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**CASTLE WEBINAR PRESENTATION**

**COVID-19: OPPORTUNITY TO THRIVE  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**Presented by  
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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the fragility of the international system as it fueled changes in alliances, institutions and the global economy. Governments were very quick to close borders and suspend international flights in a bid to curtail the spread of the virus. The pandemic has accelerated changes in international relations as nations responded by stepping away from each other rather than taking steps to tackle the crisis together. Borders between African countries were closed resulting in the unprecedented build up of cargo transporters at many borders. On the world stage, some nations are increasingly asserting themselves as others retreat from the global scene. Regionally, tensions developed between neighbors as countries pursued different strategies to contain the spread of the virus.

How is this global pandemic changing the nature of international and regional affairs? How can it be used to foster international and regional cooperation instead of promoting disintegrative tendencies within the global system – as nations seek to disconnect themselves? How can the pandemic be used as an impetus for countries working more closely together instead of as an opportunity to gain advantage in geopolitical competition? How can Uganda benefit in the changing regional and internationally scene? These are some of the questions that this webinar is addressing.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND TO UGANDA’S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

### **2.1 Introducing International Relations**

Professor Charles A. McClelland defines International Relations as the study of the relations of states with each other and with international organizations and certain sub-national entities (bureaucracies, political parties, and interest groups).

International Relations is concerned with relations across boundaries of nation-states. It addresses international political economy, global governance, intercultural relations, national and ethnic identities, foreign policy analysis, development studies, environment, international security, diplomacy, terrorism, media, social movements and more.

As the world around us changes and evolves, so does the conduct of foreign affairs and international relations. We are in a state of constant challenges and opportunities. The institutional framework for conducting international relations and foreign policy implementation has changed. Now, more than ever before, foreign policy formulation and implementation is carried out by many actors and stakeholders.



President Yoweri Museveni, in his State of the Nation Address, delivered on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2016, placed strong emphasis on East Africa's integration. He pointed out, *"the political and economic integration of East Africa is not just for sentimental reasons. It is in order to ensure our prosperity.... The 160 million people East African market should be used to pull investments for the prosperity of our people"*. Therefore, deepening and strengthen regional cooperation has been one of the key focus of Uganda's foreign policy.

## **2.2 Brief History Of Uganda's International And Regional Relations**

### **2.2.1 Arab Traders and the Introduction Of Islam**

The first recorded major contact between people living in the geographical entity now called Uganda was the coming of the Arab long distance traders in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Their interest as is often the case was trade. Ahmed Bin Ibrahim arrived in Buganda and with his coming Islam was introduced in the region.

### **2.2.2 European Explorers, Christian Missionaries and the Introduction of Christianity**

John Hannington Speke, Grant and other explorers together with missionaries introduced Uganda to the rest of the world through their stories and writings. This led to a large influx of Christian missionaries and paved way for the spread of Christianity.

### **2.2.3 The Establishment Of The British Protectorate and the Drawing Of Uganda's Borders**

In 1894, Uganda was declared a British protectorate and borders were irrationally and unilaterally drawn causing separation of kith and kin across the borders. This has continued to be a source of conflict and tension between Uganda and neighboring countries due to the overlapping nature of border tribes.

### **2.2.4 The 1960s and 1970s**

At Independence in 1962, Uganda joined the British Commonwealth and maintained close relationships with the colonial master – Britain. In the region, the East African Community bringing together Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania was founded in 1967. With the declaration of the Common Man's charter and proposed nationalization of the economy in 1967, there was a move towards the left (socialism). The thought of Uganda becoming a socialist state might have forced the capitalist countries to consider removing President Obote from power.

Idi Amin's coming to power in 1971 led to major shifts. His declaration of "Economic War" and expulsion of the Asians resulted in international condemnation and isolation of Uganda from the rest of the world. In 1976, Uganda's offering of sanctuary to the Air France plane hijacked by Palestinian terrorists at Entebbe further gave Uganda a very negative international reputation. The country was to be further humiliated when Israel launched operation



thunderbolt and rescued the hostages from Entebbe Airport. During this time, Uganda became a member of the Organization of Islamic Countries and got support from Arab Countries. In 1977 the East African Community collapsed.

### **2.2.5 The 1980s to Date**

In the first half of the decade there was a restoration of multiparty democracy though the 1980 National Elections ended in contention and civil war. The NRM captured power in the second half of the decade. Although initially the NRM was thought to be a Marxist movement, when they captured power, they embarked on the implementation of Neo-liberal Economic policies with strong support from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Bi-lateral relations with western countries especially USA and UK have been cordial.

In the period since 1986, among other things:

1. Two US presidents have visited Uganda
2. Uganda hosted CHOGM in 2007
3. Uganda has participated in peace keeping missions in Liberia and Somalia (AMISOM)
4. The East African Community has been revived and the East African passport launched.
5. Uganda has intervened in regional conflicts in Rwanda, DRC and South Sudan
6. There has been increased Foreign Direct Investments in banking, telecommunication and other service sectors

In more recent times, Uganda has started leaning more towards China with Chinese government funds helping in Uganda's infrastructural development.

### **2.3 Regional And International Bodies Uganda Is Affiliated To**

Uganda is affiliated to many regional and international bodies including:

- a) The East African Community (EAC)
- b) EAC-COMESA-SADC Tripartite arrangements (To reduce overlap and enhance efficiency)
- c) The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)
- d) The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)
- e) The African Union
- f) The Nile Basin Cooperative Framework
- g) Africa Caribbean Pacific-European Union Agreement (ACP-EU)



- h) Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)
- i) India-Africa Cooperation
- j) Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD)
- k) Afro-Arab Cooperation
- l) The Commonwealth
- m) The United Nations (UN)

### **3.0 RECENT REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS TRENDS**

#### **3.1 Multi-Polar World As Opposed To Bi-Polar System And Challenge To The Super-Power Notion**

Politically, countries and non-state actors alike, continue to challenge the super-power notion that dominated international discourse not too long ago. The collapse of the USSR, the rise of China and the declining influence of Western Europe have led to emergence of new actors on the global stage.

#### **3.2 Rise Of Terrorism And Challenges To Global Peace And Security**

Despite efforts to ensure peace and security, new challenges continue to emerge. By 2014, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace, there was a nine-fold increase in the number of deaths from terrorism since 2000, rising from 3,329 to 32,685 in 2014.

Apart from Al-Qaeda and ISIS, there has been an emergence of ‘home grown’ terrorist organizations in Africa, such as the LRA, Al-Shabab and Boko Haram. Their threats not only affect national security, but also regional and international peace and security.

#### **3.3 Migrations and Human Trafficking**

Lately, human and drug trafficking have been on the increase, and undermine peace and security. This has led to devastating effects in terms of loss of human lives through drowning at the sea in places like the Gulf of Guinea, and the Mediterranean Sea. Uganda has had a fair share of being a center for drug trafficking and human trafficking with Uganda girls being ‘exported’ to the Middle East.



### **3.4 Humanitarian Interventions**

The nature and conduct of international politics is also changing. Humanitarian intervention has somehow become an important value. Individually or collectively, countries can directly intervene; even cause regime change in other countries, all in the name of the responsibility to protect. While it is conceptually a good principle, for countries to protect their citizens against mass atrocities such as genocide, its enforcement and effects has thus far left divided opinion. Libya is one example where humanitarian intervention has had disastrous consequences.

### **3.5 The Growth Of Social Media In Shaping International Public Opinion**

High use of mobile phones, very high Internet penetration and technological advances has unleashed almost uncontrollable social media platforms that are used by many to incite violence against governments. There is no telling how much political and economic damage this can cause to states.

### **3.6 Challenges Of Youthful And Growing Population**

On the socio-economic front, issues like demography and the population explosion have become important. Not only do they affect national planning, but also cause diverse effects on the environment and climate change. In addition, population growth has exacerbated the growing demand for energy resources, sometimes heightening the risk of tensions among nations due to increased competition.

### **3.7 ICT And The Global Village Concept**

ICT continues to revolutionalise our way of life. Financially, it has provided a platform to transfer money to the remotest parts of the country, through mobile phones. Overnight, it has transformed commerce and trade. But most important, it has facilitated instant communication and exchange of information between people worlds apart.

However, it has created problems of its own for the international community to contend with. Crimes previously unknown, such as cyber crime have become commonplace. Money laundering is also on the rise. By its illicit nature, it is difficult to have accurate estimates. However, the United Nations Office on drugs and Crime estimates that, 2 -5 percent of global GDP, or between USD 800 billion – 2 trillion is laundered globally every year.

### **3.8 Climate Change and Social Development Goals**

There is also the international financial problem, which has refused to go away, affecting big and small countries alike. With new international financing requirements for climate change and sustainable development goals, big financing gaps exist. Inevitably, developing countries such as Uganda, as well as regional



and sub-regional organizations must find ways to generate their own monies to finance their priorities. As austerity measures increase across Europe, bilateral and multilateral funding are bound to reduce, as it is happening with AMISOM. Foreign direct investment is also likely to reduce, at least in the short term.

### **3.9 The Rise of China and Re-alignment of International Trade**

There is need to take interest in what is going on around the trade and investment arena, especially among the big economies. How can our small economies survive, in the face of increasing trade and investment cooperation among big powers?

In 2015, trade volumes between China and the United States, according to the Government of China, reached USD 558.4 billion, making China the second largest trading partner with the United States. Yet, the two countries are negotiating a Bilateral Investment Treaty, with a view to further strengthen their trade and investment portfolio.

On the other hand, according to the European Commission, EU's investment in the United States is around eight times the amount of EU's investment in India and China. Together, the economies of the EU and US account for about half of the entire world GDP, and for nearly one third of the world's trade flows.

Yet, the European Commission and the United States are holding talks for a trade and investment agreement to increase trade and investment among them. According to the European Union Commission, eliminating or harmonizing one quarter of existing non-tariff barriers in trade alone, could boost a combined EU and US GDP by USD 106 billion annually.

### **3.10 The Rise Of Nationalism, Brexit And The Rise Of Nationalist Political Parties And Movements**

Brexit posed a threat to the EU and there is still doubt whether the remaining members can continue to hold together. Similar leave sentiments are more pronounced in Spain, Italy, Greece and Hungary. There has been emergence of groups that seek disengagement from the Global Community.

The Trump phenomenon, Trumpism and 'America First' Policy. The arrival of Trump on the Global stage rattled the players on the international scene. His America First policy meant less commitment to NATO, withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord, Withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal and re-negotiations of Trade deals with China, Canada and Mexico. The Trump Presidency also saw less interest and interference in African Countries.





## **4.0 GAPS EXPOSED AND CHALLENGES POSED BY THE PANDEMIC**

### **4.1 GAPS EXPOSED BY COVID-19**

#### **4.1.1 Unpreparedness by states and health systems to deal with the pandemic**

There was no risk management plans, lack of early warning systems. The international community was caught flat-footed. There were no contingency plans or worst-case risk management and mitigation plans

#### **4.1.2 Lack Of Consensus Among Leaders**

Despite posturing by states and politicians, COVID 19 exposed lack of consensus among leaders in time of adversity. Within the EU for example, each country pursued different strategies. The EU took so long to agree on how to provide funding to countries like Italy and Spain that were badly hit by the pandemic. In the East African Community, the issue of testing truck drivers could not be resolved in time as each country pursued a different policy.

#### **4.1.3 Weaknesses of National Health Systems**

Health systems in the Western World - which were thought to be robust and efficient - struggled to cope with the pandemic. The sight of Cuban doctors arriving in Italy to provide support to their counterparts showed that developing countries might have something to offer to the developed world.

#### **4.1.4 Over Dependence on China**

The world's over-dependent on China for manufacturing was exposed. There was competition for supplies all over the world and China became the leading supplier of PPEs because of their strong manufacturing base.

### **4.2 CHALLENGES POSED BY COVID-19**

#### **4.2.1 Restriction Of Global Movements And Closure Of Borders**

#### **4.2.2 Disruption Of Global Supply Chains**

#### **4.2.3 Collapse And Grounding Of Businesses- Airlines, Hotels, Tourism.**

#### **4.2.4 Unbridled Competition For Supplies Especially Testing Kits And Ppes**

#### **4.2.5 Failure To Find A Common Strategy And Lack Of Coordination On The Global Stage**





## **5.0 OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Developing A Rapid Response Plan Of Action**

There is an opportunity for Uganda and the rest of East African Community Member states to develop a rapid response plan of action to tackle crisis of such magnitude as the COVID 19 Pandemic. At the East African Community level, there is need for coordinated response in managing pandemics and disasters of big magnitude.

### **5.2 Local Manufacturing**

COVID 19 has created demand for PPEs, which can spur local manufacturing and inter-state trade. The Import Substitution strategy by government will save the country foreign exchange outflows and improve the Country's balance of Payment. The Ugandan Government needs to re-align the National budget in light of the COVID 19 and take advantage of the opportunities brought about by COVID 19.

### **5.3 Research**

At the initial stage in the pandemic, Ugandan doctors and scientists did very well in managing COVID 19 patients. There is a lot that our scientists can offer in terms of research on treatment and vaccines. The money saved on travel abroad and on treatment of citizens abroad can be used to promote investment in health and ICT infrastructure. There is need for the African Union to invest jointly for research and development in the areas of Vaccine development and protection against threats like bio-terrorism. Africa must avoid the unfortunate situation of always having to rely on the western world for the health and welfare of its people. While Countries like Russia, China, UK and USA are making breakthroughs in vaccine development, the whole of Africa is silent.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

Despite the devastating effect of COVID 19 in terms of loss of human lives and disruption to livelihoods and collapse of some sectors of the economy, there is a great opportunity to thrive. We need to respond with strategies that promote adaptability, resilience and coordinated leadership at national, regional and International levels.

COVID-19 can provide an opportunity to foster international and regional cooperation instead of promoting disintegrative tendencies within the global system. The pandemic can be used as an impetus for countries working more closely together instead of as an opportunity to gain advantage in geopolitical competition. It all depends on how global leaders will respond.



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## **CREDITS:**

This think piece was compiled from a brainstorming workshop organized by CASTLE on Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2020. A multi-sectoral group reviewed the information making additions and adjustments before the Lead writers produced this think piece. This is still a working document



## **ABOUT CASTLE**

The Centre for Advanced Strategic Leadership (CASTLE) is a non-profit think tank that has been established to provide research and consultancy towards approaches for addressing challenges to Africa's advancement. CASTLE is a product of the Institute for National Transformation (INT), a leadership training institution in Africa, which has since 2005 been developing transformational leaders who are serving society in a variety of sectors. INT is headquartered in Nigeria and operates in Uganda, Kenya, South Africa and Cote d'Ivoire. INT also has training centres in the United Kingdom and the United States of America for reaching out to the African diaspora. CASTLE complements INT by providing a practical platform to offer tailored interventions to specific issues that will be identified across the African continent.

## **OUR PURPOSE**

We exist to promote the application of critical thought leadership to the governance of Africa's key sectors for national transformation. We believe that while the African continent is endowed with a wealth of natural resources, a qualified and experienced workforce, and abundant opportunities, the desirable impacts of these combined attributes are often curtailed by challenges of thought leadership, governance and execution. CASTLE seeks to help bridge the gap between knowledge and practice among stakeholders in Africa's transformation, and do so in a manner that furthers national interests in all respects.

## **OUR SERVICES**

Our services include policy research, sustainable strategies for transformation, leadership and governance development, fostering constructive dialogue and innovation among others. We target the central and local governments, stakeholders of key sectors of the economy, and, public and private institutions.

## **OUR VALUES**

CASTLE conducts its work in a manner that is forthright, non-partisan, respectful of diversity, and aligned with national aspirations.

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