



## History of Uganda

Famously described by Winston Churchill as the 'Pearl of Africa', those traveling to Uganda today will testify to such a sentiment. However Uganda's turbulent history is well known; dominated by the shadow of Idi Amin in the late 1970's.

Before the incursion of the Western powers of the late 1890's, modern-day Uganda was a collection of tribal kingdoms, with the 'kabaka' (king) of Buganda being the predominant force in the region. The arrival of the British into East Africa did not completely destroy the power of the kingdoms, as Uganda became a protectorate, which kept such tribal structures intact to provide much of the administration of the country. Due to this reliance on traditional systems, the British would not experience resistance on the scale that other Western powers were facing, such as the Germans had with the Maji Maji rebellion in Tanzania.

However the British relied heavily on the Bugandans to fill important administrative positions, which would create resentment among the other tribes of Uganda, who were forced to assume positions within the army and police force. The frustration caused by such a demarcation of roles would contribute to the instability that Uganda would face after independence

Uganda gained its independence in 1962, led by Dr Milton Obote. The king of Buganda gave support for the independence movement on the condition that Buganda itself would receive autonomy. However once Obote had gained power, his anti-monarchist beliefs encouraged him to use an up-and-coming Colonel of the army named Idi Amin to storm the Bugandan palace, forcing the Kabaka into exile. Chaos followed as the constitution was suspended with Obote assuming personal power.

The chaos caused by Obote's regime and the ensuing discontent allowed Amin to create support for a coup. Ironically, it was Obote's stripping of much of Amin's authority before

a trip to Singapore that set in motion the assault on Obote's government, which would result in Amin's dictatorship.

The widespread violence that Amin subjected the people of Uganda to was coupled with disastrous policies that severely weakened the country. Much of the violence was aimed towards the educated Ugandans who assumed professions in law, medicine and academia. Such targeting was a reaction by Amin to his feelings of inadequacy over his lack of formal education. In 1972 Amin expelled all of Uganda's Asian citizens, which put further pressure on an already struggling economy. The international community, which had once looked at Amin's regime with fascination due to his extravagant lifestyle, now condemned it for pursuing such policies.

Relations during this period between Tanzania and Uganda were tense as the President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, offered sanctuary to the exiled Obote. Constant clashes between the Ugandan army and anti-Amin rebels on the borders led to the decision to annex the Kagera region of Tanzania in 1978 that resulted in war. The Tanzanian army swept across Uganda, leading to the end of Amin's reign of terror. After a series of temporary leaders, Obote managed to return to power in 1980 in an election shrouded in controversy.

It was to be the National Resistance Movement led by Yoweri Museveni that would act on the suspicious election and begun to wage war against Obote's government. It would take six years until Museveni could claim victory, marking a new era in Uganda's history. Much of the old administration and police force were replaced on reports of mass corruption and human rights abuses, making way for the much-needed recovery from the past three decades. The Asians that had been expelled by Amin were invited back into Uganda and in 1993 the Kabaka of Buganda was reinstated with great acclaim. While constitutionally barred from politics, the Kabaka has been instrumental in upholding the culture and traditions of the Bugandan kingdom in an increasingly modern Uganda.

Such moves led to a wide base of support across the country for Museveni's government. This support became vital as rebel fighting in the North escalated into war between the Ugandan army and a violent rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army. With

the rebels continuously crossing Uganda's northern border into the Congo and Sudan, often with at the very least tacit support, it has been difficult to resolve the conflict. In recent years the North has made improvements to its stability and security, supported by numerous international organizations.

Museveni has remained in power to the present day and can claim numerous successes including the drastic reduction of HIV in Uganda as well as the introduction of universal primary and secondary education against a backdrop of sustained economic growth. Education has been one of his key commitments since 1985, restoring an education system that was once seen as the pride of East Africa.

## **Secondary School Education in Uganda**

The education system in Uganda has been traditionally called the pride of East Africa, however the decades after independence disrupted, among many other things, the educational development of the country.

Prior to independence Uganda was a protectorate of Britain, which has had a large influence on the educational system. Examinations follow a similar structure as Britain with 'O' levels followed by 'A' levels. Much like Tanzania, the curriculum of Uganda resembles that of Britain with both the subjects offered and topics covered- Latin is even offered in the curriculum!

Due to the strong resilience of tribal traditions, there are many diverse local languages across Uganda. The language of the Bugandan, the largest tribal kingdom, 'luganda', has become in effect the lingua franca, however most Ugandans also speak English, their own tribal language and even Swahili depending on their location. It is because of this large number of local languages in a relatively small country, coupled with migration, that English has been adopted as the language of instruction in not only secondary but

also primary schools. Examinations at all levels are also conducted in English. However, by secondary school, the general level of English is well established.

Since Museveni came to power in the 1980's, there has been a real emphasis on improving the education system that struggled under the Obote and Amin years. In line with the Millennium Development Goals as proscribed by the UN, 'Universal Primary Education' (UPE) was introduced in 1996, which removed the fees for students entering school at primary level. This policy within a short space of time incorporated all seven years of primary school.

This policy was followed in 2007 by 'Universal Secondary Education' (USE), which offered the same free access to education as UPE did. Each year, a new secondary year is added to the program and so as of 2009 S1, S2 and S3 were covered by USE. This has allowed many more children to enter the school system, however it only relieves in part the financial pressures on parents to educate their children. Parents are expected to provide the school uniforms, lunches, stationery and textbooks. Many of the schools are not in a position to provide a safety net for those families that can't afford such necessities- if a student can't afford lunch, then they will have to go the whole school day without food.

In time the whole of secondary education will be under the USE program. The success of the program has been undermined by the lack of financial support for resources to the schools taking the brunt of the influx of students. Schools have to share the same resources as before but with much larger classes. In this situation, the gap in the student to textbook ratio is set to widen. The Ministry of Education in Uganda is aware of the situation,

*"A study conducted on the provision of textbooks in secondary education indicates that there is a lack of instructional materials in secondary schools, especially schools in rural areas."*

With READ International starting distributions in Uganda in 2010, we are taking active steps to buck this trend.