1.0 INTRODUCTION

In February 2011, Uganda held its presidential, parliamentary and mayoral elections. This was the second presidential election since the introduction of multiparty system in 2005. Incumbent President Museveni won a fourth term by 68.38% of the total votes. His long-time political rival, Dr. Kizza Besigye managed a second place with 26.0% of the votes. The parliamentary elections were also characterized by stiff competition largely between the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC). Mayoral elections on the other hand did not make an exception to this rule. The campaign period and the election process were relatively peaceful. President Museveni’s re-election gives him the opportunity to be one of the longest serving presidents in Africa, if this term is successfully completed. Despite been generally peaceful, the opposition continues to accuse the incumbent and the ruling party- the NRM of voter bribery, uneven political campaigning turf, intimidation through the use of state security forces, unprecedented extravagance and rigging. These accusations have subsequently dictated the posturing of the opposition after the announcement of the results and appear to be significant in its political character in the post-election era.

So what does this loss mean for the opposition and the overall existence of political space in the country? What are the regional implications of this fourth term presidency of Yoweri Museveni? What is the significance of the 2011 election for democracy in Uganda, and what are some of the challenges to the practice of democracy? What role do political parties and the civil society play in the practice and promotion of democracy? What role does the discovery of oil find in the politics of the country? What does the current wave of protests across North Africa mean for the fourth term presidency? And what policy changes can the country and the region expect?

It is within this context that the Institute for Security Studies (ISS)- African Conflict Prevention Programme (ACPP), the Hanns Seidel Foundation and the Deepening
Democracy Programme jointly organized a one-day seminar in Kampala, Uganda, on 29 March 2011, to deliberate and find answers to these issues. The seminar aimed at interrogating key pre and post-election issues and their implications on regional and national political and democratic space, security and development. Attended by 52 participants, the seminar brought together members of government institutions, the diplomatic community, academia, researchers, members of the civil society, and the military, to deliberate on emerging key issues.

1.1 Attendance and Opening

Mr. Kenneth Mpyisi, the Director of the ISS Nairobi office, gave the introductory note. In his welcoming remarks, he reiterated the commitment of the various stakeholders and partners of the Institute in championing for peace and stability in the region and the continent at large. He thanked the participants for taking time to be part of the forum, which was going to deliberate and ponder on the way forward in Uganda’s political dispensation. Mr. Mpyisi highlighted the role played by the partners and organizers of the seminar and reminded the participants that peace and stability were the basic concern of the people in the country, and the region at large.

1.2 Presentations and Deliberations

The speakers and discussants in the seminar included: Professor Makara Sabiti of the Makerere University, Mr. Joseph Biribonwa- the Deputy Chairperson of the Uganda Electoral Commission, Mr. John Mary Odoy of the Democracy Group, Mr. Andrew Mwenda, Professor Elijah Mushemeza, Mr. Arthur Larok of the NGO Forum in Uganda, Dr. Zack Niringyie- Chairperson of the National Taskforce on Peace and Conflict Transformation, Hon. Norbert Mao, Hon. R. Ruzindana and Hon. David Mafabi.

Thematic issues in the seminar were: Review of the Presidential and Parliamentary elections; What is the significance of the 2011 election for democracy in Uganda, and what role do the political parties and civil society play; and, the possible recommendations and way forward for the political process in Uganda, 2011-2016.

2.0 REVIEW OF THE PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

2.1 Background of elections in Uganda

In any country, elections can bring stability or instability. They can also cause longevity for a regime, or make it short-lived. This is because if there is freedom, democracy and service delivery, then rarely will the citizens be disgruntled. However, excessive use of force by the incumbency during elections is a recipe for violence and instability. Since the first elections in Uganda held in 1986, there has been no clear system of power change in the country. Most leaders took over power through the gun, in military coups. There have been three types of governments: Military, Movement and Multiparty system. During the Movement system, elections were
known to be non-partisan because there was no opposition party opposing the ruling party and there was no political participation and competition from opposition, as seen in the 1986 elections. The 2001 elections were very intriguing and challenging in that they brought in political competition through Dr. Kizza Besigye, who openly declared his intention to run for presidency against Museveni, despite the fact that they were both of the movement party. In 2005, a new constitution was enacted through the Chonga Commission. This constitution abolished the Movement system and introduced a multi party system, because people were already questioning the Movement arguing that the idea to have one political party was limiting their political participation. The same constitution abolished term limitation for presidency thus giving Museveni the chance to vie during the 2006 and 2011 elections. It is uncertain whether or not he will run for the 2016 elections. In 2006 for instance, Museveni received strong competition from Dr. Besigye, who had performed fairly well. These elections however were marked with violence and voter bribery, intimidation and harassment.

The 2011 election was important as it presented an idea of the democratization process of the country. This gave a new insight to the government regarding what the people wanted: a system that would be representative of all, a government that would willing to attend to the concerns of the people, a level playing field and less engagement of the security forces in the election process. There are several concerns and observations that have been raised following the February 2011 general elections. These include: the inflated number of voters; excess use of money resulting to commercialization of the political process; poor civic education; names missing from the voters’ register; pre-ticked ballot papers and ballot stuffing; heavy deployment of the police, which could have intimidated the 41% of people who did not turn out to vote; lack of a system to verify whether the results released by the Uganda Electoral Commission (UEC) were the genuine results; integrity of the Uganda Electoral Commission (UEC)- concerns that the commission was not able to hold credible elections; Commission officers at the lower level being compromised; compromised party agents; citizens not taking elections seriously- they rarely look beyond the candidate campaigning; abuse of incumbency; lack of competition within political parties since the party leaders are synonymous with the party itself; lack of coherence among opposition parties; and, the lack of a level playing ground for all participants in the elections. However, the 41% of the population that did not turn out to vote could also have been be due to the fact that many people do not feel the impact of the government, and some have lost faith in the electoral system thus do not see the significance of elections because nothing much changes through election.

3.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 2011 ELECTIONS FOR DEMOCRACY IN UGANDA: THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

The civil society organizations (CSOs) and political parties have a big role to play in elections. In the 2011 elections, CSOs carried out research and informed the citizens through seminars, research, roundtables and influencing opinion. Political arties also had a role to play. It is the role of the political parties to drive the agenda in parliament. Most important, opposition parties keep the government in check. They must have a clean electoral register in order to have flawless elections; they must also
ensure the impartiality of officers in the Electoral Commission; conflict resolution mechanisms in the various political parties are important because people need to know how to manage differences especially in the case of defeat; civic education at party level and national level- this is important because there needs to be a way of informing the people; they influence the process of democratization in the country.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

• The Electoral Commission needs an entire overhaul of the body. This is the only sure way to flush out compromised officials and to bring in impartial officers. There is also need for proper vetting of Electoral Commission officers to check on their credentials and their political affiliations, so that the Commission does not end up being an agent for some political leaders. Thus, complete reconstitution is the best way to ensure credibility of the Commission.

• The country should have institutions that work for the public good. The public offices in the country at present represent their own interests, while the civil society and other institutions are afraid to speak out for fear of being misconstrued. Thus, parliament, Electoral Commission, civil society and other stakeholders must work for the common interest of the people. They must represent what the people of Uganda want and need. The government should also build alliances for the change that the people desire to see.

• There needs to be a system to significantly moderate incumbency and formulate a way of power transfer. This would help to fight the mentality of life presidency, and create new consensus between all political actors to deal with these issues. For long the ruling party has been synonymous with the state, thus having an upper hand over the opposition parties. This has also given the ruling party undue advantage that the other political parties cannot afford. The fact that the ruling party could use public funding to campaign means that it had more campaign funding. This limited campaigning capacity for the opposition parties.

• There should be a real choice for citizens, that is, political space. This is because currently, the people of Uganda identify more with the citizen manifesto and not with political party manifesto. Thus political parties and politicians need to show the citizens what they have to offer, and build confidence with the electorate. In this regard, the government, opposition parties and civil society should work together to strengthen the citizen movement to lead soberly and fill in the power gap in the country. In a nutshell, there should be freedom to accompany democracy; otherwise democracy is not meaningful.

• Invest in livelihood issues and economic emancipation- there should be rational choices that the people can identify with.

• There is a need to have a legal framework to govern the rules of elections. In addition, there needs to be a code of conduct not just for political parties, but also specifically for the party in power (ruling) party. This will ensure that there is no abuse of power and public office by the party, and that there is fair competition between all parties. There should also be a code of conduct for the staff members of the electoral commission.

• Religious organizations, though they do not have the mandate to directly influence the electoral process or the outcome of the elections, they can influence a certain perspective of it by championing for human rights, offering civic education, and informing the people of their right and freedoms.
Ugandans must stop the ‘no expectancy’ syndrome. The quality of the democracy depends not on the government or on the politicians, but on the demands and expectations of the people. There should be active citizenship in the country.

Freedom of the media- the role of the media is to inform the people on issues affecting them. State agents and other interested parties should thus protect them from harassment and intimidation.

The role of security forces should be reformed, so that the army does not serve the president, but the people at large. On the other hand, the police also needs to be empowered to be able to deal with security issues without bureaucracy.

Restore a term limit for the president. This will restore hope in the people of Uganda, that there will be no ‘president for life’, or ‘pirate victory’.

Deal with polarization, which is nepotism in the government. This will help deal with issues of ethnicity and clanism, and politics of patronage.

Champion for finance reforms for political parties, in order to deal with issues of imbalanced funding and in this way there is bound to be fair and balanced competition for the parties. In this case there is need for national dialogue to address grievances and also mechanisms to deal with political stigmatizations.

It is important to distinguish between the presidential, parliamentary and mayoral elections, because there were clear distinctions during the 2011 elections. There are wide disparities in voter behavior in the three sets of elections.

Addressing the demographic challenges- it is estimated that 75% of the population is under 25 years of age. Of this 75%, 50% is under the age of 18 years. The rates of unemployment in the country are high, thus the government needs to create tangible solutions and opportunities to help the youth develop and maximize on their abilities. This will reduce the rate of poverty and create more participation even in the political arena.

The challenge of consensus building- the ‘winner-take-all’ type of governance should be dealt with. Consensus rather than caucusing should be the focus. The country should have ‘rule of law’ rather than ‘rule by law’.

Deal with issues of regionalism- the Northern Uganda and Buganda factor, and now Western Uganda factor in Uganda politics. These are regions that largely influence politics and elections.

Separation between the state and the ruling National Resistance Movement party- the country has moved away from the Movement system, though still behaves the same way. The state should be separated from the party in order to restore confidence in the multiparty system. Thus NRM should be delinked from the state. In addition, there needs to be a distinction between the impact of the president as an individual, and that of the government as a whole. This will help deal with the mentality of ‘Musevenism’.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The next five years will be a crucial period to watch out for in Uganda’s political roadmap. They will determine and definitely shape both national and regional policy options. For the people of Uganda, it will be a time to watch out whether the government can and will deliver on its promises. For the region, it will be a time for neighbouring countries to watch out for any policy changes and implications of Museveni’s win. Most important however, is the peace and stability of the country.
and the region at large. At the national level, President Museveni and the NRM have a responsibility and obligation to fulfill to the people of Uganda, that is, to ensure sustainability, security and stability, service delivery and rule of law among other necessities. For the region, Uganda remains an important partner of the East African Community (EAC), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), African Union (AU), International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), among others, thus its stability is of paramount importance to its neighbours. It is thus important for the leadership of the country to ensure that the different parties in conflict over the outcome of the elections find a way to dialogue and reach a consensus for the benefit of all.