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State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 - Uganda

In February 2011 Ugandan's incumbent President Yoweri Museveni won 68 per cent of votes in the presidential election. This result put him on course to become the longest-serving president in Uganda's history. Kizza Besigye, President Museveni's closest opponent, rejected the result, on the grounds of rampant election malpractices – a large number of voters were disenfranchised, harassed by police and bribed. The general elections in 2011 also saw 14 members of parliament (MPs) elected from the Karamoja, home to the Karamajong, a traditionally pastoralist ethnic group. Under a loose coalition – the Karamoja Parliamentary Group (KPG) – the MPs have drawn attention to poor government policy and emergency response to problems in their region. For example, in August, the KPG criticized the government for the delay in relocating victims of landslides in Kaabong district that had killed and injured many people. In September 2011, the same group urged the government to intervene and repair roads that had been cut by torrential rains.

In May 2011, parliament elected its first female speaker, Rebecca Kadaga, which was hailed as a positive move by many women's rights activists. Affirmative action and reserved seats have boosted women's representation in parliament to 35 per cent, the majority of whom belong to the ruling party.

Despite the launch of the ambitious five-year National Development Plan (NDP) in April 2010, minority and indigenous groups in Uganda remain deprived and excluded. The US\$ 21 billion NDP focuses on infrastructure projects and private sector development rather than the needs of the country's marginalized groups. According to MRG research, Uganda's new development agenda contains glaring policy gaps with regard to improving the situation of historically marginalized groups such as pastoralists and hunter-gatherer communities. The NDP fails to address major challenges pastoralists face, such as securing land tenure, improving livestock productivity, access to water resources, diversifying livelihoods and accessing markets to sell their products. Pastoralists continue to feel excluded from the development agenda because the NDP document refers to them as 'livestock keepers', rather than pastoralists, a clear sign that the government refuses to recognize pastoralism as a valuable livelihood system.

The First Lady, Janet Museveni, who is also the Minister of Karamoja, advocates against nomadism in favour of settled livestock-keeping, which reflects a government policy of sedentarization coming from the highest level. During 2011, activists continued to report that anti-pastoralist ordinances and policies at local level are being passed to condemn pastoralism and prevent free movement of cattle.

A final draft of the national land policy was submitted before parliament in March 2011, but this process has stalled due to a cabinet reshuffle. Overall, the draft land policy calls on government to enact laws that safeguard vulnerable communities and protect minorities' and indigenous peoples' communal land-ownership and access to resources. In a departure from previous policy, the draft does recognize the rights of pastoralists, but presents no framework for their participation in decisions that will affect them. Nonetheless, if adopted this policy could reflect an important shift in the attitude of the Ugandan government.

The discovery of rich oil deposits in the western Uganda districts of Buliisa and Hoima continued to cause anxiety among local communities during 2011. In areas where oil was discovered back in 2006, the livelihood systems of minorities and indigenous peoples have been disrupted. Ethnic tensions have also erupted over communally owned lands as different groups jostle to secure ownership rights that would guarantee them hefty compensation from oil firms. For example, in the Waisoke and Bugana villages of Buliisa district, where vast oil deposits have been found, Bagungu, a fisher community, have been prevented from fishing due to ongoing oil production, and are now embroiled in a communal land dispute with migrant pastoralists.

Bagungu claim communal ownership and want to cultivate cotton while the migrant pastoralists claim to have bought the land, according to media reports. Following a Court of Appeal order that granted ownership rights to the Bagungu, the government evicted 600 pastoralist families with over 20,000 cattle in December 2010, using military and police. Although the government has promised to resettle the pastoralists, no concrete plans have been made and some pastoralists have temporarily settled in the neighbouring Hoima district. Pastoralists have challenged the government in court for failing to resettle them.

At a policy level, 2011 saw public tensions flare over disputes about oil production-sharing agreements. Senior officials were accused of soliciting bribes in a rush to sign controversial agreements with oil companies, including with UK-based Tullow Oil, in which Uganda was projected to lose millions of dollars in revenue.

In October, parliament approved a motion to compel the government to delay the approval of Tullow Oil's US\$ 2.9 billion sale of its interests in the country to French company Total and the China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC), until the necessary national laws were in place. But in February 2012 President Museveni sidestepped parliament and signed a new production-sharing agreement between the government and Tullow Oil, which allowed the sale to Total and CNOOC to go ahead, paving the way for oil production by 2015 as well as an estimated US\$ 10 billion investment in a refinery and an oil export pipeline. In an address to parliament, President Museveni spoke about how Uganda stood to benefit, revealing details about such an agreement for the first time, but he failed to mention how much revenue would go to the local communities affected, some of whom are minorities and indigenous peoples.

During 2011, there were increasing episodes of inter-community tensions, especially in Teso, Lango and Acholi regions in northern and eastern Uganda, fuelled by private companies' interest in communal land. In September, eight clans claiming to own land in Abanga in Zombo district northern Uganda accused a leading African manufacturing conglomerate, Mukwano Group, of collaborating with the government and district leaders to take 1,285 hectares of community land to establish tea and pine plantations in 2008. However, Alykhan Karmali, the Mukwano managing director, told the media that the land title was given to Agricultural Enterprise Limited in 1969, which was later sold to the Mukwano Group. The clans claim that Nebbi district officials did not consult with them before selling their land to investors and demanded that the government intervene.

In October, US President Barack Obama announced that he was sending 100 combat-equipped troops to support Ugandan forces fighting the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). This raised hopes of resolving security issues caused by the rebels, who are accused of

widespread human rights abuses. The deployment followed US legislation aimed at helping disarm the LRA and bring its leader, Joseph Kony, to justice. The LRA, said to have recruited children from minority and marginalized tribes from northern Uganda, is believed to be responsible for numerous indiscriminate killings, rapes and kidnappings in the region.

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