

# The Politics of HIV/AIDS in Uganda

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## Acronyms

<b>ABC</b>	abstinence, being faithful, condom use
<b>ACP</b>	AIDS Control Programme
<b>AIC</b>	AIDS Information Centre
<b>AIDS</b>	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
<b>AMREF</b>	African Medical and Research Foundation
<b>ARV</b>	antiretroviral
<b>CBO</b>	community-based organization
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>FBO</b>	faith-based organization
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>GTZ</b>	German Agency for Technical Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit)
<b>HIPC</b>	heavily indebted poor countries
<b>HIV</b>	human immunodeficiency virus
<b>ICASA</b>	International Conference on AIDS and STDs in Africa
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IRIN</b>	Integrated Regional Information Networks
<b>JCRC</b>	Joint Clinical Research Centre
<b>MFPED</b>	Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>NRM</b>	National Resistance Movement
<b>PLWHA</b>	People Living With HIV/AIDS
<b>STD</b>	sexually transmitted disease
<b>TASO</b>	The AIDS Support Organization
<b>THETA</b>	Traditional and Modern Health Practitioners Together Against AIDS
<b>UAC</b>	Uganda AIDS Commission
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UPDF</b>	Uganda People's Defence Force
<b>UWESO</b>	Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

## Summary/Résumé/Resumen

### *Summary*

This paper traces Uganda's experience of HIV/AIDS, and the reaction of the government, civil society and communities of Uganda to the epidemic.

The motives underlying the decision in 1986 of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government to admit there was an HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country are examined. While the HIV prevalence rate was documented to have started dropping as of 1993, it was not until 2000 that President Yoweri Museveni began using the HIV/AIDS epidemic as a success story. The paper notes that from the mid-1990s, the earlier political and economic gains of President Museveni's government were being seriously eroded by rising economic mismanagement, high-level corruption, maintenance of a de facto one-party state, failure to pacify the northern half of the country, the fomenting of regional instability and attendant human rights violations. As a consequence, by 2000 there was a need to project positive achievements—such as the reduction in HIV prevalence—to galvanize support for the flagging fortunes of the NRM government, especially with regard to sustaining donor support. In doing this, the NRM government was helped by donor dynamics, as well as by politics in the United States where Right-wing Republicans used Uganda as an example to showcase the “human side” of President George W. Bush's administration.

This paper examines the roles of various players—donors, government, non-governmental organizations, faith- and community-based organizations, and families—in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. It argues that their contributions have been appropriated in a shameless piece of political gamesmanship. The paper also points to some of the critical actions necessary to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with specific reference to Uganda.

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### *Résumé*

Ce document retrace l'expérience ougandaise du VIH/Sida et la réaction du gouvernement, de la société civile et de la population ougandaise à l'épidémie.

L'auteur examine les motifs qui ont poussé le gouvernement du National Resistance Movement (NRM—Mouvement de résistance nationale) à admettre qu'il y avait une épidémie de VIH/Sida dans le pays. Si, selon les statistiques, le taux de prévalence du VIH a commencé à baisser dès 1993, ce n'est qu'à partir de 2000 que le Président Yoweri Museveni s'est mis à présenter l'histoire de l'épidémie de VIH/Sida comme celle d'une réussite. L'auteur note qu'à partir de 1995 environ, les avancées politiques et économiques antérieures du gouvernement du Président Museveni avaient été éclipsées par une mauvaise gestion économique en constante augmentation, la corruption, qui sévissait à un niveau élevé, le maintien de fait d'un Etat à parti unique et l'incapacité de pacifier la moitié Nord du pays, facteur d'instabilité pour la région et à l'origine de nombreuses violations des droits de l'homme. Il était donc temps en 2000 de présenter des réalisations positives—telles que la baisse de la prévalence du VIH—pour rallier des appuis au gouvernement du NRM, que la chance semblait bouter, et surtout s'assurer le soutien de donateurs fidèles. Ce faisant, le gouvernement du NRM a bénéficié d'un mouvement favorable de la part des donateurs, ainsi que du climat politique aux Etats-Unis, où les républicains de droite ont vu dans l'Ouganda un exemple propre à mettre en évidence le “côté humain” de l'administration du Président George W. Bush.

L'auteur examine ici le rôle de divers acteurs—donateurs, gouvernement, organisations non gouvernementales, organisations communautaires, organismes d'inspiration religieuse et familles—dans la lutte contre le VIH/Sida. Il montre que l'on s'est approprié leurs contributions

par un stratagème politique éhonté. Il évoque aussi quelques initiatives essentielles à prendre pour maîtriser l'épidémie de VIH/Sida, en se référant au contexte particulier de l'Ouganda.

Joseph Tumushabe est chargé de cours au Département des études démographiques de l'Institut de statistique et d'économie appliquée, Université de Makerere, Ouganda.

### ***Resumen***

Este estudio describe la experiencia de Uganda con el VIH/SIDA, y la reacción del gobierno, la sociedad civil y las comunidades de dicho país ante esta epidemia.

Se estudian los motivos que inspiraron la decisión en 1986 del gobierno del Movimiento de Resistencia Nacional (NRM, por sus siglas en inglés) de admitir que había una epidemia del VIH/SIDA en el país. Aunque existen pruebas de que la tasa del VIH comenzó a bajar desde 1993, hasta el año 2000 el Presidente Yoweri Museveni no empezó a presentar la lucha contra el VIH/SIDA como un éxito. El documento señala que desde mediados de los años 90, los previos logros políticos y económicos del gobierno del Presidente Museveni estaban siendo gravemente erosionados por la creciente mala gestión, el alto nivel de corrupción, el mantenimiento de un Estado formado de facto por un solo partido, el fracaso en la pacificación de la mitad norte del país, el fomento de la inestabilidad regional y las consiguientes violaciones de derechos humanos. Como consecuencia de ello, en 2000 existía una necesidad de proyectar una imagen de éxito—como la reducción en la tasa del VIH—para galvanizar el apoyo a favor del futuro vacilante del gobierno NRM, particularmente en lo que concierne el mantenimiento de ayuda financiera. Mediante esta actuación, el gobierno NRM fue ayudado por la dinámica de los donantes y por la política de Estados Unidos ya que los republicanos de derecha usaron el ejemplo de Uganda para mostrar el lado más humano del gobierno del Presidente George W. Bush.

Este estudio examina el papel de distintos actores—donantes, gobiernos, organizaciones no gubernamentales, organizaciones basadas en grupos religiosos y comunidades, y familias—en la lucha contra el VIH/SIDA. Sostiene que sus contribuciones han sido apropiadas mediante una descarada maniobra de táctica política. El estudio también indica algunas de las medidas cruciales que han de tomarse para contrarrestar la epidemia del VIH/SIDA, centrándose particularmente en Uganda.

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