Introduction

The issue of economic development in Africa has sustained intense interest and interaction within the global community for at least the last half-century. Problem-solving internally and domestically has garnered sometimes peculiar and oftentimes detrimental results to African economies. The phrase, “the road to hell is paved with good intentions,” may come to mind. Nevertheless, it is difficult to conceive of an African developmental plan that does not necessitate strong international investors. Just one of the latest iterations of international interference—or help—in African development are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) created by the UN and ratified by 193 member states (developing and developed states alike) in 2015. Seventeen broad and independent goals meant to push countries to achieve considerable development by 2030. The goals themselves are targeted towards examining the root of issues and extraditing them, implying a sort of interconnectedness to keep in mind towards development.

In the very least, an inter-connected understanding of development is helpful; development is fundamentally non-linear in nature, and takes significant economic, socio-political, and environmental sector collaboration and more often times—sacrifice to move forward. Conversely, the inter-connected understanding that the SDGs possess, imply that with the achievement of one goal, several others will be achieved, non-withstanding the concessions from other sectors to achieve more desirable goals. Moreover, in the African context, with so many diverse economies to apply to, the SDGs could exacerbate the challenges of development most African countries, meanwhile providing helpful means to bring about development. To help fulfill the gaps in knowledge of what the SDGs mean for development in Africa, this paper will analyze the likelihood of just one African country reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. The purpose of this is to less make a broader statement about the continent, but to understand the SDGs in a more realistic manner. The SDGs, while impressive for the scope of how they want to tackle developmental issues, consequently, are written about in academia in large brush-strokes and recycling of ideas.

Therefore, to fulfill a small gap of knowledge, this paper will endeavor to look at just one case study (the country of Uganda) to more fully understand regional obstacles in fulfilling the goals. As well as the unique composition of factors that Uganda possesses in order to reach the goals. In order to illuminate my findings, in this paper I will first examine Uganda’s economic history, then address its development in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals. As well as a discussion of what factors will limit Uganda from reaching the SDGs. Finally, I will posit a tentative policy briefing for policy makers.

History of Economic Development

After independence in the October of 1962, Uganda seemed to look forward to prospering in a stable and fruitful economy. Independence from the British, was considerably less violent than other nations struggle for independence. For the first eight years after independence, Uganda remained a strong exporter of coffee and cotton—producing 218,000 tons and 243,000 tons, respectively in 1965. The manufacturing sector also started show promise: growing from 6 percent GDP in 1965 to 7.3 percent by 1971 (Wamrock, Conway; 1999). Then in 1967, Uganda joined Tanzania and Kenya to form the East African Community (EAC) hoping to reinforce economic, political, and cultural ties. Another building block that helped Uganda paint a promising picture of growth within Sub-Saharan Africa.

Economic stability, however, rapidly deteriorated in 1971 when General Idi Amin Dada came to power through a *coup de'etat* against President Milton Obote. Dada's regime had detrimental, and irreversible effects on Uganda, leaving a legacy that dubbed Dada, "the Butcher of Africa." The four years of Amin's administration maintained a strategy of supposed economic independence to defend the "economic war" that Dada embarked on. In 1972 Amin ordered the expulsion of British passport holders. This included about 80,000 people of South Asian descent, a nationalistic move that Dada claimed would be "giving Uganda back to ethnic Ugandans" (Jorgensen,1981). While the Asian population in Uganda was incredibly small, their economic presence contributed greatly to Uganda's economic downfall. Many Asians had been business owners, farmers, traders, and manufactures that contributed well to Uganda's growing manufacturing sector, as well as the primary sectors of agriculture and mining (Schultheis, 1975; Jorgensen, 1981; Sejjaaka, 2004). Meanwhile, Amin seized businesses that Asians and Europeans had owned and rewarded his own supporters with them. Consequently, gross mismanagement and maintenance incurred. Stability only continued to decay after that; Amin maintained the harsh economic regulations, originally instituted by Obote to try to rectify perceived social inequalities. Expropriation of foreign businesses only contributed to lack of foreign investment and confidence in the economy, while military expenditures grew to be the predominant focus of government spending—and deficit (Upenn.edu). Uganda became a pariah state under Amin; the EAC disbanded in 1977, and by the time he was forced to flee in 1979, his social and economic crimes compounded to nearly doom Uganda to be a failed state.

With Amin out, Obote was once again elected, however, in order to restore international trust for the Ugandan economy, Obote accepted significant international interference. The IMF gave a substantial amount of support, in exchange for floating the Ugandan shilling, tightening up government spending, removing price controls, rationalisation of tax structures. As well as encouraging expropriated firms and properties to return (Upenn.edu). However, by 1984 the IMF had ended its support over budget policy disagreements (oecd.org,1999; Upenn.edu). With the IMF taking away its support, in combination of the Ugandan civil war (the so-called ‘bush war’) from 1981-1986, Uganda’s economy was once again in shambles.

When Yoweri Museveni came into via the National Resistance Movement’s (NRM) overthrow of both Obote and the short-lived government of General Tito Okello, the country had been torn by rampant human rights abuses through dictatorships, regional and civil violence, amongst crumbling infrastructure (Wamrock, Conway, 1999). Museveni’s government can be seen as the start of rehabilitation of the Ugandan state. The NRM published an economic manifesto—the Ten Point Program—which, still emphasized socialism, concerning itself with self-sufficiency that also improved social services and welfare. As well as a focus on anti-corruption in government, returning expropriated land, reinstate regional market ties to East African states, as well as maintaining a mixed economy of private ownership and government activity (Wamrock, Conway, 1999). Overall, the NRM supported a self-sufficient economic policy that was fundamentally opposed to the popular IMF Structural Adjustment Plans of the 80’s and 90’s. However, the NRM was facing insurmountable challenges to ‘take-off’ economically. Inflation was running high at 147percent between July and December of 1986, and the effective exchange rate had increased to 128 percent (Sejjaaka, 2004). Leading Ugandan leaders to succumb to a loan given by the IMF by its Structural Adjustment Facility (SAF) the following year. Through 1992-1997 Uganda presented real per capita GDP growth averaged 4.2%, framing Uganda as one of the IMF’s only SAP success story (cepr.net, 1999). However, like most African countries that had come under SAP, the requirements that the IMF put on Uganda contracted the economy instead of helping it to grow. In 1998, the IMF had named Uganda as one of the first states to receive money from the IMF’s Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt initiative. About $650 million of its debt stock was forgiven. Yet, receiving debt forgiveness was challenged by several delays on the IMF's part. Originally, Uganda was to receive debt relief in 1997, but it was pushed back a year. Despite the fact that the country had reliably been following SAPs for at least a decade. According to the Ugandan government the cost of that one year of delayed debt relief was $193 million. An amount that was more than double than the projected spending on education, or six times total government spending on health that year (cepr.net, 1999). The lost debt relief compounded as the World Bank and the IMF overestimated how much Uganda's economy would make from coffee exports and trade with Zaire. When in reality Zaire's own economy was on the decline as world coffee prices dipped.

While donors painted Uganda as an aid ideal, there were several negative internal effects spurred on by governmental corruption. As scholar Nic Van Der Walle points out,

> …. states like Ghana and Uganda, in which strong leaders have sought to reconstitute stable political economies. Both Rawlings and Museveni are less sincere economic reformers than the donors like to believe. Progress on reform has actually been uneven, with fiscal deficits running at 8.3 and 10.2 percent of GDP on average during the 1990s in Uganda and Ghana. There is enough evidence from both countries of corruption and rent-seeking close to the presidency to suggest that these men are not that dissimilar to other African leaders…. (2001).

Never mind the fickle nature of foreign aid—in which donors can be unpredictably swung by the boom and busts of the economy, as well the standards that donor economies might impose on needy countries in order to lend. Countries still view foreign aid as a positive advantage over other developing countries. Desirable enough that countries will engage in bad behavior—like rent-seeking in order to engage in clientelism or other activities that keep kleptocracy thriving. In Uganda, President Museveni, with the NRM's Ten Point Plan, seemed to want to seriously engage with tackling corruption. However, he had inherited a weak system of civil servants that did not have such strong resolutions and were able collaborate to create a series of wage-enhancing techniques to take advantage of the donor communities (oecd.org,1999). Moreover, foreign aid and donorship unsustainably contributes to Uganda's economy. However, if the government could absorb aid in a more efficient and less predatory manner, aid could eventually help Uganda put in other measures to attract long-term capital.

Overall, Uganda can claim a positive trajectory for the future, albeit, a fluctuating growth based in a fragile centralized state. For instance, the East African Community was restored in 2000 and the regional integration originally sought-after has started coming to fruition within six partner states; harmonization of market integration, infrastructure that connects intra-stately, as well as macro-monetary integration (IMF.org, 2012). According to the African Development Bank Group, real GDP growth was an estimated 5.3% in 2018, up from 5.0% in 2017. And some analysis claims economic growth up by 6.2% in the 2018 to 2019 fiscal year. As well as agriculture, industry and services projected to grow 3.8%, 5.6%, and 7.8%, respectively (pwc.com, 2019). Generally, while there is fear of the amount of debt Uganda has accrued and is accruing for infrastructure expeditiitures, it remains to be seen how detrimental the debt will be in Uganda's future.

The Sustainable Development Goals and Uganda

To have any basic understanding of how Uganda might fare—or not in achieving the SDGs for 2030, we must first examine the Sustainable Development Goals themselves, especially concerning the intended impact of the goals, and potential criticisms of them. Then, this paper will analyze the tentative probability of Uganda reaching the Goals. The SDGs were created by the UN General Assembly in 2015, a part of Resolution 70/1 for the 2030 Agenda. The Sustainable Development Goals are just the second iteration of the UN—and by proxy, the world's mission to collectively address world development. Primarily in the economic, social, and environmental measures. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were the first short-term plan of the UN to catalyze development; drawing forth the convergence of several UN conventions and programs. Such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Health Organization (WHO), as well as several more development agencies. The MDGs were eight goals meant to broadly strengthen human capital, infrastructure, and human rights. By the end of 2015 the UN Secretary General had hailed the program as the "most successful anti-poverty movement in history," pulling at least a million people out of poverty (wvi.org, 2015). Whilst admitting the uneven development that had occurred as well, many sources specifically point out Sub-Saharan Africa as performing the worst as a region,

> For example, in the extreme poverty category the UN goal was a 50 percent reduction in the percentage of people living on under $1.25 a day. In 1990, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia had comparable rates (57 and 51 percent respectively), by 2015 it had fallen to just 17 percent in South Asia but remained stubbornly high - at 41 percent - in Sub-Saharan Africa (IRIN,2015).

Conversely, Uganda had performed better than expected for the MDGs, although, certainly not evenly across all goals. According to the United Nations final MDG report, Uganda achieved 33% of targets. Income poverty was reduced by two thirds, Malaria prevalence among children fell by more than 50% between 2009 and 2014. Also, a proportion of the rural population’s source for water increased from 52% in 2001/2 to 72% in 2012/13. As well as external debt service requirements fell from 23% of export earnings in 1999/2000 to 5.2% of exports in 2013/14.

The clear growth that Uganda showed after post-MDG era, gave hope for continued development. Especially because the SDGs are more specific and have more targets for countries to customize and to supposedly accomplish. In summary, here are the 17 goals that comprise the SDGs: 1) no poverty; 2) zero hunger; 3) good health and well-being; 4) quality education; 5) gender equality; 6) clean water and sanitation; 7) affordable and clean energy; 8) decent work and economic growth; 9) industry, innovation, and infrastructure; 10) reducing inequality; 11) sustainable cities and communities; 12) responsible consumption and production; 13) climate action; 14) life below water;15) life on land; 16) peace, justice, and strong institutions; 17) partnerships for the goals. Clearly, the goals cover a large spectrum of improvement that pragmatically, not all can be accomplished within 15 years. One way of looking at the SDGs are instituting them as more for norm building, and less for comprehensive implementation. Countries are meant choose a few goals that seem in-line with their own momentum, and work in tandem with the SDG targets to hope to reach the goals. The rest of the goals, countries keep in mind, however there’s no guarantee or even a realistic notion that one country could hope to accomplish them all. On the other hand, there are critics who look at the SDGs with the understanding that the UN means for countries to truly and rigorously attempt to implement all 17 goals, under the guidance of specific targets under each goal. To many onlookers, this would imply that somehow, by working towards a few (as is realistically possible) the rest of the goals could fall be reached. As stated earlier in this paper, that understanding lends itself to comprehending that all of these challenges are interconnected to such a degree that if one or a few goals are pursued, all are elevated. However, there are several viable criticisms against the SDGs.

The first, is that some SDGs may seem contradictory. For example, a developing country focused on economic growth—building up their industry sectors for maximum real GDP growth may find that for most economies this sort of rapid growth has historically been bad for the environment. Obviously unsustainable growth is contradictive to the majority, if not the very mission the SDGs. In his 2019 research paper on this very contradiction, scholar Jason Hickel presents the idea that Goal 8 violates the sustainability objectives of the SDGs. He then proposes that to remedy this contradiction, the requirement of aggregate global growth should be removed. That is, the goals should not rest on the assumption that the eradication of poverty and hunger can only be solved through continual economic growth. And proposes a few avenues in which the SDGs could pivot in order to define progress in more meaningful ways. Hickel's research is just one contributing paper on a body of literature that finds fault in the goals, if the UN really does expect countries to invest in all of them, another apparent problem is simply the shear amount of goals that countries are now instructed to pursue—remember that the MDGs were comprised of only 8 goals, compared to 17. With such an all-encompassing agenda, it seems almost inconceivable and unrealistic that any country could attain the goals that the UN has in mind, much less indebted and fragile states such as Uganda.

However, for the sake of argument, this paper will continue on the assumption that the UN means for states to focus on a few relevant goals, convenient to reach, perhaps under the premise of the states preceding goals. And assumedly under the influence of what conclusions the MDGs came to. This strategy is certainly true for Uganda, in a 2017 speech in Kampala, IMF managing Director, Christine Lagarde praised Uganda for its economic achievements thus far, but also urged the state to focus on investing in infrastructure, strong institutions, and regional economic integration. In light of Lagarde's recommendations, then, what are the chances that Uganda reaches just those three goals?

Looking to the targets for Goal 9, it's valid to have optimism for Uganda's growth in its infrastructure. Afterall, the targets under each goal are pretty open to interpretation. For example, target 9.1 states that, "Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and trans-border infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all” (sustainabledevelopment.org, 2015). In combination with the seemingly easy encouragements of Christine Lagarde, who in her 2017 cited mismanagement and poor governance as the main obstacles in Uganda’s way for development. Not only does strong leadership and anti-corruption polices have a huge impact on the chances of Uganda succeeding, but to grow infrastructure large, sustained capital expenditures. A recent economic policy research journal pointed out that Uganda, in order to fulfill infrastructure gaps will require regular spending of approximately USD 1.4 billion per year, in reality, Uganda spends about USD 1 billion annually on infrastructure. Implying a sever need for financing that must come from foreign donors (eprcug.org, 2017). Other goals face similar, if not the same worries: a fragile centralized state, evidenced by corrupted governments that have crippled and set-back Ugandan growth, coupled with the risky debt-inducing loans that seem to be one of the only ways to spur economic growth. Overall, it is from these factors that this paper may conclude with little hope for Uganda to reach the Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN for 2030. But it is with full hope that the Ugandan economy is admirably rising from the ashes severe economic distress, with a promising future ahead of them, keeping in mind challenges that have spurred them in the past, and continue to intimidate growth.

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Policy Brief

In September 2015 the United Nations implemented the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), following the Millennium Development Goals, and as a part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs aimed to go further than the MDGs by creating broader and more holistically based goals that were more equipped to handle global challenges to come. Uganda was one of the first countries to embrace the SDGs, especially in consideration of its success with the MDGs— reaching 33% of targets by 2015—when the MDGs ended. Uganda took the goals in stride, as they helped embraced Uganda's Vision 2040, as well as the East African Community's Vision 2050. Plans that all supported and further cultivated Uganda's Second National Development Plan (NDPII) (2015/16-2019/20), which aims to transform Uganda's economy to middle income status by 2020. The Plan emphasizes five areas that the Ugandan government sees as multipliers in the economy: agriculture, tourism, minerals, oil and gas, as well as infrastructure development. Then it is through these multipliers, that the Plan aims for eight objectives to guide its implementation. These included: (I) increasing household incomes and promoting equity; (II) enhancing the availability and quality of gainful employment; (III) improving the stock and quality of economic infrastructure; (IV) increasing access to quality social services; (V) promoting science, technology, innovation and ICT to enhance competitiveness; (VI) enhancing human capital development; (VII) strengthening good governance, defense and security; (VIII) and promoting sustainable population and the use of environmental and natural resources.

Uganda, however, still has many challenges to face despite best-laid plans. The economy has not rebounded to the extent that investors wanted from significant expenditures for infrastructure, as well as protectionist policies reminiscent of past economic regimes, a weak centralized government, and the fight to continue to reduce poverty. Solving these challenges can come through a few different avenues. The first is to still invest in infrastructure, but to manage it in more efficient manner. Keeping wary of debt through loans and utilizing more revenue from taxes. What might undoubtedly would help is creating a central government that relies on transparency and accountability to lead. Instead of building up the economy simply to preside over short-term revenues that on the long-term sell-out Ugandans. Leaders should also invest more in regional economic integration. Uganda is already a part of the East African Community

(EAS) and should continue to contribute to the economic bloc. Lastly, inclusive growth induced by poverty reduction programs, with a focus on women in Uganda’s economy, which, should add value and raise productivity. Of course, these policy recommendations are incredibly broad, and much like the critiques aimed at the SDGs aren’t so attuned to the local context of the Ugandan economy. However, it is still important to reinforce the importance of such policy decisions as they help remind global economies that IMF, World Bank and other international institutions that it is in everyone’s best interest if the global economy supports emerging ones such as Uganda.