

UGANDA 2062

Dangers Looming in the Horizon

Where we would rather not be

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JUNE 2012

While being optimistic about the next 50 years of Uganda, it is prudent to explore what could happen if we do not wake up to the realities that we are faced with today. What are the current trends which if not addressed could lead us to landmines in the journey to 2062? The worst-case scenario we can face in the journey ahead is failure of the state.

This synopsis looks at events that could lead to Uganda's catastrophic failure in the next five decades. This is not a specific prediction of the future or a depiction of a state of affairs that will and must occur. It is a discussion of how current national trends could, under certain conditions lead to state failure in the next 50 years. The details underlying some of the trends can be used to develop strategies to avoid or test potential responses to the very calamity being painted.

A nation can fail for myriad reasons: a catastrophic natural disaster, cultural or ethnic conflicts, a broken social contract between the government and the people, financial collapse, and war. In the absence of a pandemic or natural disaster, national collapse and state failure are often the result of a culmination of failures in critical areas required to build and maintain a healthy nation. Endemic corruption, unharnessed population explosion, parochial interests, poor investment in infrastructure, poor national planning

and uneven development provide the kinds of environments that foster collapse and failure.

Endemic Corruption

Pervasive corruption frustrates all the reform efforts of any leader. Bribes, kickbacks, favoritism, nepotism, and other similar influences and practices continue to permeate personal, business, and government transactions as evidenced by the media on an almost daily basis. These act as a hidden tax that robs the Ugandan people of resources to improve their health, education, and quality of life. Lack of patriotism, poor pay, lack of education, and lack of an enabling environment for employees to accomplish their jobs cause and exacerbate corruption.

Continued moral failure on the part of both the political and bureaucratic leaders will have dire consequences on the Ugandan society. If the current levels of institutional corruption are not tamed, by 2062 Uganda's endemic corruption and the predatory economic practices of government officials and their associated business enterprises may well deplete the financial resources for economic diversification and critical human and industrial infrastructure projects. In the event that this corruption is not noticeably reversed, the government eventually loses legitimacy with its people and can no longer function at both the district and national levels. The loss of faith in government would lead to ethnic nationalism across the country as we are already beginning to witness. With discontent among the ethnic majorities reaching a fever pitch, the stage could be set for wholesale political change.

Undesirable Possible Future Case Scenario

Uganda remains a Least Developed Country. The government lacks any ability to provide services such as education and health care resulting in massive rampant illiteracy and high rates of infant mortality. The tiny elites in the country have profited enormously from resource wealth. Overwhelming majorities in both rural & urban communities, meanwhile, remain desperately poor.

Population Explosion

At current growth rates, by 2062 Uganda would have a population of about 132.4 million people¹ and possibly be the most populous country in the East African Federation. By 2062 the population of the entire African continent is projected to have grown to approximately 2.95 billion people.² These will mainly be youth particularly in urban areas of many countries in Africa.³ Certainly half of Uganda's population will comprise youths. The voting-age population is expected to comprise more than 50 percent of the national electorate.⁴ Uganda's population will be increasingly urban with roughly two-thirds of the population living in urban centers.⁵ Unless aggressively addressed, uncontrolled growth in urban areas will likely outpace the government's ability to provide basic social services. This would worsen development problems as well as health issues.

If current improvements in the average life expectancy continue, by 2062 the average age in Uganda will be between 30-35 years. These two factors would increase the working age population, stressing Uganda's ability to provide basic human services, health care, and employment for large segments of its youth. As a result, this large, young, mostly urbanized, and unemployed population would create a pool of disgruntled youth with a propensity for criminality and violence, available for recruitment by antisocial groups. Heinous crime and violence would increase.

Culture and Ethnicity

Tribal culture and ethnicity are strong forces in Ugandan social life. The disparities and traditions of Uganda's tribal and colonial past have created significant social tensions that have made establishing an integrated, coherent, and legitimate government difficult under

¹ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division

² UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Globalis.gvu.unu.edu

the best of circumstances. Strong tribal allegiances combined with exploitable ignorance and perceived wrongs have the potential to spawn violence between ethnic groups.

Lack of a strong unifying national vision and identity, and shortage of enlightened visionary leaders free from parochial interests are dangerous ingredients leading to increasing allegiance to sectarian interests at the expense of the unity of the nation.

Undesirable Possible Future Case Scenario

Several parts of Uganda are in some stage of seeking autonomy from the capital in “Kampala”, citing grievances that range from government neglect to active discrimination and persecution. Religious and tribal organizations vying for control throughout the country and internal shake-ups have made the government unstable.

Poor investment in infrastructure

Poor investment in our critical infrastructure and underinvestment in health care, education, science, and technology provide the environment leading to “brain drain” in which Uganda’s most talented and educated citizens continuously leave the country, impoverishing our future. Diversion of funds through client patronage from national programs or other means results in decline in central government spending on health care and education. The poor and the large youth population, especially in urban and peri-urban areas, most directly feel the impact of loss of funds in social programs. Poor health-care funding with a breakdown in basic health infrastructure services leads to increased disease incidence, particularly in the cities. Squalor in high-density population areas will increase, as will social disorder.

Waning agriculture and food security

The African Development Bank predicts that African agriculture is likely to decline in importance in the next 50 years⁶. Global warming will tend to benefit agriculture in the temperate regions while seriously damaging African agriculture. Rain-fed African agriculture is considerably more climate-sensitive than agriculture elsewhere, and soil

⁶ Africa in Fifty Years’ Time

degradation will have substantially increased due to population pressure. These will lead to a significant decrease in suitable rain-fed land and in the production potential for cereals.

Although a largely agrarian nation, Ugandan farming contributes little to the GDP. The share of agriculture in total GDP has dropped to 23.9% (2009/2010) but it remains an important sector in the life of Ugandans. The sector employs the majority of the labour force. Thus far, the macroeconomic impacts of environmental deterioration and associated losses have been estimated to be 4-12% of GDP.⁷ A temperature rise of 2°C could wipe out most of Uganda's coffee production and jeopardize 40% of export revenue. Failure by the Government to be proactive in its response to climate change could derail the country away from the appropriate track of sustainable development, and cause a decline in Uganda's agriculture in the next 5 decades.

With appropriate government investments in physical infrastructure like water and road projects, agriculture should increase its contribution to the GDP in the years ahead. With the increasing ease of access to the Internet, farmers will be able to create and use up-to-date information on weather, imagery, entomology, transportation, hydrology, and other farm-related data to improve crop yields and profits. This all depends on whether the farmers are educated enough to harness these available resources.

On the other hand, underinvestment in agricultural infrastructure by the central government would result in decreased crop yields, thus increasing food prices throughout the country. This, in turn, would hurt the poorest people most especially in the urban centers. Overpriced food and shortages of food staples would spark social unrest and further harm the relationship between the government and the people.

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NORAD (2009) 'Review of the Embassy's Development Assistance Portfolio: Environment and Climate Change, Greening and Climate Proofing of the Portfolio,' The Royal Norwegian Embassy, Kampala, Uganda, January 2009.

Land tenure and access

Land tenure systems will become a critical source of tension in the coming decades due to scarcity, population density and soil degradation. The institutions governing land access need to be able to respond to population, physical and economic pressures. If the land markets remain unregulated and there is failure in land management and administration policies, the result will be increasing inequalities in access to land, and a rising number of land-related conflicts in both rural and urban areas.

Climate Change Crisis

The Ugandan economy and the welfare of the population are intricately linked to the natural environment and, therefore, highly vulnerable to climate variability and change. Even if the national evidence-base is still weak and modeling the impact of the changes in climatic conditions is fraught with great uncertainty, there is little doubt that climate change will jeopardize Uganda's future economic and social development prospects.

As current average temperatures in Uganda are expected to increase by up to 1.5°C by the 2020s and as rainfall patterns change, some concerns arise.⁸ Natural impacts that are anticipated in the next decades include glacial melting, droughts, floods and landslides. The expected socio-economic impacts of climate change will affect food security, health, and the economic development of the country. Extreme weather will expose the Ugandan population to harsh living conditions and outbreaks of waterborne diseases such as diarrhea and cholera. Prolonged dry spells will result in respiratory diseases, and rising temperatures will change the geographical distribution of malaria and other disease vectors.

Water Pressures

A common benchmark of water scarcity is renewable water availability of less than 1,000 m³/capita/year. Water consumption will increase for each of the major uses - irrigation,

⁸ United Nations (2009) 'United Nations Joint Action Framework on Climate Change in Uganda,' zero draft, September.

domestic and industrial. Given current population growth trends and water use patterns, Uganda is likely to exceed the limits of its land-based water resource capabilities by 2025. , Even in the absence of climate change, projections suggest that the number of people living in water-stressed areas in Uganda will increase by 2055⁹. With climate change the population at risk of increased water stress is projected to increase further. Climate change is likely to affect Uganda due to its already warm climate, inconsistent rains, generally poor soils, extensive floodplains, predominantly rain-fed agriculture and poor governance with limited coping capacity.

The Influence of ICT

In a globalized world with advanced communications technology available even to the most destitute, governance vacuums become more obvious to disenfranchised people. Today's global availability and popularity of technology such as cell phones, computers, television, personal data assistants, social networking, and the Internet create greater awareness and increase socialization. The Ugandan people are openly embracing these technologies. Without a basic understanding of the nation's history or its present circumstances, this new awareness and virtual socialization increase group grievances, which lead to greater mistrust of all institutions related to governance.

With its burgeoning population, Africa is already proving to be a lucrative market for industries that offer inexpensive computer systems and applications.¹⁰ The popularity of social networking sites and internet blogs will help the prevailing political and business elites to preserve their respective holds on power and expand their influence. With social networking becoming a part of daily life in Uganda, particularly among the large youth population its popularity could potentially be regularly exploited by the major political groupings and political & tribal elite, who through their business enterprises might dominate advanced communication and computing technologies in the country. Easy information access and social networking will undercut the power of traditional news

⁹ African Futures 2011

¹⁰ Thompson, "Give Me Rice, but Give Me a Laptop Too."

media, including those outlets controlled by the central government. These scenarios could have negative repercussions for the future stability in the country.

In a world of virtual social networks, facts easily give way to rumors especially in a failing state; these rumors then begin to fill the leadership and information vacuum, as do “outsiders” with agendas of their own.

Undesirable Possible Future Case Scenario:

An “Arab spring” like uprising causing massive instability and disruption of national life.

Finally...

The impact human and social factors have on the strength of any nation is largely determined by its own people. If the relationship between government and its people remains relatively strong—where the government rules justly, invests in its people, and provides economic and political freedom—national survival is reasonably assured. Such favorable conditions become paths for success.¹¹ However, if the government fails to invest in its people and rules through fear and intimidation and corruption becomes corrosively endemic, the bonds of trust between the government and its people become weak. These negative trends then become the path to failure.

In the absence of good governance, the people supplant the existing social contract with one of their own making. The weight of this mass of different agendas and emerging social orders can fill the vacuum reaching a critical mass that instantly explodes, rapidly collapsing the existing order.

The Uganda of the future could succumb to a variety of ills. Once labeled the *Pearl of Africa* by Winston Churchill, some of the trends detailed above may cause the nation, over time, to break apart. This does not have to be; negative outcomes are not inevitable. Uganda’s future destiny will be changed by bold fundamental reforms. A search for soft options will

¹¹ Millennium Challenge Corporation, “Annual Scorecard of Policy Categories.”

compromise our prospects in the next 50 years, which might overtime cause us to degenerate into either a weak or failed state.

As can be seen in our history, the major game-changer in the journey ahead is going to be leadership. In the 1970s, Uganda was described as the land that God forgot due to state failure in a number of parameters. What changed the scenario was the leadership that arose in the mid 1980s. Looking ahead at the new challenges we face, strong, selfless and visionary leadership at all levels of national life will be a crucial determinant of whether Uganda moves more towards the ideal future we all aspire for or towards the undesirable dark pictures painted above.