

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF BANYAKIGEZI CONVENTION REPORT- LONDON JULY 2005

1. Introduction

The third Convention of the International Community of Banyakigezi (ICOB) was successfully held at the Croydon Park Hotel in London from **28th July – 1st August 2005**. It was attended by members from the local chapters in the USA, Canada, Uganda and the United Kingdom. It was a truly family affair attended by relatives, kinsfolk, friends, in-laws and well-wishers in large numbers. It was a meeting of similar minds, many meeting for the first time and a few re-unions after years of separation, while others were into their third year of attending similar conventions. There was a lot to learn, share and celebrate.

2. The Program: Convention deliberations

The theme of the 2005 ICOB Convention was **Cultural Solidarity as an Engine of Development**. The first session on 29 July started with a round of self-introductions with everyone present mentioned one or more of the following; their names, their clan or line of descent in Kigezi, marital status, current country of residence and any other information participants chose to identify themselves.

The key topics for discussion were: Banyakigezi migration and culture; Culture as an engine for economic development; Women, the culture and education of the Banyakigezi; Youth, culture and development; Health of the Banyakigezi; and the Future of Banyakigezi culture and development. Presenters introduced their assigned topics, which were opened for discussion by the general audience, facilitated by a designated moderator.

2 (a) Banyakigezi migration and culture – by Mr. Silvester Tweyongyere

The presenter gave a detailed history of the Banyakigezi migrations tracing it from the 1950's to date. Originally a result of overpopulation due to high birth rates or fertility among the Banyakigezi, migration has in the later years evolved to become a political issue. As a result of unlawful and violent evictions from where they were resettled, a large section of the Banyakigezi migrants is now facing displacement and the accompanying distress, often characterized by loss of life and property. The haphazard nature of this exercise has left many Banyakigezi migrants suffering and has done untold damage to their social fabric.

The Convention was informed that to date the wrangling about land ownership, resettlement, and compensation of the displaced Banyakigezi is on-going. ICOB members were encouraged to support fellow Kinsmen in pursuing compensation, resettlement and security of person and property towards a just conclusion. Honourables Jack Sabiiti and Charles Byaruhanga - both members of parliament representing constituencies predominantly inhabited by Banyakigezi gave the convention participants an insight into the causes of these problems. They highlighted the following areas that needed more attention and had lacked adequate government support:

- The lack of a proper resettlement policy
- The lack of leadership among the 'Bafuruki' (migrants from Kigezi)
- The mismanagement of the compensation process

They also went on to suggest the following ways to be explored by members of ICOB and other well-wishers alike to help move things forward:

- Initiation of discussions at high levels of government regarding land ownership and redistribution
- Bafuruki to be advised and encouraged to wait for proper settlement before entertaining political ambitions as previous experience has proved that doing so has done more harm than good.
- ICOB members to think of ways and means of influencing decisions through use of researched facts when advocating and lobbying government
- Give financial and other material to the Bafuruki to assist them with litigation

A contributor from the audience suggested that ICOB members acknowledge the significant efforts and contributions made by all members of parliament from Kigezi, including Steven Bamwanga and Ruhakana Rugunda.

In general there were lessons to learn from the entire migration experience notably the need for Banyakigezi to be strategic in how they settle among the host communities. They have up to now been viewed with suspicion, envy and, in the worst cases, hostility. Immigrants could improve this situation by being conciliatory and less ostentatious in their approach and relations with indigenous communities.

2 (b) Culture as an engine for economic development – by Mr. Eustace Betubiza

Mr. Betubiza presented the convention with facts about economic development. He emphasised the need for increasing labour and capital as key factors in increasing economic development. He related this to the Banyakigezi who he proposed should be looking at increasing their productivity, improving aspects in culture and education, as well as increasing levels of savings and investment in order to improve overall efficiency and thereby addressing issues of development in Kigezi and beyond.

The role of culture was then discussed in more detail led by the presenter who challenged the audience to consider what he referred to as the 'Asian miracle'. He pointed out that based on the highly upheld values of Trust, Social Cohesion, Honour and Modest living, the Asian populations in the diaspora have made huge strides in self improvement to the point where they are now able to compete favourably with populations in the developed economies. They are experiencing a growth in industries such as trade, arts, music and theatre. Kigezi by comparison has not even started to break into the national market let alone the diaspora. Although Banyakigezi have a lot of good attributes going for them such as industriousness, an independent spirit, the love of culture and a strong sense of pride and identity, these have over the years been eroded by a host of negative ones too. There is an increasing sense of disunity, dependency syndrome - the nahirwa nakubona mentality - rampant alcoholism, male chauvinism, insensitivity and a general lack of entrepreneurship.

The Way Forward

The need for the development of **entrepreneurial skills** came top of the list as it became clear during the plenary discussions that the people of Kigezi suffered from lack of productive occupation or gainful employment. One member pointed out that the education being provided in the technical schools was too basic to be useful in this modern day and age. It still emphasised how to do but did not **address fine workmanship** so that products could compete on the national and **international markets**

The members attending were also challenged to think and act on ways and means of **restoring the pride of Kigezi**. The Development of **a robust cultural industry** was among the solutions discussed. The writing and **preservation of literature** about the people and culture of Kigezi, promotion of its **music and dance**, the sale of **artefacts** particularly in relation to the growing **tourist industry**, were all suggestions made on how to change the dynamics of development in Kigezi.

Another member of the audience pointed out that ICOB members needed to consider selling these developmental ideas to **opinion leaders** and **trendsetters** back home who could better help to move the to a practical level. It was also observed that there had to be some form of economic incentive provided to facilitate these changes and to promote the idea that "before you ask what your country has done for you ask first what you can do for your country".

Education must be invested in because it is the key to emancipation and empowerment. This tied in with the USA and Canada local chapter project started with an aim of improving technical education in the region. The **Kigezi Education Fund** had

already been established and would soon be up and running towards modernising technical education in Kigezi. The Rukungiri technical Institute had already been identified as pilot for this fund. Members were encouraged to actively support this noble cause.

Breaking the cycle

Members of ICOB were encouraged to try and give hope to our brothers and sisters back home rather than allow them to languish. This could be done by trying to help them break the cycle of poverty that they are currently trapped in. There was need to raise awareness on the problem of alcoholism and seek ways to address it, be mindful of remittances which can get easily misallocated or misused. Furthermore to facilitate the promotion of Women enterprise and long term planning.

2 (c) Women, Culture and Education - by Professor Joy Kwesiga

The presenter gave a historical background on the education of women in Uganda highlighting the ways in which efforts have been made to ensure that girls get an equal chance of education as boys. She mentioned aspects of affirmative action taken by the various government in promoting girls education such as; District scholarships, addressing barriers to education by providing sanitary facilities, addressing issues of teenage pregnancy and ensuring security ins schools and at home. Other initiatives include mentoring programs, influencing policy formulation and implementation, as well as personal commitment on the part of those involved.

Synthesis of current situation

Although all these efforts had been or were being made the current situation still left a lot to be desired. Joy highlighted the following areas of concern: the prevalence of poverty. Alcoholism and drug-taking, casual occupations and the general indiscipline in schools which compounded or negated any progress made in education in general and of girls in particular.

She also mentioned the fact that a lot of the training going on in tertiary institutions was based on affordability and not relevant to the job market. The equipment used was outdated and so the likelihood of the education available being useful in the long term was in doubt and needed rethinking at all levels.

2 (d) Health of Banyakigezi by – Dr. Shek Matsiko and Dr. George Scullard

The two doctors presented complimentary papers on the health of the Banyakigezi in Kigezi and in the diaspora (the latter focussing on the UK).

Dr Matsiko painted a dire situation of the health of Banyakigezi in Kigezi. Many diseases that had been brought under control were on the increase due to the deterioration of general hygiene and nutrition.

Access to health services had been inhibited by lack of medical equipment and expertise. Many doctors had inadequate or even lacked training in modern diagnosis and therapy. When the correct

diagnosis was made, very often the drugs required to treat the illnesses were either unavailable or prohibitively expensive – both of which led to high and avoidable mortality. In some cases, modern equipment was donated to hospitals which lacked the technical expertise to install and operate it.

During the plenary, many contributors expressed concern that the meagre financial resources were being spent on the treatment of well-placed individuals and, or their families abroad instead of building and equipping modern health centres at home. A few got excellent treatment abroad while the majority got sub-standard or no treatment at home. It was critical for the country to review its priorities for the good of all its citizens.

Dr Scullard enlightened Banyakigezi on modern developments in the management and treatment of HIV / AIDS. Whereas only a few years ago HIV infection invariably led to the development of AIDS and almost certain death within a short period, recent technological and pharmaceutical innovations prolong lives. Mortality among patients with HIV / AIDS had reduced dramatically and opportunistic infections were much easier to prevent and treat.

Although the fight against HIV / AIDS is far from being won, recent medical developments give patients and their doctors a lot of hope. Mother – to – child HIV transmission has been brought under control. After a period of apparent reduction in new infections, they have been picking again among heterosexual adults in recent years. There is a need to reinforce the message that protection from infection is very indispensable, and that current and future drugs are not a cure. The development of a vaccine is still elusive and, at best, many years away.

2 (e) Culture and the way forward

During a discussion following the presentation on Youth, Culture and Development the young people raised a number of concerns that were discussed at length and later on included in the draft recommendations at the end of the convention. They raised concerns about:

The lack of or shaky sense of belonging on their part due to language limitations, little or no knowledge about the Banyakigezi culture in general and a general feeling of alienation even more keenly felt during the convention where they could not respond to the adults who addressed them in Rukiga and felt insulted/humiliated when the adults laughed it off. They requested more parental input at home on language, folklore and food. A few who had had this input shared the positive effect it had had on them.

They wished to interact with youth from Kigezi and hoped that through ICOB this might begin to happen through mentoring or buddying programs or even arranging for gap year experiences.

They expressed a desire to get more involved even at the International level, including having a representative on the ICOB executive committee, get opportunities to develop leadership through participating in politics or community service activities.

They wanted to be educated more about the different aspects of Banyakigezi culture so that they could do their bit in raising awareness among the youth in their local chapters

- In view of all this the following were suggested as different ways in which the interests and needs of the youth could begin to be addressed:
- Rukiga language lessons
- Networking by e-mail
- Youth specific programs at conventions
- Representation of the youth on ICOB
- Institute an independent youth ICOB Committee
- Develop a web page specific to youth
- Youth to exchange addresses and start communicating with each other
- Research on Kigezi through University
- Read available literature on Kigezi, buy artefacts and put in our homes for the youth to get familiar with Kigezi culture
- Organize regular Banyakigezi Youth activities within local chapters
- Educate children about clan differences

3. A Summary of the ICOB 2005 Convention Action Plan adopted in London

Before the convention closed on 31 July 2005, participants adopted the following action plan – to be known as the “London Action Plan” – for implementation during the period leading up to and beyond the next ICOB Convention to be held in Canada.

Economic Development:

Lobby Government to accelerate the Ntungamo-Kihihi & Kabale-Kisoro road projects and feeder roads of economic viability;
Identify and promote opportunities for development of tourism and tourist sites

Kigezi Education Fund (KEF):

Appoint a KEF Coordinator per local chapter;

Develop a fund raising strategy that is broad enough to include both members and non-members of ICOB

Democracy:

Promote civic education in on-going and new programs of ICOB;

Highlight the importance of democracy to the development process.

Education for Women:

Use the KEF to encourage women in vocational/technical education;

Promote twinning and exchange arrangements for staff and students with priorities for women and girls

Migration of Banyakigezi (within Uganda):

ICOB to document migration issues and to circulate documents to relevant government and donor agencies urging action including completion of a resettlement policy;

ICOB to facilitate Gov'nt compensation of Mpokya eviction victims by engaging a consultant to work with local leaders to produce a verified list of beneficiaries.

Health in Kigezi:

Promote internet-based information sharing on health issues and actions;

Identify and publicize gaps and priorities in the health sector.

Youth:

Promote networking and information sharing among youth at local and international levels;

Develop youth activities for the next Convention and draw up future plans for youth exchanges;

Banyakigezi Heroes:

Undertake more research to streamline categories of heroes taking into account diversity in districts, gender, religion, culture etc.

Document the findings of the proposed research

4. INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF BANYAKIGEZI CONVENTION EVALUATION

Towards the end of the evaluation participants were asked to evaluate the convention using a set of 9 criteria as follows; Venue, Topics, Entertainment, Organisers/Officials, Childcare, Meals and Snacks, Expectations, Presenters and Moderators. The following is a summary of the outcome and comments, observations and suggestions given by participants in general.

The convention presenters, moderators and organisers were well appreciated while the topics, meals and snacks plus participants expectations followed closely behind. The most criticised was childcare, venue and entertainment.

END