



## **ETHNICITY AND THE FORMATION OF THE EAST AFRICAN POLITICAL FEDERATION: THE CASE OF UGANDA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

East Africa is a multicultural region with diverse ethnic composition, and is comprised of a number of independent states namely; Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and of recent Southern Sudan and Somalia have expressed interest in joining the East African Federation. These states have struggled to unite into one political, social and economic unit, however their contrasting cultural, ethnic and historical background; arising from their colonial experience, socio-political and economic environment has made the idea of a federation a challenging one. In spite of the seeming novel and beneficial nature of the East African Federation, its process and realization has taken a painful slow pace. This study examined ethnicity as a salient feature to the political federation in East Africa, taking Uganda as a case study.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Politics and Federation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

East Africa is an easterly region of the African continent. It covers 1,670,000 square kilometers, Mangachi, (2011). The Indian Ocean on its Eastern side forms a natural boundary. To the West, it borders Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi, and to the North on the Somali Republic and Ethiopia. In the South, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique are its boundaries, Ssekamwa (1994), Baregu, (2005). East Africa is a region with the most significant and oldest pale – anthropological finds in the world that has been inhabited by human- like beings for millions of years. According to a record document called, “Periplus of the Erythrean Sea”, a Greek trading guide dating to the First Century C.E, the first kingdom to develop in the region was the Nubia, with its people known as the Karmah and Kush in the First Century, and these were followed by Aksum in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, Buganda Kingdom from 14<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries C.E, Rwanda developed between 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, and then the Swahili Coastal City states.

There have been a number of migrations within and outside East Africa. Some of the Bantu tribes migrated into East Africa from Southern Africa, particularly due to Shaka’s endless Mfecane wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. A case in point is that of the Nguni invasion of East Africa, Balaam and Deenon, (1998), clearly explain this view, while others migrated as a result of trade, grazing land and water, fertile soils for agriculture and imperialistic manipulation in different East African regions.

For the case of Uganda, the first state to develop in the region was Bunyoro in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium AD. According to Oral traditions, at the height of the empire, Bunyoro covered the present day Bunyoro, Buganda, Ankole and some parts of Busoga. It also covered parts of North Eastern Tanzania and parts of

the Democratic Republic of Congo, with its first dynasty known as Abatembuzi, Odhiambo, (1971; 24) The Abatembuzi were replaced by Bachwezi, who are said to have come from Ethiopia, (Karugire: 1980). They were pastoralists; however they set up a loose empire, and came to an end in the close of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century by the Luo invasion of the area. Although the Luo ended the Chwezi rule, they were few in number as they couldn't take over the whole of Kitala Empire, instead Bunyoro and Toro. The two regions formed one kingdom until the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when Toro broke away from Bunyoro under Prince Kaboyo I. This followed the secession of other Kitala versal states, especially Buganda.

Buganda was a versal state of Bunyoro Kitala Empire, covering a radius of 25miles around Kampala; that's to say, Mawokota, Busiro and Kyaddondo. However, during the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries, Buganda expanded to its current boundaries. Although the empire started as a small chiefdom under the appendage of Bunyoro, it soon became very powerful at the expense of Bunyoro, which began to decline. This dramatic rise introduced ethnic competition in the region especially during the colonial and post-colonial Uganda, which has influenced the East African Federation.

### **East Africa in the Colonial Era**

Between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, East Africa became a theatre of competition between European major imperialist nations and all East African societies became part of the European colonial empire, Nabudere (1983). The Portuguese were the first Europeans to explore the East African region in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when Vasco Dagama visited Mombasa in 1498. The Portuguese presence in the region however began officially after 1505, when flagships under the command of Don Francisco de Almeida conquered Kilwa; an island in what is now Southern Tanzania. However, their influence was clipped by the British, Dutch and Omani Arab incursions into the region in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The advent of Arab rule brought the city states of Tanzania and Kenya under closer foreign scrutiny and domination, especially under the reign of Seyyid Said in 1839. The Arab dominance was curtailed by the British and Germany influence, with Missionary influence both at the interior and the coast of East Africa, (Haas, 1966).

Between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, East Africa experienced direct foreign rule by major European nations of the time, Britain in Uganda and Kenya, while Germany took over Tanzania and France and Belgium shared Rwanda and Burundi for exploitation of mineral resources and sources of markets for their collapsing capitalism in Europe, Collins (1996). European intervention in the region disrupted the pre-colonial East African trade and antagonized the society set up. The British for example, sided with some societies against others, like in the case of Buganda and Bunyoro and other ethnic groups in Uganda, the Kikuyu against other ethnic groups in Kenya, the Hutu against the Tutsi in Rwanda, among others.

The colonial powers also in their pursuit of control in the region weakened African societies by putting together different ethnic groups under one ethnic leadership. A case in point was that of the Eastern societies of Uganda under Buganda leadership, Karugire (1985), Mamdani (1991), in Kenya the British favoured Kikuyu over other groups, and in Rwanda, the Belgians left power in the hands of the Hutu against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The colonial economic policies also caused uneven development in the region, as there was one commodity production in one region and other regions were used as reservoirs for the recruitment of labourers, and soldiers. In Uganda for example, the Northern region was reserved for army, police while the Western part was reserved for manual labour recruitment, whereas the Central region was meant for administrative work, Karugire (1985). These policies also caused an even distribution of social services, for example education institutions were established in central regions of the colonial state at the expense of the outlying areas. These colonial policies created jealousy, envy and competition among groups in the region, which resulted into ethnic conflicts.

Ethnic conflicts were precipitated by colonial rule and entrenchment which was enhanced by the introduction of formal education by Christian Missionaries in Uganda in 1877, and 1879 by the Anglicans, Munakukaama, (1997). The colonialists placed most of their social overheads in areas of proximity to the colonial political capital. This colonial education structure created and enhanced class struggles and conflicts, (Mamdani, 1991) which transcended into ethnic conflicts. This argument is more evident in post independent Uganda and Kenya since 1966. Classical examples of this are shown in the

Mengo- Kabaka- Obote crisis of 1966, Amin's seizure of power from Obote in 1971, the post-election violence since 1980, in both Uganda and Kenya.

This clearly illustrates, that colonialism was built on an already existing disintegrated society demeaned by slave trade, tribal wars, like those mentioned earlier, as the colonialist played tribe versus tribe politics commonly known as divide and rule by social anthropologists today. In many parts of Uganda, Buganda Kingdom and the colonial government created an animosity, which seem to have persisted to date and have resurfaced in tribalism and nepotism.

### **The Quest for Political Independence and the Question of the East African Federation**

A federation is a political concept in which a group of members are bound together by covenant with a governing representative ahead. Federalism is also used to describe a system of government in which sovereignty is constitutionally divided between a central governing authority and constituent political units, such as states, or provinces, (Hoffman: 1996). It can also be interpreted as a system based upon democratic rules and institutions in which the power to govern is shared between national and provincial, or state governments, creating what is often called a federation.

The integration of East Africa began with economic unity in 1895 with the construction of the Uganda railway, and then proceeded with the creation of the East African common market in 1900 and a customs arrangement between Uganda and Kenya on one side, (then British East Africa) and Tanganyika (then Germany East Africa) on the other, (Kasaija: 2006). This saw an increasing measure to integrate and interlink the three states. This was followed by the introduction of a common currency, a joint income tax board, a joint economic council and over forty different institutions of research, social service, education, defence and communications. These were established to explore the possibilities of the East Africa federation in 1924, 1927 and 1931, and this proved to be the golden age of co-operation, Kasaija (2006: 5). In spite of the above good measure right at its inception, the East African federation had its intrinsic and extrinsic factors which diminished its future operation, for example in the field of education, there existed no uniform policies, or systems among the East African societies of the region to create the awareness, prepare and interlink their socio – economic and political unity.

In the political sector for example, in Uganda it was the colonial state with its policy of divide and rule which allowed Buganda to nurture the behaviour of conservatism by largely maintaining her identity, (Karugire, 1980). This was also the case between Tanganyika and Zanzibar, and in Kenya between the Kikuyu and the Nilotes, or non Bantu tribes. Throughout history, individual tribal groups aimed at recognition of their identity and position within the protectorate government. Their kingdoms, or societies, institutions, norms and traditions became the primary form of identity and the issue of Uganda – ness, Kenya-ness, Tanzania –ness, or even the East African Federation was, or is secondary. For the case of Uganda, it is not surprising that when the colonial government issued the idea to federate East Africa, it was rejected by all kingdoms, but Buganda's response was strongest and the Kabaka responded by asking for Buganda's independence from Uganda, leading to his deportation on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1953, a crisis that altered the formation of the East Africa Federation, (Karugire, 1980).

In 1961, the idea of the East African Federation was further considered with the formation of the East Africa Common Services Organization (EACSO), and the three states met to discuss the establishment of a federation. The already established common market, a Central Legislative Assembly and Executive made the idea of a federation achievable superficially. However, there were other unanswerable questions, for example, the site for the federal capital, who was to head the federation, there were also disagreements on the division of state and federal power, land, citizenship and borrowing powers. At this time, there was internal cohesion in East Africa which the colonialist had laid way back, centered on ethnicity and ethnic prejudice in managing state affairs, most especially in Uganda and Tanzania. In the field of education, colonial education had divided Africans along religious lines, as you hardly found a protestant African in a catholic school, a Christian African in a Moslem school, or either. Politically, Buganda and the Central government were fighting for political power and ownership. Uganda People's Congress party president, Dr. Apollo Milton Obote was no more enthusiastic than Kabaka Sir Edward Muteesa II when he asserted, that it was futile to try to think outside Uganda before solving internal problems, (Mamdani, 1994). Where as in 1964, Tanganyika and Zanzibar united as an independent state

and this smaller union opened the eyes of this region as a whole to the difficulties involved in such a venture, as Tanzania's socialism destroyed the bond of relationship which had been forged over the last years to establish the federation.

### **The Post – Independence East Africa**

The post independent East Africa has had its own share of political challenges which many politicians and the European Union believe can best get addressed through the East African Federation; putting much emphasis on a political and economic unity, as president Museveni acknowledged, that for the revived East African Community to make sense, it had to evolve into a political fragmentation as there is lack of a superstructure necessary for the integration process, (Museveni, 1998). Politically, the idea of the East African Federation is intended to maintain peace, security and stability among member states, the issues of tribalism, and social structure problems, including illiteracy will tend to disappear, and people will then begin to identify themselves as East Africans. It is also believed that a federation will be a solution to any real or potential problem of internal security. This will therefore, remove any possibility of regional societies, or partner states fighting each other and this will strengthen the political stability in the region, Kasaija, (2006:6).

However, even then, there are unanswered questions, such as the issue of kingdoms, personal or group interests, dictatorship, ethnicity and awareness through educational forces, where groups dictate political terms only acceptable to themselves to overthrow the existing order, (Mudoola, 1993:1). A case in point is that of Uganda when president Museveni changed the constitution to run for a third term. This was not welcomed in some partner states as this issue came on the floor of Tanzanian parliament when Hon. Phileman Ndesamburo argued, that Tanzania should withdraw from the East Africa Federation to protect her credibility, as Tanzania was not ready to co-operate with an undemocratic county that wants to have a life president, *The New Vision* (2006: 8, 9 and 37). These differences in ideology between member states are the major impediments of the East African Federation, which in this research are attributed to ethnicity and education. For this reason even today, we can borrow the late Dr. Milton Obote's remarks made in 1963 when he said,

“There are still points which must be settled before and not after the East African Federation is formed, and which could explain why the Federation will not come into being this year...?”

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study used a cross-sectional survey and case study design, which enabled the study to utilize both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A cross-section research design is a type of design used to study large population, or an area where the researcher conducts a survey to obtain information about the opinion, attitudes, preferences, practices and concerns of a cross section of a group of people, and uses the results to extrapolate to the entire population, (Amin, 2005), (Creswell, 2003).

#### **Population and Study sample**

The study parent population was East Africa with 141.8 million, (World Population Report; 2013). The target population is Uganda which has an approximate population of 34.5 million people (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uganda>, October, 2011; World Population Report; 2013). The study was carried out in Kampala, Masaka, Mutukula, Nimule, Malaba and Katuna. This was so, because these are major cities of the region where ethnic concentration is highest and literacy levels. For the case of Kampala, it is the metropolitan for Uganda and a transit for Rwanda, Burundi and northern Tanzania, while the rest, are business and border towns of Uganda that link it to East African neighboring states and are occupied by cross border ethnic composition, for example, Mutukula borders Uganda with Tanzania, Malaba with Kenya, Katuna with Rwanda, and Nimule with Southern Sudan. The focus of the study was put on politicians, social workers, businessmen and distinguished citizens in the region like Members of Parliament, and cabinet ministers, leaders of political parties and rural people like the Local council Chairmen / chair persons of border areas, and as Krejcie, R. V. & Morgan, D. W. (1970) study, 385 respondents were be sampled.

### **Sampling technique**

The study employed the following techniques namely; purposive, random and Convenience sampling techniques.

Purposive sampling is a technique used to select a sample based on the researcher's experience of knowledge about a group to be sampled, and with a mind that the respondents selected have the needed information, Amin (2005), thus the study intended to capture experienced respondents for specific information for the study, and was applied to 15 political leaders of different political parties in Uganda, and 150 Members of Parliament, 30 Cabinet Ministers and 90 Local council Chairmen/Chairpersons.

On the other hand, random sampling means the selection of a sample where all elements in the population will have a probability, or equal chances of being selected, Koul (2000), this was applied to also 285 political leaders, and other 100 businessmen/ business women thought relevant to the study.

Convenience sampling is a technique of selected units that are convenient at a given moment for the researcher conducting the study, Kothari (2003), and these were applied to 100 citizens of rural border communities, as Krejcie, and Morgan, (1970) stipulate.

### **Research instruments and methods**

The study employed two types of instruments; questionnaires, and the interview guide;

Questionnaires are self-report instruments used for gathering information about variables of interest in an investigation, and were administered to Members of Parliament and civil workers in order to generate reliable data from samples of predetermined interests, as respondents answered questions in their own mood without being affected by researcher's presence, Amin (2005).

An interview guide is an oral questionnaire used to gather data through direct verbal interaction with participants, Schostak (2002) and was used to supplement on the information collected from the questionnaires and was administered to political leaders, social workers and senior citizens, and focused group discussions were focused in History seminar.

### **Data analysis**

For quantitative data, the responses of the subjects were coded and entered into statistical package for Social Science Program (SPSS), and for analysis, the findings were presented descriptively using frequency tables, graphs and percentages, and interpretations and drawing of inferences was done depending on the number of occurrences of each item.

For qualitative data, respondents from the interview were coded and thematically presented to incorporate the meaning into a theme that corresponds to the context of the study.

In addition, data got from interview guides, and focused group discussions were presented and analysed by coding in lieu of the study objectives.

## **RESULTS**

### **How has ethnicity influenced the formation of the East African Political Unity?**

The findings in this section are in response to objective one, which reads; how ethnicity has influenced the formation of the East African Federation, and the first research question, which reads; to what extent has ethnicity influenced the formation of the East African Federation. To test this research question, ten items were sued in Appendix A, section B of the questionnaire and the responses were classified as agree, strongly agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree. The respondents' results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Responses on Ethnicity, and Political unity**

ITEM	SD	D	NS	A	SA
It is possible to have an East African political Federation.	106 (39.1%)	74 (27.3%)	22 (8.1%)	51 (18.8%)	18 (6.6%)
Ethnicity / tribe has influenced the inception and formation of the East African political Federation.	52 (19.3)	88 (32.6%)	31 (11.5%)	83 (30.7%)	16 (5.9%)
The political situation of Uganda can lead to the East African Federation.	98 (36.8%)	95 (35.7%)	33 (12.4%)	26 (9.8%)	14 (5.3%)
The president of Uganda is willing to surrender power to the central authority.	160 (59.5%)	61 (22.7%)	26 (9.7%)	17 (6.3%)	5 (1.9%)
It is very possible for the Ugandan people who share different cultures to unite under a federation.	85 (32.0%)	73 (27.4%)	24 (9.0%)	59 (22.2%)	25 (9.4%)
In the East African Federation, the people of Uganda will forget their cultures and adapt to one central unit.	104 (38.7%)	82 (30.5%)	29 (10.8%)	42 (15.6%)	12 (4.5%)
People of Uganda are ready for the East African Federation by 2012.	102 (38.1%)	66 (24.6%)	67 (25.0%)	24 (9.0%)	9 (3.4%)
Ugandans have tribal differences within themselves but when they join the East African Federation, all that will be forgotten.	105 (39.0%)	81 (30.1%)	38 (14.1%)	35 (13.0%)	10 (3.7%)
The political problems of Uganda can be solved if they join the federation.	84 (31.7%)	55 (20.8%)	38 (14.3%)	67 (25.3%)	21 (7.9%)
All people's political interests in the region will be fulfilled when they join the federation.	94 (35.5%)	77 (29.1%)	40 (15.1%)	38 (14.3%)	16 (6.0%)

The findings in Table 1 illustrate that all the respondents on different items did not believe, that the East African states cannot be politically united under one political unit. This is because of their different interpretations of cultures, traditions, norms, customs and origin of their peoples. In the first item when the respondent were asked whether its true that the East African states can unite and be ruled by one president, 180 (66.4%) respondents disagreed, while 69 (2.54%) respondents agreed. The above quantitative findings are also in collaboration with the qualitative findings in which some respondents were not comfortable with issues of the East African Federation. For example, one academician in a Ugandan public university, in the age bracket of 80 replied;

“We don’t seem to have the political federation of East Africa soon. Look, we Ugandans ourselves are not united, for me I love my Kabaka and my kingdom (Buganda). So let those so-called intelligent politicians first give us federal, then we can think about a larger federation.”  
(Interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2012)

While the other female respondent in the age bracket of 40-59 years when asked whether Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda can unite into one political federation, she replied;

“You see people forget that we are all human beings but we are of different origins and backgrounds. How do you expect me a Munyoro and my fellow Bunyoro to forget what Baganda did to us while in a federation? You simply do not know what you are talking

about! We have suffered because of you Buganda and these Bazungu (the British) and now you want us to forget that you are bad people to us, it is impossible!”  
(Interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2012)

In the second and third items when respondents were asked whether the political situation of Uganda can lead to the East African political unity, and whether the East African states have much in common thus need to federate, 140 (51.9%) and 193 (72.5%) respondents disagreed while 42 (14.8%) and 99 (36.6%) agreed. This implies that the interpretation of the East African federation by the citizens is ethnic ridden, and ethnicity to a big extent influence the formation of the East African Federation. From the focused group discussions, different respondents noted that ethnicity has a big influence on the formation of the East African Federation. For example they noted that, in almost all elections in the country, be it presidential, Parliamentary, District level, or below, ethnicity plays a crucial role. A case in point was that of the just concluded elections of the speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly that was overshadowed by ethnicity, which Hon. Margaret Zziwa won, Mr. Fredrick Masiga in the Sunday Monitor News of June, 10<sup>th</sup> 2012 said,

“Zziwa, the newly elected speaker of East African Legislative Assembly is a win for Buganda Kingdom in the battle for tribal dominance.”

While Hon. Omala Atubo on the same incidence commented with concern that,

“East African Legislative Assembly speaker election exposed the deep seated tribalism, nepotism, arrogance and greed among some Ugandans who want to grab every big office and resources for themselves...”

(Monitor News of 25<sup>th</sup> June 2012)

In items six when the respondents were asked whether they can forget their cultures and adapt to one central unity in the East African Federation, 186 (69.2%) disagreed while only 54 (20.1%) agreed. In addition, on item seven when the respondents were asked whether they were ready for the East African Federation by 2013, 168 (62.7%) disagreed while 33 (12.4%) agreed. This implies that the people of Uganda feel so much as East Africans but they do not feel that they are part of the East African Federation. This is because of their different contrasting interpretations of cultures and tribes. The essence of the above argument was supported by the oral interview guide when respondents were asked whether the people of Uganda can forget their cultural differences, cultures, norms, customs and traditions and embark on the unity of the East African Federation, one female respondent from Northern region replied;

“I think people should stop fantasising, you people in central and western Uganda have imposed war on us close to twenty five years and now after retarding our region, then you want us to join you in a funny federation, and then you continue exploiting us, never.”

(Interviewed on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012)

While another respondent from western Uganda replied;

“Let the people who want us to join the federation, first install and recognize our Omugabe and our kingdom, or else their projected federation will be a lost cause in our region. I have heard some of my colleagues promoting it for reasons that we shall enjoy the political offices of the federation because Museveni will be in power, but many of us we do not want, because he has been in power still and our Omugabe is still suffering with his people.”

(Interviewed on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

In addition, another respondent from central region replied;

“It is clear that you cannot mix oranges and tomatoes simply because oranges are fruits and tomatoes are vegetables. This is my position about the East African Federation. I want to know the position of king (Kabaka Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II and the position of my kingdom while in your fake federation. I say it is fake because it is very artificial and superficial.”

(Interview one 18<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

In item eight when the respondents were asked whether Ugandans can forget their tribal differences when they join the East African Federation, 186 (69.1%) disagreed while 45 (13.31%) agreed. The results were supported by interview guide when, one respondent from Eastern region replied,

“Tribe and culture are a natural phenomenon, whether national or international, its unquestionable. My culture and king are above your so-called federation.”

(Interviewed on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2012)

In addition, another respondent replied;

“I think the East African Federation is not well conceptualized to us and all the people of Uganda. In my region, we don’t understand its objectives and we don’t even want policies that will continue to divide us. It will only benefit you people in central and western Uganda, who thinks this country, is yours alone.”

(Interviewed on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2012)

The implication here is that the East African Political Federation is a misconception to many Ugandans especially at the grassroots. Its objectives are totally not understood and people think the elements that define their tribes, customs, cultures and traditions will be diluted or delete when join the political federation of East Africa.

In items nine and ten when the respondents where asked whether the political problems of Uganda can be solved if they join the federation, 139 (35.1%) disagreed, while 88 (33.2%) agreed, while on item nine when the respondents were asked whether all people’s political interests in the region will be fulfilled when they join the federation, 171 (64.6%) disagreed and 54 (20.3%) agreed. This belief was supported by reactions from the interview guides when respondents reacted as follows;

“No, our political problems stem from our tribal regions, so unless that federation begins within our regions, then can apply for international standards, but if the unitary system has almost failed, how do you expect our political problems to be solved by this East African Federation? It is a naked lie.”

(Interviewed on 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2012)

While another respondent replied;

“Am sorry, I cannot see our problems being solved in a federation. Personally, I am not a fan of it because it does not clearly stipulate the position of cultural leaders and their institutions. Why hide that from us, it clearly shows its weaknesses...”

(Interviewed on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2012)

In addition, another respondent from central region replied;

“You see, Museveni (President of the Republic of Uganda) has disorganized all kingdoms in Uganda and cultural relations, apart from, of course my kingdom (Buganda). Ours is an institution and not a system. Now he wants people to forget their belongings and then subscribe to their senseless federation. I do not think it is possible. It will exist by force because our leaders want to achieve some hidden agenda, but will eventually collapse.”

(Interviewed on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2012)

When asked, a Muganda member of the Uganda Unite group in the Diaspora replied with the same sentiments as follows;

“We have just witnessed the fast tracking of the EAC when most people in Uganda do not understand the benefits and objectives of EAC. As we speak 70% of Land in Kenya is still owned by white settlers. Without land reforms, it means people will be free to move



and buy land anywhere in East Africa, Uganda inclusive. A Muzungu from Naivasha will have a right to purchase entire Ssingu county or Ssesse islands in Buganda. This is a sellout. It seems this organisation is being imposed by orders from above, for selfish gains.”

(Interviewed on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2012)

Thus ethnicity can explain why the East African Political Federation may not yield success in the region. The perceptions of people do not believe that the political federation is intended to develop their regions, but instead to ruin their traditional and cultural institutions. Thus, the idea of the East African political federation is a Kaleidoscope of perceptions and positions with ethnic conflicting interests constantly tumbling over one another and rearranging themselves.

The above findings imply that ethnic background plays a crucial role, because of the nature of socialization most Africans undergo and this has a significant impact on the formation of the East African Federation.

## DISCUSSION

### **Ethnicity and the formation of the East African political unity**

The findings revealed that all the respondents were certain that the five independent East African states cannot successfully unite under one political unit. This is clearly reflected in the statistical details contained in result's table. For the case of Uganda, the respondents revealed that their ethnic differences greatly influence the political federation of East Africa. The findings attributed the failure of the East African political unity to lack of a political will, insufficient information distribution and federation concept amongst citizens, inequitable redistribution of gains, inter-territorial imbalances in trade, currency stem disharmony and constitutional impediments, (Katembo: 2008), These challenges are a result of ethno-political divergent paths taken by member states for political architecture, social laws, and civil liberties which exacerbate regional tensions and have strained a political federation of East African government, especially Uganda. These have also resulted in egomaniacal personality, bullying confrontational theatrics, leading to hostile political climate – threatening the political federation of East Africa, (Kamoga: 2004).

For the East African federation to be successful there must be sensitization and awareness among the citizens to which the federation will operate. Nabudere, (2005) believes that the East African federation is difacto to this view. The issue whether it is the governments, ruling political parties, and political parties in opposition or civil society organizations, remains unclear.

In addition, the East African federation member states can be categorized as being in a state of becoming a central unit, but the results confirmed otherwise, especially when Mukandala, (2008) argued that it is not mandatory that economic unity leads to political unity. Also Kasajja (2006) cited an example from European Union. European states have been building and working towards a closer European union starting with economic unity as a straight path to political unity, but the idea of political unity has failed, and it is still a big challenge, thus, why are people confident that the East African federation is a different matter? Mukandala (2000) gives a problem to this challenge which in this study is referred to as ethnicity and lack of proper knowledge about the actual prospects of the East African political federation by the citizens in the region. The question of how to balance ethnic consciousness and national patriotism has remained unanswered and has left states like Uganda to remain divided along ethnic lines. This has led to political relations of structured inequality in the state; an issue that overlaps the idea of the East African political federation.

The results of the study clearly showed that the idea of the east African federation and any attempts to a political federation has been a contradiction between the independent states of east Africa, especially Uganda. Similar findings were made by Nabudere (2005), Kibua and Tostensen (2005), and Kasajja (2004) who all agreed that the sophisticated advocates of the fast-tracking of east African political federation accept that simply merging the existing political systems of the five countries would be impossible, and unrealistic to the nature of East Africa, especially, Ugandan societies due to the

differences in political culture and values these people hold. Nabudere, (2005) goes further by citing an example of President Museveni's quest for the third term amendment, which raised questions than answers in the Ugandan electorate. His visionary political ideology has caused dissatisfaction within the elite and the poor over their exclusion in matters concerning national life and do not view the east Africana political federation as a solution to their internal problems.

Those who oppose the East African federation argue that their different norms, cultures, customs and traditions cannot unite them into a political federation. In the same line, Chikwanha (2007) believes that most triggers of conflicts in multicultural societies are a result of acculturation. If the East African political federation is to happen, it is predicted that it will trigger off all types of conflicts in the region; violent and non-violent, sporadic, or occasional and endemic, or intractable. Kelman (2007) also confirms that ethnicity occupies a great space within the political arena, and it's the easiest way for politicians to mobilize around national issues that is why it is a powerful catalyst of political violence in Uganda. Ethnicity therefore has a deterrent effect on the formation of the East African political federation.

On the other hand, the findings of the study showed that ethnicity is a natural tool for leaders in the political discourses of nation building, development, nationalism and patriotism. This has resulted in the creation of a single party political system, which ascribes certain ethnic groups in power as superior, and other groups are included in government affairs just to create an artificial semblance of national unity. This has created and strengthened divisions among Ugandans, making the idea of the East African federation a lost cause.

The researcher is in agreement with the Common Wealth of Nation's Report (2010), that democracy should be the center of all states seeking to federate, and this would mean subordination of all competing ethnic interests and loyalty to the state in order to build a strong sense of national unity, however, the respondents of the questionnaire clearly show that they cannot be part of the East African political federation willingly, citing the above contradiction. The access to the real benefits of the East African political federation should be the elimination of ethnic patronage to state resources (Berman, 2010).

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed, that the ethnocentric tendencies of political actors in the region, especially Uganda to politicize national or regional issues, has greatly impacted on the formation and stability of the East African political federation. In line with this argument, the East African annual report (2000), believed that the East African federation was intended to be people driven, but the results from the respondents clearly show that the people of Uganda do not understand the prospects of the East African political unity.

The language and style of the body remains bureaucratic and elitist and very few urban and educated citizens actually understand the meaning and proceedings of the East African political federation compared to the Uganda's entire population. Meena (1999), even goes further to question whether there is a dissemination centre for information about the East African federation, thus Ugandan women, workers, peasants and the youth have not been fully brought into the federation process in Uganda, and according to the results from the respondents, there is no evidence that the elite power in Uganda wish to alter fundamental traditional patterns of regionalism.

It was further found out from the results of the respondents, that although the people of Uganda are presented by their respective government as beneficiaries to the cooperation, the contradiction is that their same government has conceptualized them and the federation as a child-like individual who has no ability to contribute to the development of the federation, but rather is expected to accept whatever the government decides for them; a concept which dilutes the possibility of the East African political unity or federation. For this, "Women and men in Uganda" report (1998), argues that for the realization of the East African political unity, the regimes in the region should not be monopoly players in the game, a considerable involvement of people in determining the context and content of their governance must be catered for.

When looking at the respondents' views on the interview guide, the realities of the poor as they face abject poverty, lack of basic services and poor governance, coupled with the yawning gap between the rulers and the governed, has greatly contributed to the sense of powerlessness to the people of Uganda. If

thus the relationship between the state and the people is characterized by hostility, why should people accept an additional layer of suppression and oppression without clear sustainable procedures of political unity? The results show that the Ugandan people are so frustrated that they have minimal expectations from their leaders. The required task is to create public confidence and respect for its people and institutions so as to foster the prospects of political unity.

The study results also revealed that the political environment of Uganda cannot allow her to fully be part of the political federation of East Africa. The argument is supported by Kibua and Tostensen (2005), who in their study reveal that all their respondents supported the general process of the East African federation but saw the establishment of a political superstructure as premature equipment to building a house on a shaky foundation, given the current political situation in Uganda. Thus, the researcher believes that the respondents' views were reflecting ethnic beliefs and this is why the realization of a political federation will almost not exist practically.

Kibwana (1999), identifies four elements for the realization of a political unification of East Africa; he argues that there must be freedom of opinion, tolerate differences and acceptance of consensus on issues as well as ensure effective participation of the people and their organizations and associations. Ironically, the results from the respondents show that the practice has been the opposite, thus having a bearing on the formation of the East African political federation. Much as the government of Uganda is more ready than ever to join the East African political unity, the above shows, that conflict unrest in Uganda and economic development are not birds of the same feathers.

The problem of Uganda is not the lack of unavailability of workable solutions about ethnicity and political unity, but according to the study findings, is rather the lack of a required political will and appropriate political environment to implement them (Ihonvebere, 1996). The researcher believes that unless Uganda adheres to the principles of good governance and constitutionalism, the East African political unity will be fruitful.

The ethnic factor has been at the heart of Uganda's political development as inter-ethnic wars have been compounded; capitalizing on the isolation of ethnic groups in matters of politics and government, (Okwudiba: 1980). In addition to the study results, Gerhard (1993) believes that ethnicity and ethnic conflicts appear to be a response to the uneven development in multiethnic states which causes ethnic groups to mobilize and compete for national resources along ethnic lines. The outcome is the experience of distributional conflicts, which is the case with Uganda.

Ugandans view themselves in terms of tribe and the ideal of Uganda-ness is secondary. This was clearly expressed in the views advanced by respondents on the interview guide, about the first concluded East African legislative assembly speakership elections, which Hon. Margaret Zziwa won against her close counterpart, Hon. Byamukama. After the win, some Baganda believed that Zziwa's win was a win for Buganda kingdom in the struggle for tribal dominance; however, Hon. Omala Atubo replied that the election exposed the deep seated tribalism among some Ugandans who want to grab every big office and resources for themselves, (Daily Monitor Publication, 2012). This clearly confirms that we are still far from a political federation.

The findings also revealed that Ugandans do not trust their government and therefore doubt its credibility in pushing for the East African political federation. Respondents on the interview guide cited political corruption surfacing Ugandan government which breeds ethnicity, divisions and total mistrust which all have an impact on the formation of the East African political unity. This view is also shared by Osaghae (1988), when he emphasized a state as central to any analysis of corruption. He argues that political corruption is as a result of ethnicity in Africa. African leaders, once in power, they first surround themselves with their tribesmen by giving them juicy positions in government, and other tribes are considered later, or never in order to create an artificial semblance of national unity. The end result is ethnic consciousness, which transcends itself in disunity. These prospects are a hindrance to the formation of the East African political unity.

The study findings also revealed that the formation of the East African political unity is nearly impossible, but possible in words. This is revealed when the respondents on the same view, 66.4% believe that the political federation is impossible, while 25.4% agreed. When asked to justify their

positions, respondents on the interview guide believe that the differing beliefs, norms, customs and traditions of Ugandan people and those of East Africa do not show signs of willingness to unite, simply because they are different. The willingness to force Ugandans to join the political federation of East Africa will be a reference to cohabitation without marriage.

The idea of a political federation in East Africa particularly Uganda is a complex one. Gambo, (2006) has related these research findings to the theory of “godfatherism”, where in Ugandan political ideologies are constructed around the belief of certain individuals who later determine who wins an electoral contest. Ayoade, (2006) in the same view, also contends that this political business creates only political godsons by devious antidemocratic means backed by a standing personal army, supplemented with a sprinkling police detachment. This system clearly illustrates how ethno political governments operate. This creates a serious impact on political unity as respondents revealed; 72.5% agreed with the view, while 14.8% disagreed in the case of Uganda.

Hence, for ethnicity to be ameliorated in Uganda and foster political unity in the region, there should be constitutional reforms, where political leaders sit down and redefine the true meaning of politics and government to permit the people of Uganda and those in the entire region of East Africa to surrender their loyalty to the political unity of East Africa.

### **CONCLUSION**

Given the above findings, the research can vehemently conclude, that the different and contrasting interpretation of cultures, norms, customs and traditions of Ugandan people cannot allow the idea of the East African Political Federation to be successful, as it is projected. However, the realization of a political unity can be achieved if it is based on the cultural model. Therefore, there is need to adopt a cultural political federal model in East Africa that would clearly embrace, respect and recognize ethnic groups as equally important in the projected East African political Federation.

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