

Uganda Program Summary

Uganda's return to multiparty politics following a 2005 referendum created new opportunities for political participation and competition. Nineteen years of *de facto* one-party rule however, created significant obstacles to peaceful political competition and the establishment of effective, representative political institutions. To support the people of Uganda as they establish a functioning, multiparty democracy in the face of these challenges, the International Republican Institute (IRI) designed a program to strengthen political pluralism, increase the involvement of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in political processes, and to support the development of political parties and organizations.

Political Party Strengthening

IRI works with political parties to develop strategic plans and to strengthen party structures. Party activities supported by IRI include promoting internal party democracy, increasing communication between party organs and improving internal party organization, so that vital party functions are carried out and established between elections. At the district level, parties have opened offices, recruited volunteers to staff their offices and increased publicity activities.

Additionally, the Institute has sponsored an information and communications technology project for parties to establish interactive web forums at www.parties.ug and communicate with their members via SMS technology, the internet and radio.

IRI also supports the policy development process of political parties through its work with the parties and their affiliated foundations. For these programs, IRI partners with the four largest parties in Uganda's parliament: the National Resistance Movement, the Forum for Democratic Change, the Uganda People's Congress and the Democratic Party. The Institute has also provided limited assistance to two other parties represented in the legislature: the Justice Forum and the Conservative Party.

Disabilities Advocacy

In June 2007, IRI hosted a delegation of Ugandan parliamentarians active in disabilities-rights issues for a legislative exchange to the U.S. Upon their return, IRI launched a pilot program in four districts to connect national disabled persons' political leadership with local civil society groups representing persons with disabilities. The Institute's program serves to support the development of more effective issue-based advocacy in Uganda by focusing on the issue of disabilities advocacy.

Building on the foundation of the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2006, IRI is assisting advocates at the district, regional and national levels to develop monitoring and advocacy tools to ensure better service delivery for the disabled. The disabled persons' organizations, with which IRI has worked, have developed new strategies and techniques to advocate more effectively for their rights. Disability advocates have also run campaigns to engage with political leadership on how policies and programs could be changed to accommodate the needs of the disabled.

Electoral Reform

In addition to strengthening internal party democracy and political party structures, IRI has worked with political parties on the issue of electoral reform. IRI has hosted a series of dialogues with civil society organizations, representatives of the Electoral Commission, political parties and district officials to discuss areas that have been

flashpoints for violence. The findings of the groups will be presented to national leaders in an effort to encourage reform leading up to the 2011 elections.

Increasing Women and Youth Participation

To help increase women and youth participation in politics, IRI developed a youth internship program for political parties. IRI recruited, trained and placed a group of 20 youth in Uganda's leading parties to support activities at party secretariats, parliamentary caucuses and district offices. These interns carried out essential functions, including writing party publicity bulletins, membership data entry, organizing internal party elections and establishing party youth clubs in schools.

IRI is also hosting a series of Inspiring Youth Leadership fairs targeting youth at universities and secondary schools across Uganda. So far, more than 3,000 young people have participated in the fairs held in Kampala and Gulu.

In addition to the youth fairs, IRI is organizing a series of women in politics fairs. The fairs will bring together political parties, gender organizations and women leaders to encourage women to take part in party politics, advocacy and leadership. IRI is also organizing public debates for young women, which will be held in universities around the country. The debates will draw from young female students to serve as participants, and will focus on different national and district level political issues, helping young women improve their skills in public speaking and increasing their political exposure.

