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Ugandan relations with Western donors in the 1990s: what impact on democratisation?

Ellen Hauser*

ABSTRACT

Aid donors' support for democratisation in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s has been tempered by their desire to achieve other objectives. In Uganda, a high level of donor support for the Museveni government has been compatible with the Ugandan government's reluctance to introduce multiparty democracy. Donors have opted for 'dialogue' rather than coercive methods. This may be ascribed to a number of factors, including the destruction from which Uganda was recovering, the need to present Uganda as a success story for economic liberalisation, and donors' need to maintain good relations with Uganda in order to pursue their foreign policy goals. The resulting donor-recipient relationship has however created dangers for the maintenance of long-term sustainable democracy in Uganda, by condoning divisive policies, and neglecting the need for coalition-building and conflict resolution.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, many Western donor governments have claimed one major aim of their foreign policy and foreign aid to be the support of democratisation in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. After the Cold War ended, bilateral Western donors began to use democracy as an ideological argument for foreign aid; assistance could no longer be justified to domestic audiences as support for the fight against communism. Reasons given for donor targeting of African countries for political reforms have included donor recognition that the lack of success of economic reforms in Africa called for political solutions (Robinson 1992: 2), and the argument that African countries offered few, if any, economic or geopolitical interests to donors and were therefore in a weaker bargaining position to withstand donor demand for reforms (Crawford 1997: 90–1; Moore & Robinson 1994: 150).

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While recognition has been given to the possibility that donors' foreign policy and economic interests may conflict with donor pursuit of democratisation in such regions as the Middle East and Asia (Olson 1994), a common assumption has been that donors' foreign policy goals in the post-Cold War era do not conflict with their support for democratisation in African countries (Diamond 1995: 253; Moore & Robinson 1994: 143). Other assumptions have been that the high level of aid dependency in many African countries results in greater vulnerability to donor demands for political reforms (Barkan 1994: 2-3; Crawford 1997: 90), and that political and economic reforms can in many circumstances reinforce one another (van de Walle 1995).

Donor methods to promote democratic reforms have included financial support for specific political reforms; dialogue with recipient governments to persuade them to implement democratic reforms; and strong overt pressure on recipient governments to make reforms, often taking the form of political conditionality on aid (Nelson & Eglinton 1992: 8-9). Political conditionality can be defined in several ways. In this article, political conditionality is defined in a narrow sense to mean overt donor threats to cut off or freeze foreign aid to a country if the recipient government does not put into place specific democratic reforms. Much attention has been given to donors' conditionality on their aid to several African countries in the early 1990s to push for specific democratic reforms. Two of the most visible cases were donor threats of conditionality on Kenya in 1991 and Malawi in 1992. Donors suspended or froze aid to the two countries in an attempt to force the governments to implement political reform. In both cases, the governments held multiparty elections after the political conditions were placed on aid, although in Malawi a national referendum on the multiparty issue preceded the elections. The visibility of these two cases is one reason for the popular belief that donors equate democracy with multiparty elections, even though donor aid programmes support many different aspects of democratic reform.

An important question for consideration is what factors lead donors to choose among the above-mentioned methods in their attempts to influence political reform in a particular country. Do donor foreign policy interests enter into the decision? Does the level of aid dependency of a recipient country matter? And do the amount and level of success of economic reforms in a country influence whether and in which manner donors push for political reforms?

The development of the relationship between Uganda and Western bilateral donors during the early 1990s is an interesting context in

which to examine donor support for democratisation in African countries. Since coming to power in 1986, President Museveni has continually argued that Uganda is not yet ready for multiparty democracy, and that the current movement system of government is the only way to maintain unity and progress in Uganda. Despite the lack of a multiparty system, Western donors have strongly supported the Ugandan government. Like Kenya and Malawi, Uganda has been an aid-dependent country; during the early 1990s most of Uganda's government budget (including debt servicing) was financed by donors. In contrast to Kenya and Malawi, donors did not freeze or suspend aid to Uganda's National Resistance Movement (NRM) government in an attempt to force political reform. When the US ambassador to Uganda attempted in 1995 to move in the direction of political conditionality, other donor officials did not follow suit.

The first focus of this article is an examination of the reasons why Uganda was not threatened with political conditionality on the multiparty issue, using the questions of donor foreign policy interests, aid dependency and success of economic reforms noted above. One conclusion of the article is that even from the beginning of 'new donor support' for democracy in the early 1990s, donors' interests influenced their decisions not to threaten Uganda with political conditionality, showing that donors retain foreign policy interests in Africa in the post-Cold War era. A second conclusion of this article is that a country's level of dependence on foreign aid is not the most important factor in determining whether or not it is subjected to political conditionality. Regarding the question of economic reforms, the case of Uganda shows that whether a country pursues economic reforms and whether those reforms are successful influence donors' decisions of how to pursue political reforms in the country. Although donor rhetoric links political and economic reforms, in practice, political reforms which would help sustain economic reform are frequently ignored.

The Uganda case raises another issue in donor promotion of democratisation: donor emphasis on particular aspects of political reform. As Thomas Carothers (1997) has outlined in a discussion about US foreign aid to support democratisation, donors frequently focus on set political institutions of democracy as opposed to coalition-building. According to this approach, if the 'correct' institutions are put into place, a country will eventually become more democratic. Donors probably choose this approach because Western political institutions and procedures are easily identifiable, and therefore foreign assistance for democracy-building is readily implemented through support to

build those institutions. However, this approach ignores the fact that politics, and therefore political reform, is fundamentally political, meaning that the political and economic interests of political actors, as well as the varying levels of power of the actors, must be factored into the reform process. These interests can disrupt the process of democratisation. Donor officials frequently argue that they recognise the complexity of democratic reforms and that they support other political reforms besides multiparty elections (for example, in the US, Rice 1998; Shattuck & Atwood 1998). While it is true that donor aid to promote democracy supports far more than multiparty elections and the formation of political parties, the fact that in the early 1990s the threat of aid cuts was used to 'encourage' several African governments to allow multiparty elections stands as proof that, at least in the early 1990s, multiparty elections were the major standard for democracy. The fact also remains that donors frequently focus more on the institutions of democracy than on the political means to make those institutions most effective to bring about sustainable democracy.

The second focus of this article addresses this issue by analysing the ways in which donors have approached the democratisation process in Uganda to show the resultant potentially detrimental effects on prospects for sustainable democracy in the country. Although Uganda was not threatened with political conditionality on the multiparty issue, multipartyism was the focus of the persuasion/dialogue tactics used by donor governments in the first half of the 1990s. In this case, Uganda is an example of donors' focus on institutional means and lack of attention to coalition-building and conflict resolution in the democracy-building process. This lack of donor attention to resolution of serious conflicts in the political arena resulted in lost opportunities for donors to focus on solving critical problems in Uganda's political scene in the early 1990s, a crucial time in Uganda's constitution writing process.

In this discussion of donor support for democratisation, it is important to keep in mind the often-ignored distinction between donor diplomatic actions and programmes put into place to build democracy. The impact of political and foreign policy decisions made by donor governments about a particular country frequently do not complement the intent of donor aid programmes to help countries democratise. While donors usually attempt to minimise this tension, it is necessary to recognise its existence. This article focuses mainly on the political and foreign policy decisions which have affected the democratisation process in Uganda. A distinction also needs to be made between

multilateral support for 'good governance' and bilateral donor support for democratic reform. While the types of programmes sometimes overlap and often claim similar goals, the focus of this article is on bilateral programmes, because it highlights foreign policy interests and other concerns of bilateral donor governments.

The next section will provide a brief background of the political situation in Uganda and the relationship between Western donors and the NRM government until the presidential and parliamentary elections held in 1996. The subsequent section will discuss various reasons why Uganda was not threatened with political conditionality to hold multiparty elections. In this discussion it is important to keep in mind that the lack of political conditionality on the Ugandan government did not mean that donors ceased viewing multiparty democracy as the eventual goal in Uganda's democratisation efforts, or that they accepted the movement system as democratic. Donors conveyed their desire for Uganda to move to a multiparty system through their private attempts to persuade the Ugandan government instead of through political conditionality.

The fourth section of the article will discuss the dangers implicit in how donors treated the pursuit of democracy in Uganda, including how donors focused on institutions and ignored the divisive politics which were developing. Even though Uganda is often touted as a 'success story' and has very positive relationships with Western donors, the Ugandan political situation as it has unfolded poses dangers to Uganda's ability to become a stable democracy in the long term. The final section will draw together general conclusions about the donor-Uganda relationship, and relate these to the issue of donor promotion of democracy in African countries.

OVERVIEW OF UGANDAN POLITICS AND UGANDAN-DONOR RELATIONS

The early years of the NRM government

In 1990, when Western governments began pronouncing their determination to promote democracy in Africa, the NRM government had been in power for four years. Although President Museveni stated when he came to power in January 1986 that Uganda would follow a mixed economy (i.e. both socialist and capitalist), the NRM government adopted a Structural Adjustment Programme in 1987. The agreement to follow World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) guidelines brought positive responses from Western bilateral

donors; however, many Western countries remained suspicious that Museveni was a leftist-leaning autocrat.

Even before donors began their push for democratic reforms on the African continent, the NRM government had already put into place several institutions that it claimed were democratic. First, the movement system of government, according to its proponents, was supposed to be a democratic way of unifying opposing Ugandan forces. Since the beginning of the NRM government, NRM officials have claimed that all Ugandans belong to the movement and, unlike in a one-party system, cannot be expelled. During his early years in power, Museveni claimed an interest in reconciliation and invited many of his former opponents into the movement to hold positions in his government. Therefore, according to NRM officials, the movement system was a democratic institution which promoted cooperation and reconciliation.

NRM officials claimed that the Resistance Council (RC) system of local government, which involved direct election of officials at the local level and a hierarchy of councils indirectly related by lower level councils, gave Ugandans experience in political participation and management of local affairs. Each council level had a designated seat for a women's representative, further supporting the NRM's claim to promote women's active democratic participation in government. By 1990 the NRM government had put into place the Human Rights Commission to investigate abuses of human rights before 1986, and the Constitutional Commission had for two years actively collected views from different sectors as to what should be written into the new constitution.

Donor relations

Donor involvement in Uganda increased significantly between 1989 and 1994. Not only did bilateral foreign aid from major Western donors almost double, from \$179.7 million in 1989 to \$342.7 million in 1994 (OECD 1996: 30), but donor interest in the unfolding of political events in Uganda also intensified. This time period corresponds directly to the period when Western donors placed political conditions on Kenya and Malawi.

During these years several events revealed that Western donors did not accept the movement political system as democratic. Before the 1994 Constituent Assembly (CA) elections, several Western donors remained reluctant to support the elections financially because they were not going to be held on a multiparty basis. Some donors felt that

the Ugandan government was not seriously committed to holding fair elections. Reports from officials about the negotiations in the autumn of 1993 between donors and the Ugandan government show that President Museveni firmly insisted that the CA elections be held on the movement basis, while Western donors argued for multiparty elections (Hauser 1994–5). A compromise was finally reached in which Museveni agreed that candidates opposed to the movement system would have equal access to the media and that the *mchaka mchaka* political education courses, which multipartyists claimed were an unfair means of propaganda to convince Ugandans to vote for movement candidates, would be suspended during the campaign and election period. In return, Western donors agreed to fund the elections, even though candidates were not allowed to compete on a political party basis, with the stipulation that no additional restrictions be placed on party activities. Other terms of the agreement between donors and the Ugandan government included the Ugandan government making a significant financial contribution to the elections and an independent auditor monitoring donor funds to the elections (Hauser 1994–95). This series of events shows that donors chose to use the dialogue/persuasion method to attempt to influence political change in Uganda, even when pressuring for multiparty elections.

The Constituent Assembly (CA)

The CA elections were held on 28 March 1994, with the international donor community providing financial assistance and international election monitors. Donor officials pronounced the elections ‘transparent and open’ and ‘a legitimate expression of the will of the people’ (Henderson 1994: 32). The term ‘free and fair’ did not appear in official donor statements about the elections because there were some irregularities; however, donor officials generally agreed, both publicly and privately, that the outcome of the elections represented the will of the Ugandan people (Hauser 1994–5). During the CA, which was not directly funded by donors, Western governments poured money into Uganda for other projects and programmes, and Uganda was deemed a ‘success story’ in Africa because of its economic progress.

Although donors funded the CA elections, they were not pleased with how the CA handled the question of whether Uganda should move to a multiparty system of government. A majority of delegates were supporters of the NRM, and therefore supported the movement system of government. This preponderance of NRM supporters in the

CA influenced the decision as to whether Uganda would continue with the movement system, or whether the new constitution would provide for a multiparty system of government. During the last few months of the CA, when it became clear that the CA would not change Uganda's system of government to a multiparty system, some donor officials argued that pro-movement CA delegates were unduly influenced by President Museveni and voted the way in which he directed them (Hauser 1994-5). However, CA debates and records show that NRM delegates voted against President Museveni's wishes on many issues. First, there was no 'NRM voting bloc'. The CA comprised many different 'blocs', and CA delegates who supported the NRM argued and disagreed on many issues, including how to handle the movement/multiparty question. Second, CA delegates voted against President Museveni's wishes on several constitutional provisions, including limits on executive power. In fact, an attempt by President Museveni in a closed-door meeting with pro-movement CA delegates to discuss the handling of one contentious issue regarding the Buganda region resulted in the delegates booing the president and telling him he was interfering with the democratic process (Hauser 1994-5; *The Monitor*, Kampala, 20-22 Feb. 1995). The fact that NRM delegates voted for a continuation of the movement system is not surprising because they were, after all, supporters of the NRM. When some donor officials attempted to argue about 'undue influence' of the president on CA delegates during the multiparty issue debates in the CA, their argument was weak. The donors had accepted the CA elections which voted in an NRM majority to the CA, and CA debates were open discussions at which delegates freely voiced their opinions.

On 12 May 1995, the US Embassy in Kampala released a press statement which attempted to move from the previous method of using dialogue and persuasion to influence the Ugandan government, to more overt pressure to force a change to a multiparty system of government. The press release stated that the US government wanted a 'fully democratic system' written into the Ugandan constitution (USIS 1995). This phrase was frequently used to refer to a multiparty system of government. Although the press release officially came from the US Information Service in Kampala, US officials in Washington DC confirmed that the driving force behind the statement was the US ambassador to Uganda, Michael Southwick (Hauser 1994-5). Furthermore, the 12 May press release was the result of Ambassador Southwick's lack of success in privately convincing President Museveni to move to a multiparty system, especially during his discussions with

Museveni in the few days preceding the statement (Hauser 1994-5). One unintended result of the 12 May statement was that moderate NRM supporters and moderate multiparty supporters who had been trying to work out a compromise in the CA hurried back to their respective corners (*The Monitor*, Kampala, 17-19 May 1995). Moderate NRM supporters suspended compromise efforts because they were accused by mainline NRM supporters of trying to please the US government. Multiparty supporters saw no reason to compromise because their views were supported in the statement; the US embassy had validated their position.

Western European governments did not follow the US ambassador's lead in the attempt to change tactics. European embassy officials in Kampala avoided publicly supporting the US government's press release, although the Danish minister for international cooperation attempted to breach the gap between the US and European stance in public statements in which he said that denying multiparty supporters their rights was not democratic. However, the Danish minister added that because of the turmoil and destruction Uganda had gone through in the past, it was necessary to carefully look at the appropriate timing to return to a multiparty system (*The New Vision*, Kampala, 24 May 1995). The official European stance claimed that Ugandans should be the ones to decide which political system they wanted and that donor governments should not impose a particular form of government (Hauser 1994-5; *The East African*, Nairobi, 5-11 June).

Again, just before the new constitution was promulgated in October 1995, the US embassy in Kampala attempted to exert overt pressure to force the CA into writing a multiparty system of government into the constitution. The deputy chief of mission (DCM) at the US embassy in Kampala publicly stated that the new constitution contained a flaw because there were no provisions for a clear and decisive path to multipartyism, and that this flaw should be fixed as soon as possible (Bush 1995). According to the new constitution, the movement system was to continue through the first five years after the new government elected in 1996. In the year 2000, at the end of the fourth year of the first parliament (Ugandan parliamentary terms are for five years), a national referendum is due to be held to determine which system of government Ugandans want. One year before the referendum, in 1999, multipartyists can begin publicly campaigning for a multiparty system. Therefore, under the constitution the multiparty question is left to a future referendum and not definitively settled.

The DCM's statement followed a press release in September 1995 by

the British High Commission, which raised questions about the way in which the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections and campaign processes were taking place. Although the DCM's statement attempted to link the US and British statements, the emphases of the two were very different. The British press release expressed support for the universal human rights of freedom of opinion, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of association, but did not claim the new Ugandan constitution contained a flaw. In fact, the statement explicitly said that Britain was not asking for a particular form of multiparty democracy, and instead focused on specific aspects of Uganda's unfair election playing field which the British government felt needed to be addressed (British High Commission, Kampala 1995). Therefore, while the DCM's statement attempted to show that the US and Great Britain were in agreement on this issue, examination of the text of the two statements shows that they had different emphases, and were not in agreement as to the necessity of threatening the NRM government with political conditionality if the CA did not write a multiparty system into the new constitution. Despite the statements from the US embassy attempting to move towards a threat of political conditionality on the NRM government, no political conditions were ever imposed on the government to force multiparty elections or to force the CA into writing a multiparty system of government into the constitution. As will be discussed later, messages from different US government officials regarding the multiparty issue were not consistent. It was, therefore, impossible for the US embassy in Kampala to effectively threaten political conditions on aid when US officials were not unified on the best approach for democratisation in Uganda, and when European embassies in Kampala also did not agree to move to a tactic of political conditionality.

1996 presidential and parliamentary elections

Two candidates ran against President Museveni in the 1996 presidential election. Museveni's most serious competitor was Paul Kawanga Ssemogerere, the president of the Democratic Party, who had run against Milton Obote in the 1980 elections, and would supposedly have won if there had been no election rigging. Ssemogerere had served in various ministerial posts in the NRM government, including minister of foreign affairs, until he declared his presidential candidacy in 1995. His candidacy was the result of an alliance of the major political parties in Uganda, the Uganda People's Congress and

the Democratic Party, under the organisation of the Inter-Political Forces Cooperation (IPFC). The other challenger was Muhammad Mayanja, a university professor with no political experience. The election was not a multiparty election, and campaigning on party platforms was supposedly illegal. However, most Ugandans knew that Ssemogerere supported change to a multiparty system and Museveni supported the movement system. Furthermore, the IPFC actually had party campaign offices in many parts of the country and distributed its party platform.

Most Western donors provided funding for the 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections, although some, like the US, directed their funding to non-governmental organisations which provided election observers, training of journalists and other similar activities, as opposed to funding the elections through the government's electoral commission. The European donors' major criticism during the election preparations was that Museveni's two opponents in the presidential race were not allowed the same lengthy campaign period as he enjoyed, and this point raised questions about Museveni's commitment to a free election (Reuters, 10 Apr. 1996). Other questions about the fairness of both of the elections included the *mchaka mchaka* political education courses unduly influencing voters against opposition candidates, concerns about unequal access to the media for opposition candidates, and the misuse of government cars and positions to campaign. Museveni won the presidential election with 74.2 per cent of the vote, although Ssemogerere won in several northern districts, sometimes winning 90 per cent of the vote (*The New Vision*, 11 May 1996).

The 1996 presidential election was deemed a 'step forward' by many Western diplomats, although before the election some diplomats privately questioned how the election could be fair because of the fact that political parties were not able to organise to compete with the political machinery of the NRM (Reuters, 6 May 1996). Despite private reservations, the official donor attitude was that the losers of the election should not contest the results. When Paul Ssemogerere went to the European Union Parliamentary Committee on Development to complain about the unfairness of the election, the committee told him to accept his defeat (*The New Vision*, 3 June 1996).

The parliamentary elections, held more than a month after the presidential elections, were deemed open and transparent, although irregularities also took place, and the elections had a much lower voter turn-out than did the presidential election. IPFC leaders claimed that the low turnout was the result of their supporters' disillusionment with

the presidential election. However, local newspaper surveys showed that many Ugandans considered the presidential election to have been the important one; some Ugandans claimed they were just tired of the whole campaign and election business (*The Monitor*, Kampala, 28–29 June 1996; *The New Vision*, 28 June 1996). The parliamentary elections resulted in a majority of NRM supporters in parliament, although many multiparty candidates also won seats.

REASONS FOR DONORS' CHOICE OF PERSUASION/DIALOGUE TACTICS

Several factors explain donors' decisions to use the persuasion/dialogue method instead of political conditionality to influence whether Uganda held the CA, presidential and parliamentary elections on a multiparty basis. It is important to keep in mind that at no time did Western diplomats give up on the idea of eventual multipartyism in Uganda; it is only that their method of influence did not involve political conditionality. Although official donor statements generally expressed the view that 'the Ugandan people should decide what form of government they will have' (*The East African*, Nairobi, 5–11 June 1995), in private, donor officials clearly expressed to Ugandan government officials that in order to have 'full democracy', Uganda would need to hold multiparty elections (Hauser 1994–5).

In choosing which tactic to use, donors recognised the destruction from which Uganda was attempting to recover, and appreciated the fact that NRM officials were willing to listen to donor ideas about political and economic reform. Donor officials also recognised that the NRM government had put into place some political reforms which were improvements over previous Ugandan governments (Hauser 1994–5). However, these factors alone do not explain why donors chose not to use political conditionality in pressuring for political reform in Uganda. The donor–Ugandan discussions before the CA elections and during the CA clearly showed that donors did not view Uganda as democratic, despite the reforms that the NRM government claimed were democratic; donors argued that the country needed a multiparty system. The most influential factors in determining donor treatment of Uganda during this time were the following: the fact that Uganda was undertaking and achieving great success with economic liberalisation policies; the need on the part of some donor countries to promote a success story in Africa, and the way in which Uganda fitted that role; and the role that President Museveni took on as a regional leader, and

Western reliance on Museveni to play that role. The rest of this section will focus on these issues.

Uganda as a success story

As mentioned earlier, President Museveni radically modified his thinking regarding economic policy in his first years as president. Changing from an anti-IMF stance in 1986, Museveni agreed in 1987 that Uganda would follow IMF-recommended economic policies. Museveni clearly recognised that he could not rebuild Uganda's devastated economy and infrastructure without assistance from Western donors. More important to donors than Uganda's strict adherence to IMF recommendations was the fact that the economy grew. One British economist working in the Ugandan Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning claimed that in reality Uganda did not exactly follow IMF recommendations, but because the government could bring about good results, donors overlooked this point (Hauser 1994-5). From 1991 to 1995, the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Uganda increased at an average annual rate of 6.4 per cent, and per capita GDP growth averaged over 3 per cent a year in real terms (UNDP 1995: 32). In 1994-5 Uganda's GDP grew at a rate of 10 per cent instead of the targeted 5 per cent, and inflation that year was approximately 3 per cent (*The New Vision*, 16 June 1995). Therefore, official economic indicators show that Uganda's economy did well in the early 1990s, amidst reports of economic decline in many other African countries. The significance of this economic success was that donors remained reluctant to threaten political conditionality for fear of upsetting the economic balance in Uganda.

Uganda's overall success was important because of donor governments' need to have success stories, especially in Africa. Some donor officials stressed the importance of Uganda succeeding so that it could be a role model for other African countries (Hauser 1994-5). Besides being a role model, Uganda's success satisfied donor needs in other ways. Western donor aid agencies must justify their programmes to legislatures and citizens back home. If programmes in Africa are seen to be unsuccessful and failing, it is difficult to justify continued funding in times of budget cutbacks. As one US official said, 'If you're serious about democracy in Africa, if you're serious about development in Africa, [your programme] should work in Uganda. If it can't work in Uganda, it can't work' (Hauser 1994-5).

The US government and other Western governments were also

criticised by academics and politicians in recipient countries during this time period for forcing Western economic programmes on developing countries, especially in Africa. The major criticisms were that these programmes did not work and that donors imposed dangerous and useless goals on weak countries. Therefore, being able to point to an African success story where economic programmes worked was very important, because failures in other African countries could then be attributed to lack of cooperation by recipient governments, rather than to problems with donors' programmes.

Museveni's role in donor foreign policy goals

Lack of donor political conditionality on Uganda was also due in part to the fact that donors, particularly the US and Great Britain, relied on President Museveni's leadership in the region for their foreign policy goals. Museveni has proved himself to be a reliable partner to the West in the post-Cold War era. The first half of the 1990s decade saw the continuation of a civil war in Sudan, anarchy in Somalia, massacres in Rwanda and Burundi, and uncertainty in Kenya. Uganda was an 'island of stability' in the midst of chaos. In several situations President Museveni held the position of interlocutor for the US in the region. The war in northern Uganda has been described by many as a fight not only between the NRM government and the Lord's Resistance Army rebels, but between the Ugandan government and the Sudanese government, which allegedly provides support to the rebels. President Museveni has been an ally to the US government in its relations with the government of Sudan. Museveni also cooperated with Western governments by providing a regional hub for logistical support after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. If donors had openly pressured President Museveni on the multiparty issue, a contentious one for him, they would have risked losing a valuable partner. Because Western governments needed President Museveni's leadership in the volatile region, they used a less confrontational approach when attempting to influence political reforms in Uganda.

DANGERS IN THE DONOR-UGANDAN RELATIONSHIP

Some of the ways in which Western donors have treated Uganda in the pursuit of democratisation are dangerous for long-term sustainable democracy in Uganda. In various ways, donors have de-emphasised the problems which seriously divide the country. Identifying these

problems should not diminish recognition of what the NRM government has done for Uganda, but rather highlight the fact that what has been achieved can easily be lost if the problems are not resolved. Uganda is a more divided country today than it was when the NRM came to power in 1986. Corruption is rampant, and regionalism and ethnicity continue to be the usual means of determining who gets what in the political and economic arenas. The war in northern Uganda has intensified since 1995, with newer insurgencies in other areas of the country. There is an increasing lack of tolerance and cooperation between the NRM and the political parties. Whereas in the early years of the NRM government, the leadership of both the NRM and most of the political parties displayed a spirit of reconciliation and cooperation, currently there is less tolerance and compromise. In fact, the groups' respective positions have become more extreme and intransigent. Much of the blame for this lack of tolerance lies with Ugandan political leaders who appear more interested in personal gain than in unity and progress in Uganda. Part of the blame also lies with donor priorities, which assumed that eventual multipartyism would solve these problems, and with donors' lack of diplomatic pressure on the NRM to cooperate with other groups to solve Uganda's fundamental political problems. Donor priorities for democratic reform in Uganda have focused mainly on institutions and have ignored the growing political divisiveness which threatens to undermine political reforms already put into place.

The dangers for future democracy in Uganda lie not in the lack of donor political conditionality to pursue a multiparty system in Uganda, but rather in the factors which influenced donors not to use political conditionality, and in donor emphasis on particular political institutions. This section will discuss four major dangers: lack of donor attention to how political problems threatened successful economic reforms; donor emphasis on the institutions of democracy instead of attention to managing conflict and building a spirit of cooperation in the political arena; the ways in which donor foreign policy interests lessened the effect of the pursuit of democratisation; and inconsistencies in how donors handled their support for democratisation.

Donor neglect of the effects of political problems on economic success

Lack of donor attention to how political problems pose threats to Uganda's economic success has proved to be dangerous both for Uganda's economy and for the possibility of sustainable democracy.

Political and economic reforms can reinforce one another if implemented carefully. Overlooking political problems will eventually have an adverse effect on the economy in Uganda. Furthermore, the methods donors have used to pursue economic reforms in Uganda have reinforced divisive politics. In new democracies, consensus among the major political actors as to which economic policy should be followed is necessary (van de Walle 1995: 138). In Uganda during the early 1990s, more discussions on economic policy apparently took place between NRM government officials and donors, than between the NRM and opposing Ugandan political leaders. The exclusion opened up the possibility for opposition politicians to emphasise regional differences in the levels of deprivation that some Ugandans were experiencing due to economic reforms, and to alienate segments of Ugandan's population from the NRM government.

Two of the most serious political problems not addressed during the early 1990s were corruption and the growing alienation of opposing political forces in Uganda. Since that time, the alienation of political forces in Uganda has become more extreme, and accusations that the NRM government is mainly for people from President Museveni's region are more common. The growing alienation of political forces has led to more rebel groups and violence in Uganda. This situation threatens foreign investment to Uganda, as well as Uganda's tourist industry.

Since the early 1990s, donors have more seriously addressed the problem of corruption. Meanwhile, some government officials have grown quite wealthy because of corruption, and poverty in Uganda remains a serious problem. The growing gap between wealthy officials and poor average Ugandans threatens to lessen Ugandan popular support for economic reforms, and also to lessen support for democratisation because neither economic reforms nor political reforms have resulted in economic improvements for many Ugandans.

Donor neglect of divisive politics

As mentioned earlier, donor support for democracy usually takes the form of support to put into place the institutions of democracy. There is nothing inherently wrong with this support. However, when the power dynamics in a country are not addressed, and when underlying political conflicts are not solved or at least cooperatively managed by opposing political forces, the politics in a country can undermine whatever democratic institutions and processes are put into place. In

the case of Uganda, even though donors did not place political conditions on the NRM government to force the holding of multiparty elections, many Western embassy officials privately conveyed the message to NRM government officials that Uganda needed a multiparty system of government. Therefore, the problem is not that Western donors did not force Uganda to move to a multiparty system through political conditionality, but that the efforts to convince the NRM government to allow more political reform focused on implementing a multiparty system, instead of finding solutions to the widening political divisions in the country.

Donors lost an opportunity in the early 1990s to build upon the existing goodwill among the majority of opposing political forces. Instead of focusing their persuasion tactics on change to a multiparty system, donors could have worked together to convince or pressure the NRM government to build upon the policy of inclusiveness it displayed in the late 1980s and to assist government and opposition politicians to find effective processes for solving political conflict.

Donor foreign policy interests

The influence of donors' foreign policy interests on determining how they pressured for political reform also posed dangers to sustainable democracy in Uganda. Because donors needed President Museveni's cooperation in the region, they had less clout to push for democratic reforms, whether or not those reforms moved Uganda to a multiparty system and whether or not political conditionality was used. This is not to say that donor officials did not discuss Uganda's political problems with the president and other top Ugandan officials. However, the diplomatic relationships made it more difficult for donor officials to push for reforms in areas where President Museveni disagreed. As shown in the discussions between donors and the NRM government regarding the CA elections, the situation became one of political negotiation for what President Museveni would accept, rather than discussion of how best to solve Uganda's political problems.

In recent years, the label 'new leaders' (Ottaway 1999) has been coined to describe President Museveni and a few other African leaders who supposedly want to bring a new form of political leadership to African countries which will result in greater political stability, economic growth, self-reliance and improved human rights. However, Western governments, especially the United States, have been accused of giving these new leaders undeserved favourable treatment, including

choosing to ignore political problems in their countries. The danger is that Western donors' need to keep 'new leaders' such as Museveni as allies lessens the effectiveness of any democratisation reforms pursued. Museveni's ability to keep the CA elections on a movement basis instead of a multiparty basis shows the significant power a 'new leader' can have over donors.

Donor inconsistency in implementation

Inconsistencies in how donor democratisation policies have been carried out pose further dangers to sustainable democracy in Uganda. These inconsistencies take place at several levels. Because Western governments publicly declared in the early 1990s that democratisation was their priority in deciding which African countries would receive foreign aid, when other factors such as those discussed above came into play, the governments which were coerced into holding multiparty elections complained that they had been treated unfairly. Supporters of multipartyism in Uganda also criticised the inconsistency, saying donors should have insisted on multiparty elections in Uganda as they did in Kenya (Hauser 1994-5). Inconsistency among donors also exists in their attempts to influence political reform, even within one recipient country. As the case of the US embassy's press release in May 1995 shows, there is often a difference in strategy between how European governments and the US support democratisation. United public donor stances such as the one pressuring President Moi to implement political reform in Kenya are rare. While European and US diplomats privately express similar goals for democracy in Uganda, their public statements have been inconsistent.

Even in the relationship between one donor government and one recipient government, inconsistencies arise in how different donor government agencies handle democratisation. The US-Ugandan relationship provides a good example. Writers of the *USAID Country Program Strategic Plan, Uganda 1992-96* argued that the NRM government sincerely desired democracy and was open in its method of pursuing the democratisation process. The analysis in the report also showed that USAID officials working in Uganda clearly recognised the possibility that the new constitution would not necessarily include a multiparty system, claiming, 'It seems likely that the NRM is going to preclude partisan politics in the near future, but it might be persuaded to allow the parties gradually to resurface as "public interest" bodies, lobbies, etc.' (USAID, no date (b): 179). Writers of the report argued that political pluralism was not to be defined merely as political parties,

and that 'if social organizations are numerous, diverse, healthy, and free to exert influence, the political function is ipso facto being performed and the restriction of political parties qua parties is less serious' (USAID, no date (b): 183). The report expressed confidence that Ugandans would choose a workable formula of governance and that the US government need only support the process indirectly (USAID, no date (a): 56). In 1995, the US embassy's 12 May press release and the deputy chief of mission's October speech calling for a multiparty system in the new constitution were clearly inconsistent with this report. Both the press release and the statement were overt attempts to push the NRM government to agree to a multiparty system in Uganda. Therefore, even within one donor government's relationship with one recipient country, there have been inconsistencies in the messages given by different donor government offices. The danger of these various levels of inconsistency is that they are confusing to recipient government leaders, who at best will not be able to follow the changing guidelines even if they are willing, and at worst can manipulate the ambiguity of the inconsistencies.

In summary, there are dangers in how the donor-Ugandan relationship has evolved that could threaten Uganda's prospects for long-term sustainable democracy. Even in a country such as Uganda, which has enjoyed economic growth and good relations with Western donors, more care should have been taken to remove the political obstacles to more sustainable political reform. First, donors overlooked the linkage between existing political problems in Uganda and future economic and political problems. Second, even within donor diplomatic efforts to support democracy, the type of political reform that donors emphasised was not the most effective to solve Uganda's political problems. Donors lost the opportunity during a moment of political goodwill and a fairly friendly political atmosphere to focus on coalition-building processes in addition to their support to build democratic political institutions. Third, donor foreign policy goals have frequently conflicted with goals to support democratisation in Uganda, thereby lessening the effectiveness of diplomatic messages that donors want more political reform. Lastly, inconsistencies in donor handling of Uganda have lessened the impact of donor influence on the democratisation process.



Although donor treatment of Uganda in the early 1990s, especially on the multiparty issue, has frequently been considered unique, the factors

which influenced donors' decisions regarding democratisation in Uganda are more universal than the case may at first suggest. The case of Uganda shows that donors do indeed hold foreign policy interests in Africa, and that these interests affect how they pursue democratic reforms in specific African countries, even in heavily aid-dependent countries. Donors also consider a country's level of economic reform and success when deciding how to pursue political reforms in that country.

The dangers in donor treatment of Uganda are also relevant for other African countries. Donor emphasis on economic reform and the conflict between donor foreign policy interests and the pursuit of democratic reforms pose similar threats to successful democratisation in other African countries. Donors are inconsistent in their support of political reforms in many African countries. And the lack of donor emphasis on coalition-building and conflict resolution techniques to address the varying levels of political power and interests in the political arena holds the same threat for many other African countries as it does for Uganda.

It would be untrue to claim that donors have had no positive effect on the political reform process; Western countries have funded crucial activities to support the democratisation process in Uganda. Donor funding supported the CA elections, aspects of the 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections, as well as human rights organisations, women's legal aid organisations, civic education, voter education, support for judicial reform, police training for respect of human rights, simplified translations of the new constitution into local languages, and discussions on Uganda's constitution and other Ugandan political issues. These activities have all contained the potential to make a difference. However, the message supportive of democracy given by these donor-funded activities has been contradicted by the overall context of donor-Uganda relations.

Even legitimate democratic reforms which have been put into place in African countries can be undermined if the democratisation process is not handled well. Donor efforts and actions to promote democracy can actually hurt prospects for sustainable democracy if they are not well planned and consistent. It seems as if the general rule is often that whatever effort is put into promoting democracy cannot hurt. However, if donors continue to give conflicting messages about their priorities, there will be deleterious results. Donor inconsistency in how political reform is approached can also lessen the likelihood sustainable democracy will take root. Furthermore, democracy can be dangerous and volatile in unstable countries, if care is not taken to address

underlying issues of power and political interests and to build coalitions and conflict resolution processes.

Forcing a country to peaceful, sustainable democracy is not within donor governments' control. The drive and commitment for democracy must come from citizens and leaders themselves. However, as the case of Uganda shows, resolution of the conflict between donors' interests and democratisation programmes, and recognition of the need for coalition-building methods in addition to democratic political institutions could provide the opportunity for more positive results.

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