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Government Improvement in Uganda is a Necessity

Uganda was once rich in human and natural resources and on the verge of moving into a period of favorable climate for economic development. The climate is conducive for planning and cultivating many different crops, a great many of them very suitable for exports. The country is greatly reliant on agriculture; most of the jobs are involved in that sector. However today it has not improved much since the 1960s in regard to income and stability. A siege of political and economic chaos has prevented this “pearl” of Africa from really shining. This lack of economic development has the country under a blanket of poverty, failed infrastructure, and lack of education, higher imports than exports, and a life expectancy of 52. After its independence Uganda has seen a parade of brutal leaders that devastated the economy and created turmoil within the country like Idi Amin and his regime in 1971, which continues today with the current president. The key to improving life in Uganda and all over the world is installing a government that is based on democracy, accountability, and transparency in public relations, and the rule of law that is basic to reducing the number of vulnerable members of society. Educating the female population is the start of changing and improving the government in a country. Education is important for every citizen; however women in Uganda have, for many years, been left in the dark while men have controlled the government. Helping women understand the government and the world is the first step in helping create a government that is stable and not corrupt. AIDS has also hurt Uganda’s efforts to improve itself. Recent efforts have helped in AIDS prevention but the disease continues to have a strong hold on the country. AIDS created Uganda into a country of children. With the average age only 15, it is ever more important to have education in the country. Again, by educating and informing the women, the number of AIDS illness and those infected will decrease.

The country is agricultural based with 90 percent of the population living in rural areas. Farming employs over 80 percent of the workforce. Roughly 20 percent of regular wage earners work in commercial agricultural enterprises, with an additional 60 percent of the work force earning some income from agriculture.

The chief food crops are cassava, sweet potatoes, corn, millet, and pulses. Cassava, which is also called Yucca, provides an edible starchy tuberous root. Millet is a small-seeded cereal crop. Pulses are a legume that contains 20 – 25 percent protein. The principal cash crops are coffee, tea, cotton, tobacco, cut flowers, and sugarcane. Large numbers of poultry, cattle, goats, and sheep are raised. The fishing industry plays a major agricultural role. A great deal of hardwood is cut, which some sources are trying to stop due to deforestation of the country side.

Also the former leading mineral resource, copper ore, has been practically mined out. Other minerals extracted on a small scale include cobalt, tin and iron ores, beryl, tungsten, and gold. Uganda's few manufactures are limited mainly to processed agricultural goods, but they also include textiles, chemical fertilizer, and steel. There is a large hydroelectric plant called the Nalubaale Power Station at Owen Falls, which is located on the Victoria Nile where it leaves Lake Victoria.

Although population growth has created the need for more land in a few areas, land shortages are rare. About one-third of the estimated area of arable land was under cultivation in 1989 and there still remains room for expansion. Similar to most of the poor African countries, farms are small in size in Uganda. Agricultural output was generated by about 2.2 million small-scale producers on farms with an average of 2.5 hectares or 5 acres of land. Farms of five acres are not large enough to support cattle, so goats are raised. The breeds the Uganda farmers use tend to have only short periods for producing milk and do not yield high amounts of milk during the short time they produce. The goats do not provide much sustenance for households and nothing extra for the farmer to sell.

Generally crop yields were lower in the 1980's than they were in the 1960's. The political insecurity that was experienced in the 1970's, the mismanagement of farm land, and the lack of adequate resources to farm the land has seriously eroded the incomes from agriculture. Due to continued political insecurity technological improvements had been delayed by the lack of government support. Agricultural practices still use unimproved methods of production on small widely scattered farms, with low levels of cash available to most farmers. Mismanagement or lack of funds has contributed to other issues facing farmers including the failure to maintain the nation's roads, nearly destroyed marketing system, increasing inflation, and lowering producer prices.

In the past Uganda's rich soil and climate have contributed to the country's agricultural success. Most areas of Uganda have usually received adequate rain. In the north, a short dry season in December and January is expected. Temperatures vary only a few degrees above or below 68 degrees Fahrenheit and are affected by differences in altitude. Continuous cultivation is practiced in the south with just annual cropping in the north, and the driest northeastern corner of the country is used mostly for pasture forage. Only 2 percent of farmers practice irrigation.

All of these factors also contribute to low volumes of export commodity and a decline in per capita food production and consumption which began in the late 1980's and continues to plague Uganda today. In the late 1980's, agriculture contributed about two-thirds of GDP, 95 percent of export revenues, and 40 percent of government revenues. The annual value of Uganda's imports is usually considerably higher than the value of its exports. The principal exports are coffee from which most of the export revenues are generated. Also included are fish and fish products, tea, cotton, horticultural products, and gold. The leading imports are capital equipment, vehicles, petroleum, medical supplies, and cereals. The main trade partners are Kenya, European Union countries, the United Arab Emirates, and South Africa.

By the year 2020, the country's population will have grown by about 20 percent from the current figure. Yet last year, Uganda's agriculture production dropped to 0.4 percent. If this trend continues, just feeding the country will become a serious issue. In a country where agriculture generates two-thirds of the GDP, there can not be economic growth without producing enough products to export. The farming sector must have government backing to expand.

Without major changes in the government policies the agriculture sector will continue to weaken. The decline in agriculture production, if sustained, poses major problems in terms of simply maintaining present production without a possibility of expanding exports let alone feed Uganda's expanding population. Despite these serious problems, agriculture continues to dominate the economy, which makes the strength of the agricultural economy so important.

The 1987 Recreation for Development and Peace called for efforts both to increase production of traditional cash crops, including coffee, cotton, tea, and tobacco, and to promote the production of nontraditional agricultural exports, such as corn, beans, peanuts, soybeans, sesame seeds, and a variety of fruit and fruit products. Yet nothing has changed in the production of these traditional cash crops.

Uganda gained its independence on October 9, 1962 from the United Kingdom and the country has improved little sense then. Major General Idi Amin gained control the country by the end of 1971. Under Amin's rule good relations with the United States and Israel diminished. The United States and Israel had both helped Uganda with military and economic aid but were accused of trying to undermine the government in Uganda. In the month of August of 1972, Idi Amin ordered all Asians who were not citizens of the country to leave and in three months most of them did. There was an estimated 60,000 Asians who left, mostly to Great Britain. These people played a great role in the business and finance sectors and their loss hurt Uganda's economy. Amin's rule became increasingly brutal. It is estimated that 300,000 Ugandan's were killed in the 1970s. In 1976, Idi Amin declared himself ruler of Uganda for life and also claimed parts of West Kenya. Later, in 1978, he invaded Tanzania. The next year Tanzania launched a counter invasion which drove Amin out of Uganda. This anti-Amin group was unified by the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF). Amin fled the country.

Tanzania left an occupation force in Uganda. Yusufu Lule was installed as president. Soon after, he became president, Yusufu Lule, was replaced by Godfrey Binaisa. Internal conflict in the UNLF made it easy for Milton Obote and the Uganda People's Congress to gain power later. The National Resistance Army (NRA) conducted guerrilla campaigns throughout the country and continued to spread fear and violence for many years. After the withdrawal of Tanzanian troops in 1981 they attacked former Amin supporters. Many Ugandans sought refuge in the neighboring nations of Rwanda, Congo and Sudan. There has been little stability and peace in Uganda.

Yoweri Museveni has been president since the late 1980's. In the presidential election in March 2001, Museveni was reelected, but his margin of victory was inflated by apparent vote fraud. Apollo Nsubambi has been Prime Minister since 5 April 1999. He acts as an advisor to the president. The Legislative branch contains the unicameral National Assembly with 303 members - 214 directly elected by popular vote, 81 nominated by legally established special interest groups. The judicial branch consists of the Court of Appeal; judges are appointed by the president and approved by the legislature. In the High Court, judges are appointed by the president. In July, 2005, voters approved a return to a multiparty system, this time Museveni supported the abandonment of Uganda's "no-party" politics, in part because of international and internal pressure for the change. He also subsequently signed into law a constitutional amendment that eliminated the presidential term limit.

Life expectancy in Uganda is only 52 years. This number remains low because of the constant violence and the threat of AIDS. In the 1980's, AIDS became a serious health threat as it continues to be today; Uganda ranks 9th in the world for the number of deaths from AIDS. In the 1990's the number of people with AIDS decreased and there are two primary reasons behind this. The first is that there were a greater number of AIDS deaths during that time. Many of those affected in the 1980's were reaching the end of their survival period and there was no treatment to delay the onset of this disease. Since the first diagnosed case of AIDS recorded in 1982 through the year 2000 the Ugandan health ministry estimated that 800,000 people died from an AIDS related illness. That number has risen to almost a million to date.

Behavioral changes may have also decreased the prevalence of the diseases. Uganda was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to open a voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) clinic for those with the disease.

AIDS has left behind a large number of young people in Uganda. The population equals about 27,269,000; population growing at 2.69 per year. HIV and AIDS have left many children without parents and homes. The average age of the population is 15 making Uganda one of the youngest countries in the world. Infant mortality has decreased slightly.

Another problem in Uganda is that women's roles were clearly subordinate to those of men. Women were taught to accede to the wishes of their fathers, brothers, husbands and sometimes other men as well. Women have been trained to be subordinate to any man they may meet in public. Ugandan women have worked hard to achieve some recognition as religious leaders in their country. As religious leaders, they were instrumental in religious revolts to overthrow political order that had been dominated by men. This demonstrates that involving women in government offices can make a difference in how the country is run. The Ugandan women have proven themselves in the past.

Polygamous marriages have reinforced the concept of male-dominance. In recent years laws have been changed so the subsequent wives are not legally recognized as married and therefore leave women without legal rights to inheritance or financial support in the cases of divorce or death of the male. Women have been working toward rewriting the laws concerning marriage, divorce and inheritance. Two special areas are women being the custodial parent in the event of a divorce and the right to own land. The Uganda Association of Women Lawyers established legal-aid to support women facing the loss of property or children due to divorce and establish equal legal grounds in divorce. The average Ugandan woman gives birth to six children. This is second highest in the world for number of births per woman. The number of dependents being born to Uganda women makes changes to custody laws more urgent.

The 1970s and 1980s brought violence that inflicted a heavy burden upon the Ugandan women. The women were relied on more to pick up the extra work the men had done. It brought collapse of public services and infrastructure causing the women poor access to schools, hospitals, markets and their personal support network. Traveling to nearby towns was at times impossible. The good news from this was that due to the lack of males, there was an increase in women employed in commerce. Women were able to insert themselves into roles formerly only held by males.

There has been an effort by women to be included in the government. Women are leading the movement to require documentation of abuses by the military. With the present leadership, these efforts are moving extremely slow. Another effort to improve the rights of women is the government-operated Uganda Commercial Bank. It launched a rural credit plan to make farm loans more accessible to women. In areas where the land has little value, women have been allowed to own land and influence political decisions traditionally made by men. But in areas where the cash-crop becomes profitable men often claim the land formerly owned by women. With farm loans available and changes in the land ownership laws more women would be able to secure land for themselves.

Mission schools were established in Uganda in the 1890's, and in 1924 the government established the first secondary school. Education has been a highly valued by the entire population of Uganda since the 1950s. Most subjects were taught according to the British syllabus until the mid-1970's. After independence was achieved, many villages established children in the southern part of the country and

received government assistance to operate village schools. School enrollments continued to climb and during the attempted government reform in the mid-1980's, the educational sector was the largest public-sector employer. The Ministry of Education received about 18 percent of the government's current budget, most of which was used to pay teacher salaries in government schools. The primary and secondary pupils were required to pay school fees ranging from US\$5 to US\$10 each year, and most schools asked pupils and their parents to contribute labor, food, or materials to the school. With the average income at US\$200, it is apparent this would be a burden to many families. "A-level" secondary schools, teacher training institutions, and other postsecondary institutions did not charge fees during the 1980's, but their students were required to bring materials, such as food and bedding, for their own use.

After 1986, it is estimated that the defense segment surpassed education in money spent due to continued unrest and violence schools were damaged by warfare and vandalism. In 1990, adult literacy was estimated at only 50 percent. Again there was an attempt to improve this ratio. The government started a program in 1997 to provide free preschool for four children per family. This increased the numbers from 2 million pupils in 1986 to over 6 millions pupils by 1999. Education consists of seven years of primary education followed by the lower secondary cycle of four years and the upper secondary cycle of two years, after which there are three to five years of university studies. This sector has witnessed a growth of over 20 percent in the number of government-aided secondary schools over the last 10 years. Approximately 10,000 qualify to join post-secondary education each year. However, only about 25 percent are present in post-secondary institutions. Today only about 68 percent of the population is literate. School life expectancy is only about ten years. 5.2% is spent on education of the GNP.

There are overwhelming issues facing Uganda. Life expectancy in Uganda is only 52 years; the average age is 15 which indicate that living conditions must improve. Sixty-eight percent of the population is literate and the average years spent in school is only ten years. 5.2 percent is spent on education of the GNP in Uganda, 12 percent of the GNP is spent on education in the USA. The government must bring an end to the violence and unrest that has led to the disruption of education. There has been a loss of population due to refugees escaping the violence to other countries and AIDS. The political unrest has devastated the economy and kept Uganda from moving toward the country rich in human and natural resources it once was. With 90 percent of the population living in rural areas and 80 percent of the workforce employed in the agricultural sector, the continued decline of agriculture will cause critical issues in a country where agriculture dominates the economy. If Uganda is going to move into a period of favorable climate for economic development, there must first be a government based on democracy, accountability, and transparency in public relations. The laws that are basic to reducing the number of vulnerable members of society must be passed. It is also very important that the women are educated so that they can achieve equal rights and play the same role as men in the government. The women have the potential to lift the country out of the economic situation it is in. Women can control the rapid population growth and AIDS. The support coming from places like Heifer International, the World Bank and other international aid organizations must reach the people and not be sidelined by corrupt government officials.

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