Uganda eyes middle income status

By Nicholas Wawajja

American President Donald Trump recently labeled African countries "shitholes." A few days ago, President Yoweri Museveni said he "loves" Trump because it is such controversial, but honest statements that will act as a wake up call to the sleeping giant that is Africa.

Reading through the minds of the National Resistance Army (NRA) heroes that set out to capture power 32 years ago, the intention was to transform the country politically, socially and economically, perhaps to avoid the Trump kind of labelling.

Indeed, the progress made over the years has been the result of shared effort, which rhymes with the theme for the 32nd Liberation Day anniversary, "Uganda’s liberation a significant contribution to our present and future development."

It is upon this background that President Museveni, who spearheaded the NRA liberation struggle, argues that to avoid future scarring, Uganda and Africa at large need fast and lasting solutions to its continent’s plight.

The liberation struggle started with 27 brave men on February 6, 1986 with an attack on the then Government army installation at Kabamba. It was an uphill task, but they succeeded.

The NRA deputy secretary general, Richard Todwong, says at the core of the achievement, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) is the contribution each individual made, but urges citizens to continue engaging.

"When you read from history books, you realise that from the word war, Africans have been the cornerstone in the success story we all share in. However, a lot more still needs to be done, for example, we cannot be blind of the scattered cases of insecurity in some parts of the country. I think we need to go back to the NRA philosophy of everyone being their neighbours’ keeper," Todwong says.

He adds the various security units and authorities continue to play their role in ensuring that Ugandans enjoy the ultimate freedom that their forefathers sacrificed for.

"Partial responsibility is an oxymoron. But by and large, Uganda is safe from border to border," Todwong says.

His view rhymes well with President Yoweri Museveni’s recent thoughts on the final stages of the East African Community (EAC) integration. Speaking at the opening of the 48th East African Assembly yesterday, he urged the EAC to put in place a list of economic and social issues that must be resolved.

"We have experienced significant economic growth. According to a recent Bank of Uganda State of the Economy Report, in fiscal year 2015/16, it recorded Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 4.6% in real terms and 7.1% in nominal terms. Exports have increased from 2.8% of GDP in 2013 to 4.9% in 2016, while imports have increased from 3.5% in 2015 to 4.5% in 2016. The balance of payments is projected to improve from $22.7 billion in 2015/16 to $26.4 billion in 2016. The growth is expected to continue rising, driven mainly by public investment in infrastructure and human capital development. Museveni quickly adds that with infrastructure being high on the agenda in a decade plus, the Government will soon shift from enhancing human resource development and social service delivery, along more drums for household income."

Richard Todwong:

Legislative Assembly (IRALU) last week, Museveni said the drive for prosperity of the people in the region should not be to trade well with strategic security. At the country looks forward to the final stages of the EAC integration, which involves political federation and monetary union by 2020, the issue of strategic security has been partly addressed by establishing the EAC armed forces, made up of all the six partner states.

However, with or without the regional standby force, Uganda has mastered the importance of regional peace and security in the past 32 years of the NRM rule by providing its gallant sons and daughters a chance to fight alongside troups from foreign countries in the face of instability.

The justification for this enormous sacrifice, Todwong says, is the fact that the fundamental pillar of development is peace and security, both internal and external.

"It is not news that South Sudan contributes to Uganda's export trade. Therefore, it is not only also instilled the spirit of patriotism," Silwany says.

He adds that the celebrations are also a wake up call for all stakeholders to remember that Uganda still has a long way to go.

Silwany says "As we reflect on where we were, we also need to cast a light into the future. Yes, it is a bright one, but there are things that must be done. Having been in power for 30 years, some Ugandans seem satisfied with the current achievements and have veered off the course. That explains the high burden cost of non communicable diseases."

Today also marks almost two years since the electorate renewed the mandate of the NRM for another five-year term. The current vision is to propel the country to attain middle-income status by 2020.

When the NRM took over power, it inherited along the famous Ten-Point Programme, which outlined milestones to transform the country.

Silwany’s fears were allayed by President Museveni in 2016, when he outlined the key strategic bottlenecks that need to be addressed. He also assured the people of the much-anticipated middle income status by 2020.

Museveni said they should be addressed in the 2016-2020 Cabinet work plan. He declared a national campaign to produce the much-needed "Kisanja hakuna machezo."

At the inauguration of Cabinet in 2016, Museveni outlined the major hurdles to economic development and backed them with executive orders, as strategic interventions to guide the realization of his new plan.

He identified four principles at the core of the rejuvenated NRM, which include patriotism, Pan Africanism, social and economic transformation and accountability.

The strategic bottlenecks were—fighting ideological disorientation, eliminating sectionalism, improving education to reflect increased human resource and facilitating private sector-led economic growth.

Others were developing roads, railway and electricity infrastructure, market expansion through regional integration, pursuing industrialisation for exports’ value-addition, developing its sector to create jobs, modernizing agriculture to increase household incomes and deepening democratic governance.

With a projection of about $25 trillion revenue collection in the 2016/18 budget framework paper from about $10 trillion in the 2007/08 financial year, what remains to be seen is whether Government will address the standing challenges for better Uganda.