

REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19 POLITICS IN UGANDA

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Winning the Battle Against COVID-19 and Losing the Soul of a Nation

Uganda's Pre-existing Conditions and the
future of the Uganda National Dialogue

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On December 18, 2018, Uganda's clergy leaders under the banner of Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCUG) and the leaders of The Elders Forum of Uganda (TEFU) converged at Uganda's State House, Entebbe, the official residence of Uganda's president. Save for some years under which this residence was under renovation, incumbent President Yoweri Museveni has been the resident here for now close to 35 years. On this occasion, Mr. Museveni had invited the leaders of Uganda's major religious groupings, the leaders of TEFU and his top government officials to sign off on a communique that would provide a political framework for the convening of the [Uganda National Dialogue](#).

In this think piece, we highlight Uganda's pre-existing conditions as set out in the Uganda National Dialogue process framework paper. It is argued that these pre-existing conditions have been building up since independence in 1962 and are clearly reflected in the apparent distortions in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, we examine the directions in which the pandemic may drive the national dialogue process given its impact on the global, regional and national policy discourse. Finally, it is argued that the Uganda National Dialogue offers Ugandans a unique opportunity to confront the country's current structural "ailments" or these pre-existing conditions. While the COVID-19 response measures are needed to save lives, the Uganda National Dialogue is the fight for the soul of Uganda and how such responses preserve human dignity and the sanctity of life.

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Uganda national dialogue: Searching for common ground

The idea of a national dialogue may be traced way back to 2006 following a hotly contested presidential election between then incumbent President Museveni and Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) presidential candidate Kizza Besigye. The campaigns leading up to the elections was characterized by [violence](#) and the arrest and incarceration of [Mr. Besigye](#) on rape charges which were subsequently [withdrawn 12 years later](#). At the end of the elections, Mr. Museveni was declared winner. Mr. Besigye challenged the declaration of Mr. Museveni victory in [Uganda's Supreme Court](#) where he finally lost the petition.

The election violence and the post-election stalemate motivated Uganda's clergy leaders to call for a national dialogue. This stalemate was repeated in the run up, during and after the 2011 elections when obscene deployment of money almost collapsed the economy. The runaway inflation that followed the elections triggered [walk-to-work protests](#) in Kampala and major towns across the country. The protests as well as the brutality employed by the security forces in quelling the protests pushed the country to breaking point.

Indeed, over the period 1996-2016, the calls for a national dialogue grew louder. The clergy leaders continued to advocate for a dialogue although no tangible progress was made. The politicians in government were largely unbothered as long as they felt they were in full control and there were no credible threats to their power. The politicians in opposition political parties remained suspicious of the concept of dialogue with an "illegitimate government" and looked at the proposal for dialogue as both untenable and diversionary. At the same time, the proponents of the dialogue made no visible progress in defining the goal of the dialogue, the agenda, the participants or the modalities for such a process.

However, the violence and the political stalemate following the 2016 added a sense of urgency to convene a national dialogue. At exactly 1545 hours on February 20, 2016, then Electoral Commission Chairman Badru Kiggundu declared incumbent president Yoweri Museveni the winner of the 2016 elections. In the period prior and after the EC declaration, the offices of Uganda's leading opposition party – Forum for Democratic Change – were [raided by security forces](#), there was deafening silence in the country – no jubilations that often go with announcement of victory and no victory or concession speeches. There were worries that protests against the apparent fraud in the electoral process could lead to [escalation of violence](#). [Heavily armed military personnel](#) donning brand new military fatigue, some of them with brand new Avtomat Kalashnikova (AK-47) patrolled the streets of Kampala on brand new numberless pickup trucks.

As the air of uncertainty engulfed the country, the clergy leaders and a group of women civic leaders under the Women Situation Room (WSR) engaged in shuttle diplomacy with all the contending leaders. Their efforts helped diffuse the tensions while at the same time, according to multiple accounts, they secured a commitment from the two main protagonists – Mr. Museveni and Dr. Besigye – to support the idea of a national dialogue. At a

convening of stakeholders in July 2016, Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda gave a nod to a process of consultations over the rationale, vision and modalities for a national dialogue.

The clergy leaders joined up with The Uganda Elders Forum (TEFU) to convene a series of informal consultations with political and civic leaders as well as citizens across the country. It is estimated that through the informal consultations, an estimated 5,000 Ugandans – men, women and young people – participated in the process of diagnosing Uganda's structural brokenness that inhibit the country from making accelerate progress towards achieving equal opportunity, shared prosperity and sustainable peace. Through this process, Ugandans identified 8 pre-existing conditions that ought to be confronted and resolved if the country is to prepare itself to avoid potential crisis now and in the future. The national dialogue is designed as a platform that would enable Ugandans to break the political, ethnic, religious and other barriers that distract the country from confronting this structural brokenness. What then are these pre-existing conditions that made us unprepared for a comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Coronavirus and Uganda's pre-existing conditions

The informal consultations process identified 8 pre-existing conditions that have implications for Uganda's response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the post-pandemic recovery efforts. We briefly examine each one of these conditions.

A growing political stalemate

Uganda's political stalemate is a bubble that may burst in a not so distant future. Rooted in more than half century of political instability, the signs of this stalemate continue to show and escalate at every turn of events. After more than half a century of independence, Uganda is still held hostage to the series of political events including the violence of 1966 that implanted the military into the Nation's political life, Idi Amin's reign of terror, Museveni's 5-year guerilla war and more than two decades of insurgencies in Northern and Eastern Uganda. The progress that has been made over the last three decades of Museveni's presidency are undercut by the deepening state capture and political patronage that stands in the way of political transformation. The violence, obscene use of money and fraud that characterize the country's electoral process implies that elections and partisan engagements may not provide a pathway to the future but can only push the country towards a potential political crisis akin to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Sarah Birete has argued elsewhere, the COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges for electoral systems around the world. One of the main challenges is how to reconcile the need for extreme pandemic control measures such as lockdowns, quarantines, stay at home orders and dusk to dawn curfews with political organization and mobilization that



citizens are used to in normal times. This challenge is more pronounced in countries like Uganda where the independence of elections management bodies such as the electoral commission and the police is questionable. Indeed, when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, the Uganda Electoral Commission looked helpless as it was clearly not in control of the elections calendar. The parliament looked incapable to setting the agenda after they were infected by a Shs.10 billion virus. Consequently, the distortions in Uganda's electoral system makes diminishes its utility in helping resolve Uganda's increasing political stalemate and leaves the Uganda National Dialogue the alternative mechanism through which an alternative political consensus can be pursued.

Nations and societies that espouse a strong culture of constitutionalism are more likely to have leaders how tell the truth and obey laws as well as citizens who comply with laws and public safety guidelines without the state having to deploy strong arm tactics and measures that violate the rights of citizens. Indeed, the enforcement machinery involving a cocktail of Uganda's security forces and their allied militia group – the local defense units (LDUs) – and the human rights abuses associated with their operation is a clear manifestations of the diminishing culture of constitutionalism and lack of respect for the rule of law. Given the current political impasse and the partisanship of most institutions or citizens' lack of trust in these institutions, a national dialogue remains the only pathway for Ugandans to agree on restoring and strengthening a new constitutional culture.

Breakdown in constitutionalism and the rule of law

It is now generally acknowledged that Uganda is country that has had many constitutions since independence in 1962 but has failed to deepen the culture of constitutionalism and respect for the rule of law. Ugandans are more likely to try circumvent the constitution and rig themselves out of established rules through corruption and influence peddling. Since the 1995 constitution was promulgated, it has been changed multiple times or laws enacted to circumvent its inbuilt safeguards. In spite of the progressive reforms in the justice, law and order (JLOS) system, the citizens' trust in the institutions in the sector and government in general has diminished significantly. In effect, Uganda is generally seen as a country with a constitution but without constitutionalism – a system of governance where the power of government is limited by the rule of law – laws, checks and balances – that help reconcile authority with individual and collective freedoms.

A nation without values

Uganda suffers from a chronic breakdown in values. There is general consensus that the Ugandan society has lost its values at all levels. Shared values such as respect for life and human dignity, fairness, community, or honesty are the software upon which successful families, communities and nations are built. Such values are the wire that bids binds a



people together. In cases of a pandemic such as COVID-19, it is these same values that enable citizens to summon the best in themselves to support each other, ensure justice and comply with established laws and norms. The clergy leaders sold the idea of the Uganda National Dialogue as the platform for Ugandans engage each other and agree on a set of shared values to form the foundation for the unfinished business of nation building.

The Uganda National Dialogue remains the only credible mechanism through which Ugandan citizens can engage in an honest and non-partisan conversation to agree on a set of shared national values. By reneging on the promise of a national dialogue, both the clergy leaders and President Museveni ensured a condition that makes a dignified response to crises of the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic untenable. The violence unleashed on ordinary citizens by [UPDF allied LDU militia](#), the reported cases of corruption including an illegal allocation of Shs.10 billion to members of parliament, the incarceration of vulnerable people on account of violating curfew orders, etc are all manifestations of a society that has lost its values and is faced with a moral crisis of monumental proportion.

Harnessing diversity for development and transformation

Through the Uganda National Dialogue, the clergy leaders and Government seek to create a platform where Ugandans come together to dialogue on how to harness diversity for development and transformation. Uganda is a country of many nationalities and inherently diverse ethnically, culturally, linguistically and in many other different ways. Uganda's nations and nationalities from Karamoja to Kisoro, Bunyoro, West Nile through Acholi to Lango and Teso constitute the country's building blocks for an economically prosperous nation. Unfortunately, more than half a century of economic exclusion and inequality, ethnic marginalization, gender segregation, political persecution, hostile land grabs and other forms of inequality have piled up into volcanic mountains of injustice.

The national dialogue is envisaged as the pathway to avoid the weaponization of these diversities but rather to harness them into potential resources for development. Emerging ethnic, religious, demographic, political or economic fault lines are potential gasoline that can be lit up by any minor or major crisis or a future potential pandemic akin to COVID-19 that may end up triggering long term instability. The case of protests in Gulu [against truck drivers](#) from South Sudan, the allegations of ethnic witch hunt regarding the [arrest of officials](#) from the Office of the Prime Minister over procurement of relief food and the toxic ethnic discourse regarding the preferential repatriation of the family of a well-connected [Ugandan businessman](#) when Government had refused to repatriate other Ugandans are all manifestations of how our different nationalities can be weaponized in times of crisis.

Land, land justice, access to natural resources and environment

In spite of over two decades of reform, the crisis over land, land injustices and environmental degradation poses an existential threat to the country. Cases of land grabbing and violent eviction of citizens are ever increasing. The land administration and land adjudication systems are rigged against the poor and vulnerable segments of the population. Unprecedented degradation of the nation's wetlands, forestry ecosystems and climate change pose an eminent threat to the citizens. The war over land and access to natural resources combined with environmental distress could trigger Uganda's next crisis that could surpass the magnitude of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic triggered by the Coronavirus.

Since the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, President Museveni and other government officials have touted the resilience of local economies in weathering the potential likelihood and economic situation that could have been triggered by the pandemic. Besides Uganda's health work force, ordinary Ugandans engaged in subsistence and small scale farming are the real front line workers and heroes of the Corona Virus pandemic. Yet, the ongoing land grabs and disenfranchising of ordinary citizens pose a major threat to community resilience in cases of future crisis.

Addressing economic exclusion and reversing decades of joblessness

Uganda's economic development story is a mixed record of success, failure and recovery. The economic promise of independence in the 1960s was disrupted by Idi Amin's economic war and the nearly eight years of his reign of terror, Museveni's 5-year bush war and two decades of insurgency mainly in Eastern and Northern Uganda. In spite of the challenges posed by this vicious insurgency, Mr. Museveni's government was able to establish a longer period of stability that enabled almost two decades of sustained economic growth.

However, Uganda's economy remains a work in progress faced with many challenges. More than half a century after independence, over 68 percent of the Nation's households are still trapped in low productivity subsistence agriculture. Hundreds of thousands of educated and uneducated young people are powering onto the streets of the Nation's urban centres but can't find jobs, later on rewarding and well paying jobs. Political patronage programmes coached in sloganeering language such as Entadikwa, youth livelihood programmes, Emyoga have helped deliver political dividends but unable to address the underlying conditions of joblessness and youth unemployment. Since the bulk of Uganda's debt was forgiven under the Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative (HIPIC), runaway borrowing has led to the piling up of new debt currently standing at Shs.48.9 trillion. The country is heavily in debt and chronic corruption is a malignant cancer that is eating up many years of painful progress. Mr. Museveni's systematic efforts to build Uganda into a class society – a ruling class, a middle class and a working class – have produced economic distortions that threaten to reverse years of poverty eradication interventions.

It is very easy to blame Uganda's current economic conditions on President Museveni given that he has been president directing Uganda's economic policy for the last 34 years. However, such blame games do not take away the problem. Through the Uganda National Dialogue, the clergy leaders and government sought to mobilize Ugandans to agree on a new consensus on how to build an economy that works for everyone. Unless the clergy leaders marshal the moral courage to lead and deliver the process of dialogue, another crisis on our doorsteps may cause more economic and livelihood disruptions far worse than those triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Minimum standards of service systems

Over the years, there have been considerable attempts to improve public service delivery in critical areas including education, health, water, agricultural extension services, land administration and other areas. However, there is general consensus that access to these services and their quality has either stagnated or continue to decline. Student completion rates from primary school remains disturbingly low. When the coronavirus forced Government to hide Uganda's 15 million learners from their schools, it dawned on the country that access to digital learning facilities was not available in rural areas and low income urban households. [Jacklyn Makaaru](#) argues that Uganda's lack of preparedness means that it has reneged on the SDGs promise of no child left behind. There are widespread distortions in the health services delivery systems and the quality of health services remain poor. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the brokenness of the system as pregnant mothers were left to die as they [could not reach hospitals](#) or get attended to at health centres. Even with failures in the food distribution system, it took more than 40 days for Mr. Museveni and the clergy leaders to agree that the [religious infrastructure could be harnessed](#) to distribute food to vulnerable segments of Uganda's society.

As the framers of the Uganda National Dialogue argue, it is tempting to blame the incumbent government when service delivery systems fail. The dialogue is an opportunity to mobilize the citizens to agree on minimum standards of service delivery and share in the responsibility to ensure that the delivery systems function. Unless this problem is addressed, another pandemic of the magnitude of COVID-19 or even worse could overwhelm our public service delivery systems in a manner that causes distress and instability more than was witnessed.

Shared responsibility to ensure effective implementation of agreed decisions

Uganda is a country where leaders are more likely to agree on what the problem is, what needs to be done and end up doing nothing. This "ailment" is often expressed in the mantra that "Uganda has many good policies but the problem is implementation". Over the years, Ugandan leaders have adopted policies and made commitments they have reneged on and failed to implement. If implemented, these policies would have found the country more



prepared to confront the coronavirus and hence limit the distress the COVID-19 pandemic response has imposed on citizens.

As both Government and the clergy leaders appear to be wavering or flip flopping on the national dialogue, these conditions are likely to remain unresolved. The COVID-19 pandemic has given us a dry-run of what could happen in a future pandemic of a similar magnitude and character. Indeed, when the Coronavirus struck, it set off the panic button and sent shockwaves in the entire establishment. The very pre-existing conditions that were supposed to be addressed through the Dialogue remain and the fault lines continue to worsen.

Did the president, the clergy leaders and the elders lie to Ugandans?

The idea of a national dialogue has been in the works largely promoted by IRCU and TEFU since 2006. It was given impetus by the events that followed the contested [February 2016 presidential elections](#). On the eve of the announcement of the presidential elections results, President Museveni's regime imposed a total [social media blackout](#) and [froze all mobile money operations](#) on Uganda's mobile telephone networks directly affecting more than 6.7 million people. Uganda's leading opposition leader [Kizza Besigye](#) was arrested immediately after the elections and subsequently [charged with treason](#). Mean looking and heavily armed Uganda Peoples' Defense Forces patrolled the streets of Kampala and its environs on numberless pickup trucks against the backdrop of [senior military officers](#) issuing threats of violence in the days leading up to the elections. When finally, incumbent president Museveni was [declared the winner](#) of the presidential elections on February 20, 2016, the deafening silence and total absence of celebrations by Mr. Museveni's supporters remain living testimony of the depth of political stalemate that has been building up since independence in 1962.

Behind the scenes, the clergy leaders under IRCU and women leaders under the Women Situation Room worked to diffuse the tensions. They engaged in covert and overt shuttle diplomacy holding a series of meetings with President Museveni, Dr. Besigye who was declared runners up in the presidential elections and other political leaders who had participated in the elections. With varying understanding of what the issues were, how they would be addressed and who would address them, the clergy leaders understood that this was the moment to work towards a Uganda National Dialogue process as the most legitimate mechanism for addressing the apparent tensions and set the country back to normalcy.

At a December 2018 State House meeting between President Museveni, his government, the clergy leaders and other members of the Working Group of Seven (WG7) adopted a Communique in which they committed to launch the Uganda National Dialogue (UND) by June 30, 2019. Yet, more than one and half years later, the clergy leaders are quiet, President Museveni went in mute mode and the rest of the members of the WG7 are absent.

Since the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), Mr. Museveni has held [two official meetings with IRCU](#) Council of presidents and organized two prayer sessions at State House. It is tenable to conclude that the interaction between the clergy leaders and Mr. Museveni has had a profound effect on him. Besides the televised national prayers, the president increasingly laces his addresses with relevant scripture almost at the same frequency he does with NRM and Luwero bush war escapades. However, the fundamental question with regard to the Uganda National Dialogue is whether the President was genuine in his commitment to the process or if this was just a way to win himself deep into the hearts of clergy leaders.

The COVID-19 pandemic more than anything else taught Ugandans that unless these pre-existing conditions are addressed, another crisis of a similar nature and magnitude could easily paralyze the country. With COVID-19 pandemic, the informal economy literally came to a halt as some market vendors “abandoned” their homes and camped at their market stalls. For more than two months, Government was incapable of providing leadership on how to mitigate the economic devastation caused by the response measures or deliver an economic recovery plan to give hope to business and the citizens. COVID-19 made some of Uganda’s [women market vendors](#) make the hard choice of having to choose between their businesses and their families. In spite of many decades of investment in the health sector, the pandemic sent Mr. Museveni to a begging spree for vehicles to support the pandemic response. The fundamental question therefore is whether the pandemic has left clergy leaders with sufficient clout to push forward the national dialogue agenda or whether they have been co-opted into Mr. Museveni COVID-19 pandemic politics.

COVID-19, the national dialogue and the politics of money

A major sticking point for the Uganda national dialogue regards the funding for the process. Throughout the informal consultations process, Ugandans emphasized the need for the citizen ownership of the dialogue process. Among other things, the participants in these consultations proposed that a mechanism should be set up to mobilize Ugandan citizens to contribute directly to the funding of the Uganda National Dialogue as part of the effort to promote citizen ownership of the process.

Consistent with this aspiration, a number of funding modalities were arrived at and articulated in the national dialogue framework people. Funding through the national budget appropriated by parliament and direct voluntary contributions by citizens were considered the main sources of funding that would optimize citizen ownership of the process. Accordingly, the Uganda National Dialogue Communique provides thus: “Government hereby commits to provide for the appropriate funding of the Uganda National Dialogue Process, through the appropriate government channels including spearheading the mobilization of funds from development partners to support the dialogue process.”

It is now more than one and half years later since Mr. Museveni and his Government committed to provide funding for the Uganda National Dialogue but no single shilling has been provided. Neither the clergy leaders nor the president can explain why they renegaded on a public commitment to a process that seeks to address Uganda's pre-existing conditions. Yet, when the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to strike, the Government quickly passed a supplementary budget to deal with the consequences of the pandemic attack. But for all this long, it has failed to honor a promise it made to its clergy leaders and the citizens to provide the much needed financing for the national dialogue which seeks to address Uganda's underlying pre-existing conditions.

The Coronavirus, militarization and de-institutionalization of government

Countries that have strong, credible and functional institutions with high levels of trust are more likely to implement pandemic control measures that are fair, transparent and dignifying for the citizens. Unfortunately, as President Museveni consolidates his presidency now in its 34th year, there has been systematic erosion of state and government civilian institutions. Through carefully executed military deployments, strategic civilian state institutions are increasingly being taken over by Uganda's military.

The most visible of this military takeovers can be seen in different areas, including agriculture, fisheries, law enforcement, anti-corruption, environmental conservation and many others. In some institutions such as the National Planning Authority, there are "resident" military officers that often become the ultimate authority in decision making. Through Resident District Commissioners (RDCs), Mr. Museveni has effectively taken over the local government system. The LCV chairpersons that are expected to offer local political leadership and the district medical officers that should provide leadership for the medical response are relegated to the peripheral as RDCs give military-like orders and command operations to enforce lockdowns, curfews, and mandatory wearing of masks. The powerlessness of an LCV chairman in the current power game was brought to the fore by the pandemic in one ugly incident in Bunyangabu where the [district chairperson physically assaulted the RDC](#) who was trying to forcefully take away his official vehicle on account of a presidential directive.

Through these takeovers, Mr. Museveni is now the [Ssabawany](#) (the chief of fighters) and the [Ssabagabe](#) (King of Kings). He declared himself the grandfather of all the millennials (Bazukulu). He crisscrosses the country handing over money to [elderly citizens](#) on their bended knees. And he recently declared himself the [alternative ghetto president](#) in competition with Kyagulanyi Ssentamu aka Bobi Wine, the self-proclaimed leader of the People Power Movement.

The regular convening of clergy leaders and the statehouse sponsored prayers, the increasing use of biblical scriptures in his speeches and the muteness of the clergy leaders

during this COVID-19 pandemic makes Mr. Museveni a chief priest, or the grand Ayatollah to whom all these clergy leaders may have to continuously look to for “spiritual guidance”. Should these clergy leaders continue to look at Mr. Museveni as a “supreme leader” of sorts and fail to demand for a timely convening of the Uganda National Dialogue, the lack of progress threatens the credibility of Inter-Religious Council of Uganda. This could further exacerbate the trust deficit that clergy leaders suffer on account of the now systemic practice of accepting “gift cars” and other taxpayer funded presidential offers.

Conclusion

The emergence of the Coronavirus in China and its supersonic travel around the world triggering the global COVID-19 pandemic caused panic everywhere. In Uganda, President Museveni was conscious of the limited state capacity to handle the public health crisis given Uganda’s economic conditions and the state of the Nation’s health services delivery system. But the crisis also presented a unique political advantage as the incumbent President battles a political opposition emboldened by an insurgence of young people under the People Power Movement heading into an election scheduled for early 2021.

The implementation of the standard measures adopted by many countries involving suspension of public gatherings and a dusk to dawn curfew helped keep down infections while at the same time gave him a monopoly of the political space adding to his 34 years of uninterrupted presidency.

However, the uncertainty that characterized the Government response to the pandemic as evidenced by sometimes incoherent directives by the President that required follow up clarifications, the declaration of a dusk to dawn curfew in the absence of a state of emergence declaration, the unleashing of violence on women market vendors and boda boda riders, and the Government failure to provide timely economic response to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, among other shortcoming, all point to a set of pre-existing conditions that can provide gasoline to potential future crises.

Looking into the future of the Uganda National Dialogue, a number of conclusions and observations can be made. First, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have helped create a bond between Mr. Museveni and clergy leaders. But is this a genuine relationship driven by a nationalistic agenda or is it simply a patronage relationship that has come to characterize Mr. Museveni’s relationship with other segments of Uganda’s society? Secondly, at the moment, the solidarity of the Working Group of Seven (WG7) stands scattered and in limbo. It will be important to inquire into whether COVID-19 pandemic has paralyzed these organizations to shift into the short-term survival mode that ordinarily characterize responses to pandemics. Finally, Uganda’s partners have responded pouring tonnes of money into the pandemic response. There is a danger that these development partners may use the pandemic to divert the country from investing in a long term prosperity project like the Uganda National Dialogue by focusing on the short-term survival policies and actions?



The fundamental question, therefore, is whether the COVID-19 pandemic has provided the shock therapy necessary to trigger the clergy leaders into providing the much needed moral and non-partisan leadership to activate the Uganda National Dialogue. With key civilian institutions of state effectively under the direct control of Mr. Museveni, through covert and overt deployment of military officers, the dialogue remains the only legitimate mechanism to mobilize Ugandans to be the vanguards of restoring or establishing an institutional order necessary to confront Uganda's pre-existing conditions that diminish the country's capability to ensure a crisis response that is transparent and fair where fundamental human rights and human dignity are respected. In a potential win-win scenario, the COVID-19 induced love between Mr. Museveni and the clergy could be harnessed by the former for his short-term political dividends while the clergy leaders could harness it to ensure that the national dialogue as a long-term project of nation building does not fissile out. Short of a national dialogue, lives will be saved, economy and businesses may recover, industry may thrive but Uganda's soul could be lost. And there is no other force to keep the eyes on the radar than the Nation's clergy leaders. Whether they can deliver on this mission, only time will tell.

About the Uganda Transition Scenarios Thought Leadership Group – UTSTLG

We are a network of independent multi-disciplinary professionals committed to critical inquiry on contemporary and emerging governance and public policy issues in Uganda. UTSTLG is driven by a desire to be intellectually thought provoking and asking questions behind the answers. UTSTLG is hosted by the Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies (www.glissafrika.org). The views expressed in UTSTLG publications and think pieces do not represent the views of GLISS or the collective thinking of individual members but are the views of the authors.

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