee system', a 'non-party' regime controlled by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) but with an element of local democracy based on village councils, provided a degree of stability, if with considerable regional variation. Large numbers of refugees returned to the West Nile region from Sudan, joined later by others fleeing the Sudanese war.

By the 1990s, the economy, badly hit by the collapse of coffee prices, was showing signs of recovery. However by then the AIDS pandemic was ravaging the country and burdening economic recovery. Uganda reacted late to the spread of AIDS, but President Museveni has since won broad international praise for aggressively tackling the disease through blunt public information campaigns, condom distribution, and improved health services. Although by 2006 some 500,000 Ugandans were HIV positive, the infection prevalence had been cut by more than half since 1992.

In 1995, a new constitution allowed political parties to come into existence, but not to pursue political activities. Uganda's 'no-party' system increasingly became a one-party system, prolonged by referendum in 2000. The opposition boycotted the poll and turnout was low, but 90 per cent of those who voted favoured a continuation of the NRM system. Museveni was re-elected in 2001. But with opposition parties banned and Museveni's campaign receiving the backing of state resources, including fawning state media coverage, observers questioned the election's legitimacy. Most observers did conclude that Museveni likely would have won a fair election in any case.

In 2005, the NRM-dominated parliament amended the constitution to allow Museveni a third term in office. Following a 2004 ruling by Uganda's Constitutional Court that faulted the ban on political party activity as inconsistent with the 1995 legalization of their existence, Museveni supported a 2005 referendum that returned the country to multi-party politics. But when opposition leader Kizza Besigye returned from exile in November 2005 to challenge Museveni in February 2006, he was promptly arrested on treason, rape, terrorism, and illegal possession of firearms. Museveni won 59 per cent of the February vote, but his image as a reformer and democrat was further tarnished.

Despite the comparative success that the Museveni government has achieved in stabilizing the country and improving human rights, the outrages of the Amin and Obote years in particular left a legacy of mistrust among many sections of Uganda's population, notably between many northerners and the NRA. As discussed above, fighting continued until 2002 between the NRA and the remnant of the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) in the north-west, and clashes continue with the Karamojong warriors, and most persistently with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

Uganda's northern wars have been complicated by its involvement in neighbouring conflicts. Until the January 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the north-south conflict in Sudan, Museveni provided support and a haven to fighters from the Sudan People's Liberation Army. In return, the

Sudanese regime provided support and havens to both the LRA and UNRF. In 1997, Uganda joined with ally Rwanda in sponsoring a rebellion in Zaire and installing Laurent Kabila to lead the movement. Ugandan and Rwandan forces marched with Zairian rebels across the country to oust Mobutu Sese Seko, whom they accused of harbouring Rwandan genocidaires and Ugandan rebels. But once Kabila took power in the renamed Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), he quickly turned on his unpopular sponsors; in July 1998 he ordered all foreign forces to leave the country. Uganda and Rwanda invaded anew from the east with a mix of their own forces and sponsored local rebels. Museveni and his Rwandan counterpart Kagame argued that the invasion was necessary to secure their countries' security. But their exploitation of DRC's rich mineral resources gave ammunition to critics who accused them of harbouring ulterior motives. Indeed, fierce fighting erupted between the Ugandan and Rwandan armies in the diamond-rich DRC town of Kisangani in 2000. In March 2001, Uganda classified its erstwhile ally as a hostile nation. Museveni announced a Ugandan troop withdrawal from DRC in May 2003, but sponsorship of rebels continued. In December 2005, the International Court of Justice ordered Uganda to pay restitution to the DRC for the looting of resources and commission of human rights violations.

Current state of minorities and indigenous peoples

Peace negotiations to end the long-running rebellion by the Lord's Resistance Army continued, while security in the north improved through 2007. The 20-year civil war has devastated the lives - and livelihoods - of the Acholi people of the north. But by September 2007, in a tangible sign of progress, the first refugee camps began to close, as families finally began to return home. In October 2007, for the first time in 20 years, two commanders of the LRA flew into Entebbe to consult on the ongoing peace talks.

At the height of the insurgency, some 1.8 million people were living in camps in the north. While the peace process holds out the prospect of ending the marginalization of the Acholi, Oxfam reported in September 2007 that many Acholi communities were concerned that the peace was fragile and would quickly unravel in the absence of a signed peace deal.

The plight of the country's pastoralist peoples was highlighted by the public row over the invasion of Uganda's flagship nature reserve, the Queen Elizabeth National Park, by the Basongora cattle-herders. There were reportedly several thousand Basongora with large herds of cattle in the park. They had crossed over the border from the Democratic Republic of Congo, after being driven out of the Virunga mountain range.

However, Uganda's wildlife authorities were anxious about damage done to the park environment - especially in light of an upcoming visit to the park by the UK's Queen Elizabeth, coinciding with the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit in November 2007. The Basongora pointed out that their traditional pastures had been in the territory now protected as the Queen Elizabeth National Park, but they had been evicted upon its creation in 1954.

In September, wildlife officials once again tried to evict them. But after claims that excessive force was being used, the government eventually offered the Basongora alternative land outside the park. However this settlement has also proved problematic: there were reports of the forcible removal of small-scale farmers to make way for the Basongora.

The biggest crisis to hit Uganda in 2007 was flooding. Heavy rainfall - the worst in three decades - left large parts of the country inundated. The Karamoja region in north-eastern Uganda - home of the Karamajong pastoralists - was one of the worst-affected places. In September it was reported that the area had been totally cut off from food supplies. Michael Kuskus of the Karamoja Agro-Pastoral

Development Programme complained of sharp rises in food prices and hoarding by unscrupulous traders. This region is already the poorest and most underdeveloped in the country, and, following the floods, there were fears of widespread hunger and the outbreak of epidemics.

The hardship endured by the Karamajong has intensified in recent years. Like other cattle-herders in the East African region, they have been at the sharp end of climate change. More frequent cycles of drought have led to greater competition for scarce resources; cattle-raiding has accelerated and this has been accompanied by an upsurge of violence. The ready availability of small arms in the region has led to deadly conflict, which has caused hundreds of deaths over the past few years.

In an attempt to curb the violence, the Ugandan government embarked upon a forced disarmament programme in Karamoja. But the way in which the policy has been carried out has attracted fierce criticism. In a stinging report issued in 2006, and followed up in April 2007, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented grave human rights violations carried out by the national army, the Ugandan People's Defence Forces. These included extra-judicial killings of civilians, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, the rape of a woman, and the widespread destruction of homesteads.

By November 2007, OHCHR noted that there had been a marked improvement in the security and human rights situation - following increased efforts to seek the cooperation of Karamajong communities, and better training of the military in human rights standards. But OHCHR continued to call for those who had been responsible for the abuses to be brought to account, and condemned the culture of impunity in the armed forces when extra-judicial killings and torture occur.

In July 2006, the Uganda Land Alliance for Coalition of Pastoral Civil Society Organizations (COPACSO) warned that the few thousand Batwa (Twa) of Uganda are in danger of extinction. The organization's report warned of starvation and loss of social cohesion among desperate Batwa who lost their homes in the Bwindi Impenetrable Game Park when this became a World Heritage Site for preservation of endangered mountain gorillas in 1992.