

NRM@40: Turning national gains into tangible hope

Targeted programmes like the Parish Development Model (PDM) have reshaped lives amid national gains, reflecting the NRM's focus on inclusive development under Vision 2040.

BY CAESAR ABANGIRAH

On January 26, 1986, Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) fighters entered Kampala, bringing an end to nearly two decades of brutal instability that had left Uganda reeling from dictatorship, war, and economic collapse.

Forty years later, in 2026, the country's transformation is evident not just in national figures but in the lived experiences of people across diverse regions—from the once-conflict-scarred north to the oil-rich west, the fertile east, and the agricultural heartlands of Bu-

soga and Toro.

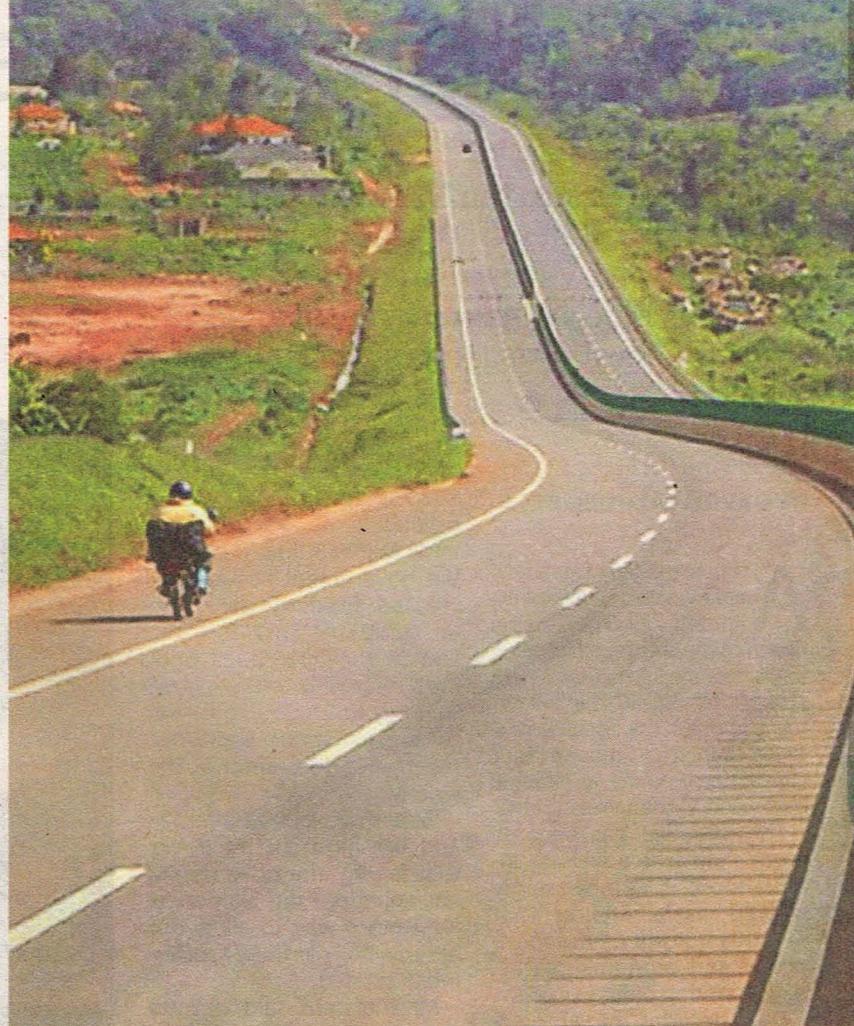
To illustrate this journey, consider ordinary Ugandans in five districts spanning the country: Gulu in the north (Acholi sub-region), Kabarole in Toro (western region), Buliisa in Bunyoro (oil belt), Mbale in the east (Elgon sub-region), and Kamuli in Busoga (central-eastern). These areas highlight how peace, infrastructure, and targeted programmes like the Parish Development Model (PDM) have reshaped lives amid national gains, reflecting the NRM's focus on inclusive development under Vision 2040.

In Gulu District, northern Uganda, the scars of the Lord's Resistance

Army conflict lingered long after peace efforts in the mid-2000s. Yet today, stability has enabled recovery. Farmers grow crops such as maize, beans, and coffee, with initiatives boosting yields and market access through better roads, animal diagnostic facilities, and restocking programmes.

Despite challenges such as higher poverty in Acholi sub-region (around 42% regionally, in recent surveys), peace has shifted focus to wealth creation, with President Museveni emphasizing commercial agriculture to lift communities.

Kabarole District in the Toro region, with its fertile soils, proxim-



The Kampala-Entebbe Expressway is one of the achievements realised during NRM's 40-year stay in power.

ity to Fort Portal, and attractions like the Rwenzori Mountains, has benefited from agricultural partnerships and research.

The National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) collaborates with local kingdoms to introduce high-yielding varieties of bananas, maize, beans, coffee, and tea, alongside improved livestock breeds.

Better inputs

Hakeem Atageka, a local farmer says: "We used to struggle with low yields due to poor seeds and erratic weather; now, better inputs and training mean more to sell at markets, feed our families, and even invest in small enterprises." Physical development plans project sustained growth in agro-processing, aligning with national efforts to boost value addition and tourism in the highlands.

Buliisa District in Bunyoro exemplifies the promise of oil-led transformation. As a hub for the Tilenga Project (operated by TotalEnergies across Buliisa and Nwoya) and nearby Kingfisher (CNOOC-led), the area is on track for first oil in the second half of 2026, with projects over 60% complete and the East African Crude Oil Pipeline advancing steadily. President Museveni has urged sustainable use of the resource:

"Petroleum is exhaustible—we

have 6.5 billion barrels for about 25 years; use it to create durable wealth in infrastructure, jobs, and agriculture." Local communities anticipate employment opportunities, better roads, schools, and spillovers to farming and trade.

Mbale District, in the eastern Elgon region, thrives on its renowned Arabica coffee production—contributing significantly to Uganda's exports—alongside maize, bananas, and other crops on fertile volcanic soils. As a secondary city and trade hub with access to Kenya, it supports urban-peri-urban farming and value chains like coffee processing. Challenges like land fragmentation persist, but investments in storage, roasting facilities, and market links create non-farm jobs.

Kamuli District in Busoga showcases integrated farming's impact on livelihoods. Smallholders face productivity hurdles from soil degradation and climate variability, but projects like Participatory Integrated Planning (PIP) combine crops (maize, beans, coffee) with livestock such as poultry and goats for resilience and diversified income. Farmers report improved food security and earnings: "Mixing poultry, crops, and goats helps us withstand dry spells, earn more from sales, and support household needs like health and education." Government initiatives provide skills

Peace.

"The biggest achievement of defence is the stability of the country. When it comes to peace and territorial integrity..."

Hon. Jacob Oboth-Oboth, Minister of Defence, affirms:

training, improved seeds, and market linkages, turning subsistence into commercial potential in this densely populated area.

These district stories mirror broader national progress under 40 years of NRM leadership. Peace was the cornerstone: Sergeant James Lutalo, a former bush war fighter retired in Luwero, recalls: "We laid down arms knowing our children wouldn't pick up guns."

Reforms

The 1995 Constitution decentralised power, empowering districts with local governance. Multiparty elections since 2005 engage citizens, with Freedom House noting strides from 1986's chaos (Uganda at 34/100 in 2025).

Economically, IMF-backed reforms drove average annual GDP growth of around 6% over recent decades, pushing GDP to approximately \$55-72 billion

by latest estimates (World Bank and IMF data for 2025/26 projections), with per capita income around \$1,000-1,400. Real GDP grew 6.3% in FY2024/25, driven by household consumption, government spending, and investment. Poverty has declined significantly—from 56.4% in 1993 to national rates around 16-20% in recent UBOS surveys (e.g., 16.1% in UNHS 2023/24), though regional disparities remain (e.g., lower in Kampala, higher in Karamoja). Infrastructure expanded: electricity generation from 150 MW to over 1,800 MW, reaching about 47% of households.

Hon. Matia Kasaija, Minister of Finance, highlights: "Peace, security, political stability, increased pocket cash... poverty reduction compared to 15 years ago." Debt challenges (external around \$11-15 billion) are managed prudently, with IMF projecting 7.6% growth in 2026.

Trade and manufacturing surged: from 80 industries in 1986 to over 9,000, employing millions. Hon. Francis Mwebesa, Minister of Trade said, "Value addition is not optional; it is the foundation of Uganda's competitiveness."

Exports in coffee, gold, and value-added goods thrive, backed by agro-industrialisation priorities.

Socially, HIV/AIDS prevalence fell from 18% in the early 1990s to 5.1% by 2023 (UNAIDS), life ex-

pectancy rose to 68-70 years, infant mortality dropped from 122 to about 34 per 1,000 births, and rural safe water access reached 80% (WHO and UBOS).

Education completion improved from 35% to over 50%, with hundreds of new schools. Women's parliamentary representation hit 34%.

Major boosts

In foreign affairs, Uganda remains an island of peace in a turbulent region, hosting refugees and leading peacekeeping. Hon. Gen. Jeje Odongo: "Uganda's most profound gratitude to the BRICS..."

In 2026, with over 50 million people (median age around 18), youth-focused initiatives like PDM offer pathways amid low official youth unemployment but underemployment concerns. Oil promises major boosts—first production targeted for second half of 2026—aligning with NDP IV's Tenfold Growth Strategy and middle-income goals by 2040.

As President Museveni, now 81, steers toward Vision 2040, these district voices—from Gulu's recovery to Buliisa's oil hopes—embody the human side: families reunited, farms productive, futures brighter. From 1986's ashes, Uganda rebuilds steadily, one region, one life at a time, turning national gains into tangible hope across the land.