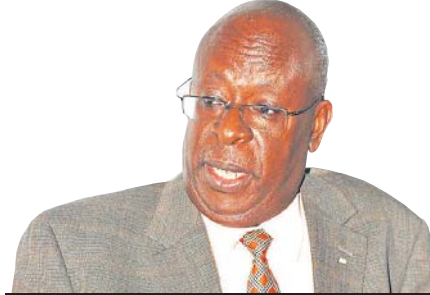


## WORLD BOOK DAY

New Vision  
ADVERTISER SUPPLEMENT

## Uganda needs library culture

April 23 is World Book Day, a day to mark the joys of reading. The date marks 403 years since William Shakespeare, the greatest writer of all time and Miguel de Cervantes – Don Quixote author and the greatest writer in the Spanish language ever – both died. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) set the day aside to promote reading, publishing and copyright. This year's event pays special attention to the role of indigenous languages. Fountain Publishers has been at the helm of the publishing industry in Uganda, producing educational and literary material for more than 30 years. On this 24th World Book and Copyright day, Ahumuza Muhumuza interviewed Fountain Publishers' founder James Tumusiime about the year's theme, the status of reading and its future in Uganda.



James Tumusiime, founder of Fountain Publishers

**Q** What is the status of the reading culture in Uganda?

Uganda has invested heavily in education and that is a good thing, but the investment needs to be boosted with an investment in books and libraries.

A democracy is guided by knowledge; for a healthy democracy to function, people read, discuss and share alternative policies. Because of Uganda's unique history – decades of instability and mismanagement, it has the distinction of being the only East African country without a vibrant national library. But this has not always been the case. Uganda used to have libraries in every district. The political troubles of the regimes after independence destroyed this.

When the current Government came to power in 1986, it had no option, but to prioritise bread and butter sectors – the basics such as food, safety and travel. But now that the country is stable and secure, the lack of investment in libraries is a huge omission that needs to be rectified.

The reading culture has also suffered because of misplaced emphasis on passing exams and cut-throat competition among schools. Students have to cram and regurgitate content in narrow spheres of interest. The type of teaching done in most schools, the questions set for tests and the objectives of the system are all set on shaky ground. These methods do not inspire a healthy reading culture. Students are forced to memorise facts packed in pamphlets and textbooks. Many Ugandans, therefore, internalise reading as a punishment from an early age. That is why, after major examinations such as Primary Seven and Senior Four, children light a bonfire and burn their books. There is no

## Is Copyright law abused?

The copyright law has been abused through, first and foremost, the pervasive culture of pamphlets, where books or sections of academic books are churned out as commercial materials. A number of unscrupulous dealers have even gone further ahead to republish and print books without permission.

Fountain Publishers has been working with Uganda Registration Services Bureau and members of other creative content industries to fight book pirates and other criminals who infringe on copyright. When the

Government orders books from us, we do not lose money. But the cost of piracy in the private sector is huge. We lose more than 50% of potential income. These criminals have a strong network in the region, spilling across borders. They are a huge drain on publishers' resources. We have now started including holograms on each book so that it is easier to identify the publisher of each book. We are also working with the National Book Trust of Uganda to sensitise schools to buy books from genuine publishers only.

room for exploration, discovery and the sharing of ideas, which would have otherwise inculcated a vibrant reading culture.

Knowledge is meant to be shared, debated and improved. Instead, in our systems, the same questions from long ago are set over and over again, the same answers are expected. Students just cram these.

## Why do we need to read?

Reading improves the life skills of students and adults and consequently improves a country's standing since people are its most valuable resource. When a country's education system discourages reading outside of class, the country suffers. People need to share experiences – through biographies, share life skills – through self-help books or textbooks in order to appreciate their surroundings, understand their culture and utilise this information to appreciate, enjoy and better utilise their environment to thrive.

A good education system keeps experimenting, implementing, testing and improving. The Government, working with technocrats and policy makers, has tried to improve Uganda's education system, but the

current system of cramming and regurgitating information is so strong that it pushes their efforts aside. As publishers, we also have an important role to play. If we only target schools, feeding them information to pass on to their students to regurgitate like a conveyor belt, we would be neglecting our duties. Our duty is to stir creativity; to engage good writers to enhance the reading experience and cultivate a wholesome individual.

If Uganda is to move into middle income-status, books and libraries are part and parcel of what it takes. It would be a big omission for the Government not to prioritise this. A library culture is a vital part of every developed country. In the US, almost every president who retires starts a library to cement their legacy, but in Uganda, we have no Milton Obote library or Idi Amin library.

## Will books survive the era of social media?

In order to deal with the 'threat' of social media, publishers and other stakeholders in the book industry will have to re-strategise, repackaging and relaunch books. With the

widespread popularity of TV in the 1940s and 50s, many thought radio was going to go under, but radio is still here, very much alive and strong today because it managed to adapt. Books will, therefore, be able to adequately coexist with social media and so will newspapers.

**How relevant is the theme of this year's celebration to our situation in Uganda**

• where English seems to have edged out local languages?

• This year's World Book and Copyright Day celebrates the role of indigenous languages while aiming to enhance and protect their status. Fountain Publishers has been at the forefront of promoting local languages in Uganda. Long before the Government prioritised this, we had already

invested heavily in the revival of indigenous languages. First, we got rights from authors of old local language classics that had gone out of print and republished them. Fountain Publishers has made sure there is a dictionary for children and adult readers and textbooks in every recognised language in Uganda. The Government has reinvigorated the campaign to promote the use of the mother tongue in schools, but this is almost a little too late. Most young people have been disoriented and programmed to give preference to the English language. Although it will be an uphill task, there is still room to improve the status of local languages – by encouraging competitions and activities such as essay writing, poetry and singing competitions. We need creative programmes if we are to uplift the status of local languages in the national psyche.



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## Celebrating World Book and Copy Right Day 2019

Moran (U) Publishers Ltd is a publishing company that strives to provide quality information to our readers by publishing and marketing stimulating educational and general reading materials. As we celebrate world book and copy right day, we are fully committed to deliver the most effective, well researched and appropriate educational resources focused on improving student learning outcomes.



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