

Seeking a coherent national identity: the Ugandan experience

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Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa, bordered by Kenya in the east, Sudan in the north, the Democratic Republic of Congo in the west, Tanzania in the south and Rwanda in the southwest. It has a population of approximately 30,900,000 (2007 UN estimate). Uganda is a multilingual nation with a variety of indigenous languages. Gordon (2005) identifies 45 languages, 43 living and two extinct. The official language of Uganda is English. Although the 1995 constitution allows the use of indigenous languages in any domain of public life, English remains the language of every domain of the public arena and also the language of political and social exclusio (Katamba 2006) . The government, through the national parliament has had intentions of making Swahili the country's second official language, but since very few people in Uganda are fluent in Swahili, these efforts have met more criticisms than support.

This paper discusses the national language experience in Uganda, the struggles and strategies of managing linguistic and ethnic diversity, and the role of language in building a coherent national identity. The question of which language should become official is important to many if not all Ugandans and highlights the relationship between language policy and national identity in nation building (Ricento, 2005). Against this background, the paper investigates the role of English and the 43 living languages in Uganda, and asks how a coherent national identity can be achieved.