

Uganda

GEOGRAPHY

Uganda is a landlocked country in east-central Africa. The country's landscapes vary from volcanic ranges to savannas to swamps. The source of the Nile, the world's longest river, is in Uganda. Uganda's location beside Lake Victoria and its altitude (900 to 1,500 metres above sea level) make its climate cooler than might be expected in a country which lies across the equator: temperatures range from 15-32°C. This climate favours a wide range of vegetation and agricultural production.

PEOPLE

Most of Uganda's people live in the cooler and higher regions of the east and the southwest. There are four main African language groups: the Bantu, Nilotic, Nilo Hamitic and Sudanic. These groups are further divided into over 30 ethnic groups. Small numbers of people are also of Indian, European and Arab descent.

English is widely spoken alongside many local languages, of which Luganda is the most common. More than half of Uganda's population are Christians, while many follow traditional religions and some are Muslims. The government generally views religious groups as allies in community development.

HISTORY

Human habitation in Uganda stretches back at least 52,000 years. Hand axes which date back to 50,000BC have been found along Uganda's Kagera River. During the reign of King Mutesa I (1856-84), European explorers first entered Buganda. The colonial future of Uganda was decided by negotiations between Germany and Britain in 1886 and 1890, with present-day Uganda (incorporating Buganda and the lands of 28 other ethnic groups) assigned to British rule.



Map courtesy of The General Libraries,
The University of Texas at Austin.

In 1962, Uganda became independent under Prime Minister Milton Obote. However, Obote's government was toppled in 1971 in a coup led by Major-General Idi Amin. In a reign of terror, Amin eliminated his opponents, ruined the economy and oversaw horrific state-sponsored human rights abuses. He was overthrown in 1979 and civil war followed. Guerrilla leader Yoweri Museveni took power in 1986 and he has been credited with substantially improving the country's human rights record. He has also achieved some stability and a fragile unity but this has not been uniform across the country.

From the 1980s, a rebel group called the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) began an armed struggle against Museveni. Using the abduction of children as a weapon of war, the LRA conducted a terror campaign across northern Uganda until 2006. This conflict claimed tens of thousands of lives and displaced approximately 1.6 million people over two decades. UNICEF estimates that 20,000 Ugandan children were abducted by the LRA and forced to become child soldiers. Attempts to secure a permanent peace between Ugandan forces and the LRA failed in 2008 and since then the LRA focus has shifted outside of Uganda to neighbouring countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. The LRA conflict caused great human and financial cost to Uganda and its development. After two years of relative security, decommissioning of the camps that housed up to a million people displaced by the conflict commenced in October 2010.



ECONOMY

Uganda's economy shows a mixed picture of recent growth alongside ongoing problems with debt and costs resulting from economic mismanagement and conflict. Agriculture provides 70 percent of income and employs 80 percent of the labour force. Coffee is the main export, followed by cotton, tea, gold, tobacco, corn and fish.

Most farms are small and the average size is three hectares. Tea and sugar are produced on large estates. Food crops include plantains (cooking bananas), cassava, millet, maize and potatoes. Rivers and lakes are a good source of fish. Livestock is important but tsetse fly is a problem in the north. Inequities in the world trading system make it difficult for Uganda to trade its way out of poverty.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Most Ugandans live in rural areas. Housing varies from square mud-walled buildings or grass-thatched huts in the countryside, to concrete block or brick homes with tin roofs in towns. Contaminated water and inadequate sanitation are problems for the poor. Even in Kampala, slums lack running water and electricity. The staple diet is high in starch and low in protein, consisting of matooke made from cooking bananas, or porridge made from millet or sorghum.

Though women are the major contributors in the agricultural labour force (70 to 80 percent), only seven percent own land. Wages of most people, including public servants, have not kept pace with price increases and families need several income-producing activities (such as street-selling) to make ends meet. Officially the government provides medical care but much of the population does not have access to health facilities.



Improving access to clean water and promoting good hygiene practices is an important part of our work with communities in Uganda.

Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	UGANDA	AUSTRALIA
Population	33.8 million	21.5 million
Urban population (as % of total)	13.3%	89.1 %
GNI per capita (US\$ PPP)	\$1,224	\$38,692
Population living on less than US\$1.25 (PPP) a day	51.5%	0%
Population with sustainable access to an improved water source	64%	100%
Adult literacy rate	74.6%	99%
Life expectancy at birth	54.1 years	81.9 years
Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	135	6

Source: United Nations Development Programme
Human Development Report 2010

HIV and AIDS brought about a major crisis to Uganda. It has claimed many lives and created over two million orphans. The epidemic has placed major strains on scarce resources, as well as causing labour shortages. But Uganda has been waging a vigorous campaign against HIV and AIDS and this has helped to reduce the prevalence rate of the virus – which reached 30 percent of the population in the 1990s – to 5.4 percent in 2010.

EDUCATION

In 1997, school fees for primary education were abolished and enrolment rates increased from 62 percent in 1992 to 86 percent in 2004. However, many children continue to drop out of school because of huge class sizes of up to 100 children and teachers with limited resources and training.

WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN UGANDA

- works with local communities to improve the wellbeing of orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV and AIDS. Measures include education programs, and prevention and control of HIV and AIDS-related illnesses;
- supports household income generating activities to improve food security and reduce malnutrition. World Vision is supporting farmers with training on good farming practices, new technologies, small business skills and nutrition education;
- works with local governments to improve both the physical learning environment and the quality of education available;
- facilitates peace-building projects in northern Uganda and is helping people resettle in their traditional lands after years of living in camps for the displaced;
- works with local communities to improve access to health services and clean water, and to promote good sanitation practices.

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