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UGANDA ICAF SUMMARY

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Corporate Offices

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Uganda Conflict Assessment

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UGANDA ICAF SUMMARY

In the last two decades, Uganda has experienced record economic growth and has been commended by the international community for its early and vigorous response to HIV and AIDS. Since General Yoweri Museveni assumed the presidency in 1986, the instability that plagued Kampala during the post-independence years was replaced with relative peace and prosperity. While development has never been distributed equally throughout the country, Uganda has established itself as an emerging market for investment and trade. More recently, the country has asserted its regional strength via military and political means, a position that could increase in the coming years due to the discovery of oil in the western districts.

Yet for all of this progress, Uganda's stability and continued development may depend more on what lies ahead than behind. With national elections scheduled for 2011, the discovery of sizable oil reserves in the West, a focus on recovery after decades of conflict in the North, a predominately youthful population, and the country's growing prominence as a regional actor, Uganda could be on the verge of its most dramatic period of change since Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) government assumed power in 1986.

Whether 2011 sees a political transition or not, it is clear that the dynamics in Uganda are shifting. While the older generation still remembers the horrors of the post-independence era and are resistant to change that could result in renewed violence, the younger generation does not view the Republic through the lens of those who have survived the horrors of war. This assessment attempts to better understand this shift in dynamics in order to offer the United States Government (USG) an opportunity to reflect on both the current and likely future contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This summary is the product of a joint assessment and planning mission involving USAID's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) and the State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS). The purpose of this mission was to identify underlying causes and drivers of potential conflict in Uganda, mitigating factors, and opportunities for reducing the likelihood of conflict. This engagement was planned at the request of the U.S. Mission in Kampala. It will help to inform, among others, the Country Development Cooperation Strategy, USAID conflict programming, diplomatic efforts, and planning around key windows of vulnerability.

In May 2010, a pre-departure Table Top exercise was conducted in Washington, D.C. at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP). In preparation for the fieldwork and the Table Top, a desk study was presented for discussion. Following this meeting, the six-person ICAF team spent two weeks in Uganda meeting with US Mission staff, Government of Uganda officials, bilateral and multilateral partners, and selected Ugandan representatives from civil society and other sectors.

The findings and recommendations of this assessment should be considered within the context of the overall assessment design. Unlike other conflict assessments where data collection and analysis activities were centered on the ICAF methodology, this assessment also emphasized scenario planning and the explication of current critical dynamics. Additionally, with only two weeks in-country and only three days outside Kampala for fieldwork, the ICAF team was limited in its ability to triangulate the opinions and ideas of Mission staff with other sources. Despite these limitations, the ICAF team was able to identify where priority vulnerabilities are likely to emerge going forward. While many of these issues will require further examination to stimulate concrete action, this report and the assessment process as a whole does help to move the USG further along in understanding and reinforcing Uganda's future path towards continued and expanded stability.

FINDINGS

In 2009 and 2010, key areas of concern include grievances related to the 2011 presidential election; tensions between the central government and local kingdoms; the transition from relief to recovery and development in the North; conflicts over land and other natural resources, such as the recent discovery of more than 1.5 billion barrels of oil in Western Uganda; and an array of regional factors, including the upcoming referendum in Southern Sudan and Uganda's participation in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). While this assessment found that national-level instability is unlikely in Uganda in the short-term, trends of local-level violence are likely to continue around key issue areas. If not appropriately addressed, these grievances could be marshaled by key actors to drive larger-scale conflict that could have serious peace and stability repercussions.

The most likely immediate threat for violence within Uganda relates to the upcoming elections, especially in light of the September 2009 riots that shut down Kampala and resulted in numerous deaths. Tensions between the state and the Buganda Kingdom have been brewing for some time and additional episodes of localized violence, especially as the election nears, are possible. Finding a long-term solution to the question of power for Buganda, including implications for other less influential kingdoms, will be a central challenge for the Ugandan government. While violence may not manifest on a large scale, the relationship between Buganda and the government will continue to be a vulnerability for Ugandan stability.

In addition, the general population's growing frustration with President Museveni's prolonged stay in power and continued restrictions on the activities of opposition leaders and parties is concerning. A decrease in space for non-government aligned media, harassment of opposition members, and redistricting to further NRM control have further entrenched the ruling party. Frustration amongst segments of the population, coupled with the government's willingness to use force, could result in conflict surrounding elections, especially within Kampala.

An overlapping trend affecting conflict within Uganda concerns the issue of land. Although the ways in which land grievances play out vary by region, indications are that localized conflict over land will continue as long as the population growth rate remains high and institutional capacity for enforcing the law remains low. Land is critical to survival, identity, and group perceptions of relative strength within Uganda. These factors, combined with the lack of equitable regulatory implementation, is pushing people to rally around leaders they see as protecting their rights with regard to land. If specific leaders are able to use land grievances to support their own political or economic motivations, it has the potential to lead to violence. Similarly, competition over control of oil production has already resulted in some localized violence. Depending upon arrangements made over revenue distribution and control, oil has the potential to have a destabilizing effect on the country, although most observers see this as a distant concern.

In the North, while a sense of stability is present and optimism is high, interviews with residents suggest that they see much of this as a result of donor or NGO support, not as an outcome of government action. Given northern Uganda's recent history, there is a real need for the central government to demonstrate positive interaction and inclusion of all northern ethnic groups and actors in the political process. Otherwise if this perception remains and people grow unsatisfied with the pace of individual and community gains, this could be a source of conflict.

Another issue that could lead to localized instability in the North is the referendum in Southern Sudan scheduled for January of 2011. As a regional military leader and historic partner of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Army, Uganda is well-positioned to act as a positive player that seeks regional stability. Conversely, however, because of its historical alliance and geographic proximity to Sudan, Uganda faces serious risks vis-à-vis the possibility of internal instability in South Sudan. Implications could include a flow of Sudanese refugees, an interruption in economic ties between the countries, an increase in rebel activity and presence of small arms and light weapons in the area, and internal displacement among newly resettled Ugandans in the North.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are intended to inform USG programming:

- **Land** is the largest source of grievance that cuts across the country. Although land access, and therefore conflict, varies across regions according to the primary land holding systems in each locale, land as a common grievance is a national issue. The GoU is currently reviewing its land policy. USAID should support the GoU in this process and seek opportunities to collaborate with partners such as the World Bank (which is already investing in land reform) to help the GoU institutionalize a rational, national system of land tenure. Uganda has a good legal foundation for its land system, but it lacks the ability to implement and enforce legislation. The USG should seek to help the GoU to strengthen district administrations and build robust land institutions. The USAID NUDEIL program (Northern Uganda Development of Enhanced Local Governance, Infrastructure, and Livelihoods) could be a vehicle for working on land issues in the North whereas in other parts of the country other sources of funds, such as agricultural or food security, could be utilized to support local land structures. There is significant opportunity to leverage both existing USG and other donor investment in this area. USAID/Uganda already completed a land assessment in the North, which could be updated and nationalized to help determine the most appropriate program focus.
- USAID should develop a **new conflict program** that will focus on **prevention** in the regions at the most risk for violence, including the West, Central, and Karamoja regions. Ideally this program would complement a new program focused on land or be a component part of it. In the West, the target of prevention efforts should be on enhancing governance dialogue related to oil and land issues, including through both national structures (NEMA, etc) and local actors (kingdom, local leaders, etc). Opportunities exist to engage with Makerere University and potentially with other organized groups. In Karamoja, the USG should focus not only on supporting diversification of livelihoods systems and mitigating environmental shocks, but on advocating for a pastoralist policy that aligns all efforts. Such a strategy could help to organize UPDF and USG Civil Affairs teams towards greater regional stability, whether given a continued pastoral system or a greater shift toward settled agriculture. A new prevention focus should also include a specific focus on how all Mission investments can be better tailored to decrease grievances and associated risks of violence. For example, PEPFAR money could be utilized to set up monitoring committees or local means of redress to combat the spread of counterfeit pharmaceuticals (an increasing challenge in Africa). The more people are able to address their grievances through workable systems, the less likely they will be to turn to violence or support those intent upon mobilizing violence.
- **Democracy and governance programming** is a high priority for the Mission, and funding should reflect this priority. The USG should consider efforts to strengthen the judiciary by supporting the development of local courts and legal aid organizations. The assessment found that individuals and organizations are willing and able to utilize formal systems of dispute resolution, including courts, so long as they are available and neutral. However, when such systems are not in place resorting to violence becomes a second – viable – option. By supporting the increased growth of legal systems the USG can demonstrate that rule of law works and the peaceful adjudication is preferable to violence. The USG should also consider increased assistance to Parliament to improve the legislative branch's ability to serve as a check on the executive and increase linkages between Parliamentarians and the local constituencies they serve.
- **Youth** were identified as a population that should be targeted in a more systematic way. The Mission is planning to conduct a youth assessment that will inform the development of a comprehensive youth strategy. USAID should attempt to integrate this strategy with existing programming areas to ensure a comprehensive approach to working with youths. The assessment

strongly recommends that the Mission focus not only on uneducated, unemployed youth, but on the broader category as significant grievances and willingness to organize and engage in violence exists across socio-economic barriers.

- **Agricultural programming** and investments in food security can easily reinforce land tenure systems by working through local land structures. For example, when working with local communities on setting up demonstration sites or agricultural fairs, members of the Land Board or Area Land Committee should participate as should any traditionally-based individuals with responsibility for land. In addition support could be provided directly at the national level through ensuring that broad-based food security planning is integrated with Land Ministry planning.
- In the longer term, USAID should collaborate with the GoU in the development of a monitoring system for oil revenues. The US Mission should also remain cognizant of Uganda's military expenditures as the threats to stability (e.g., LRA) are reduced or eliminated.

The U.S. is committed to working with Uganda to promote democracy, development, accountability, and economic growth. To support Uganda in this regard, the U.S. should work with the Ugandan government, civil society organizations, and local partners to supporting independent, functional, and transparent institutions that ensure that all issues—whether land, oil, ethnic division, corruption, political competition or others—are handled peaceably through legitimate structures.