

By Bob Kisiki

It is almost an annual ritual. Each time there is a book-related event – conference, symposium, market or whatever – people assert: Ugandans do not read.

The interesting thing is, it is Ugandans who say this. And they should know, shouldn't they? At this point, I will not say the assertion is true or false; let's first take a look at where we have come from as a people.

### Society and information

We all know that no society can survive without an information and knowledge sharing system.

Every society is founded on having information and knowledge about themselves, such as commercial engagement and deity, among other things. Africa was not any different before the West invaded her.

### Passing on information

In Buganda, for instance, there was an established system by which families ensured that children knew and appreciated their lineage; traced their ancestry and learnt the values that distinguished Buganda and its traditions from other peoples.

They had an established clan system that had roots deeply buried in the individual

# Do Ugandans have a



Children reading story books in a classroom. In book stores, many people tend to buy more books than gifts

family, from where one was established in their identity; layer by layer, as they went outward, towards their perceived founder, Kintu.

As they worked, tilling

the gardens, building huts, hunting and other forms of work, the Baganda always ensured to pass on all vital information and knowledge to their offspring.

### Informal education

They taught sex education; instructed boys and girls on gender roles and the history of skills such as hunting and crafts-making. Also, as they did

this, they sang songs that were loaded with this information.

In the evening hours, before and after meals, again there were sessions held around the fireplace, where knowledge

**EVERY SOCIETY IS FOUNDED ON HAVING INFORMATION ABOUT THEMSELVES**

and information were shared. This was through folklore – the swapping of proverbs, tongue twisters, tales and sayings.

So, no African ever lacked information and Africa is not averse to the generation and dissemination of information and knowledge.

### Formal education

Why this belief that Africans or Ugandans do not read? Where did the (literary) rain begin to beat us? For one, transitioning from the oral tradition to a system where one was required to first learn to read and write before they could access information and knowledge has been arduous.

It demands that one unlearns a multi-century-long cultural

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KYAMBOGO



UNIVERSITY

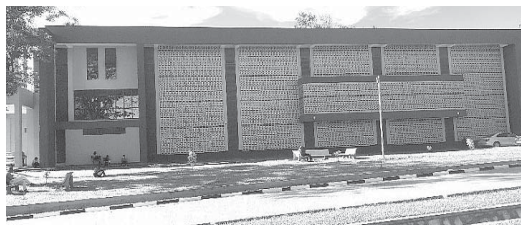
## Kyambogo University Library Celebrates World Book and Copyright Day 2019

Today, Kyambogo University Library joins the rest of the world to celebrate the World book and Copyright day. Kyambogo University Library has existed since 2003 when the University was established. The Library operates in five service centres located at the East-End (Barclays), the West end (Faculties of Science and Education), North End (Faculty of Special Needs and Rehabilitation) and the new Central Library funded by AfDB-HEST Project. The library serves all students, staff, members from the affiliated institutions, the alumni and the general public.

Kyambogo University library has a rich collection of over 250,000 volumes. The strategic focus of the library is on providing access to Library and information Services through a diversified collection that meets the information needs of the university community. The library therefore provides access to 40 databases (over 3000 electronic journals and 250,000 electronic books) mostly funded by Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) through the Consortium of Uganda Universities Libraries (CUUL) and open educational resources freely available on the web. With this array of resources, Kyambogo University Library is effectively supporting the core university functions of: teaching, learning, research and community outreach.

In line with the Open Access movement, the University Library is also setting up a University Institutional Repository to enhance access and visibility of the University research output. As the University increases support to research and introduces new programs, the library is committed to support these efforts with the relevant resources and to maintain the comparative advantage that Kyambogo University has over other institutions in the areas of Technical, Vocational, Engineering and Special Needs education.

In the new Central Library, we are setting up computer labs for both graduate and undergraduate students for seamless access to



The Central Library at Kyambogo University

the e-resources available. Additionally, there will be research carrels accessible to graduate students and space for nursing mothers. We are aiming for an unrivalled user experience for our students and staff in this new building.

The University Library has also equipped the newly established study centres at Bushenyi and Soroti with relevant library resources to support the growing list of programs introduced and run at these centres. The centres are also linked and can easily access all the available electronic resources provided at the main campus in Kampala.

Kyambogo University Library also carries out outreach programs to promote a reading culture especially among children. In the words of Margaret Fuller, today a reader, tomorrow a leader, Kyambogo University Library uniquely, supports several schools: preschools, primary, secondary schools and tertiary institutions across Uganda with books through the partnership with Book Aid International (BAI). Kyambogo University Library distributes books to institutions interested in developing their libraries and resource centres. Interested institutions submit applications to the University Librarian, Kyambogo University clearly stating the subject areas of the required books. Books are distributed on first come, first served basis.

Through this partnership, we work towards bridging the gap and supporting the curricula in several schools especially in rural Uganda. Several school going children have learnt to read and developed the desire to be better by reading BAI books distributed by Kyambogo University. We ensure that the little that is received trickles down to schools that express interest because certainly, the demand is far greater than what is received.



Kyambogo University Library Staff packing books for schools



Kyambogo University Library staff handing over books to staff of St. Simon Peter Primary School, Kibaale.

As we join the rest of the World in Sharjah, UAE (the World Book Capital 2019) to celebrate the World Book and Copyright day 2019 under the theme, "Open

Books, Open minds", Kyambogo University Library reaffirms the commitment to provide information resources that meet the needs of the user community we serve. Bearing in mind Knowledge and Skills for service.

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# reading culture?

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system and takes on another. But also, the very people who introduced formal reading to Uganda made access to the kind of education that taught literacy rather exclusive. Not everybody had access to formal education. Right now, if you do not have lots of money, you might not help your child access quality formal education.

Pegging access to quality education segregates the disadvantaged against keeping up with their moneyed counterparts, meaning that some will have information, while others do not.

## Reading culture in Uganda

So yes, many people do not want to read, but the problem is deeper than many imagine. For instance, you have teachers of Literature, who teach set texts they have not personally read; depending instead on critical texts by other authors, to glean what to teach their students.

In Uganda, newspaper circulation is said to be low, because people do not buy the copies. Even on social media, where many have purchased for themselves permanent



Children reading story books. Expose your children to reading right from infancy

residence, when one shares a piece of writing that is considered too long, one is accused of "tormenting" those s/he has shared the literature with. People are, indeed, averse to reading... but, only some are...

You will be amazed at how many people are reading, both as a requirement and for leisure; but we will focus

more on reading for pleasure, for now. Most people who have been through boarding school will tell you about how they used to get one novel and divide it into parts so that different people could read the book at a go. So once one is done with their part, they passed it on to someone else, who also passes on what they had to another.

If you went to book outlets such as Aristoc in Kampala, you would be surprised to realise that there are more people buying books than gifts or stationery; with some using the available seating facilities in the bookshop isles to read. When you buy a book and friends, work colleagues and family get to know that you have it, you will have a whole

## Sources of information

People who had access to the palace or chief's place also learnt more, as these offices were custodians of information about their people.

They kept special artefacts; hosted skilled people who knew more than anybody else and held ceremonies where information and knowledge were passed on.

There was no information shadow back then and there was no scarcity of education, as nothing impeded anybody from accessing it. Such people, *ssengas* (paternal aunts) and (maternal) uncles, groomed their nieces and nephews into cultural practices, in preparation for adulthood.

queue of people "booking" it, so they can read. And, often times, when you pass it on to them, they will indeed read it, with the evidence being when they review it for/ with you afterwards. But also, the social media has seen the burgeoning of book clubs, where people share electronic versions of books, read them and then discuss them. People are reading... but only some are...

The more people share information about the books they have read, the more those who receive this information, especially on social media, will desire to read those books. Also, with a rise in the number of young people engaged in contemporary performance poetry, there is a greater demand for written poetry. People read it.

This is what is happening:

People read, but majority do not buy books. That is where the trick is - the availability and cost of books. Anybody who is interested in boosting their reading culture in Uganda needs to study the book market, so they can entice more people into buying reading materials.

Besides, parents and other caretakers must expose children to reading right from infancy. Even before they can read, read to them. Hold a book and read to them. Have charts on the walls and as you carry them and move from one chart to another, read.

They will learn the habit and, if they keep seeing you read in the house, they will grow up into avid readers. Yes, there have been reading issues in Uganda, but the picture is less blurred now and can only get clearer.

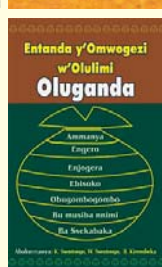
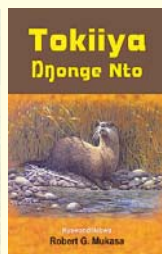
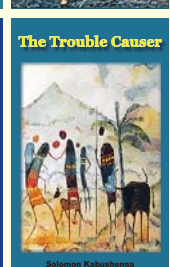
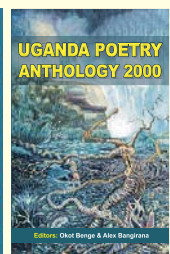
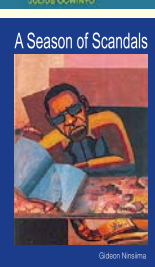
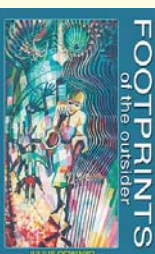
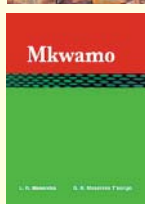
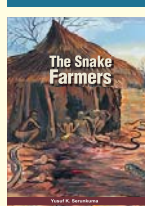


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Fountain Publishers Ltd joins the rest of the world in celebrating The World Book and Copyright day.



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Books continue where the teacher stops, so let us read them!



**THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF UGANDA CELEBRATES WORLD BOOK AND COPYRIGHT DAY.**

*The National Library of Uganda (NLU) joins the rest of the World, today April 23rd in celebrating the "World Book and Copyright Day"*

The NLU a government of Uganda semi-autonomous institution established by the National Library Act, 2003. Its major mandate is to collect, organize and preserve Uganda's documented heritage for present and future use; and to avert the development of Libraries in the country. Other functions are: to promote a culture of reading among the Ugandan population for individual and national prosperity and to provide standards and guidance for the development of libraries in Uganda. The book remains at the core of all NLU operations and work.

The NLU is the lead agency responsible for organizing the activities of the World Book and Copyright day in Uganda. In collaboration with other book sector stakeholders, a number of activities are organized every year to commemorate the day. These include community reading and publishing industry promotion activities

The theme for this year's celebrations is "Books Bridging the Health Information Gap". This theme was to highlight the role of books and libraries towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal no. 3- Good Health and Well-being. This year's celebration has had the following activities organised by NLU:

- Books and the Creative Industry Exhibition (15th to 17th April) at the Constitutional square. (Publishers have exhibited their books, the creative industry-artist, and those in craft making have also had their works exhibited. We have also partnered with some stakeholders in the health sector to offer free medical services).
- A Community Reading Tent at Kigumba Public Library (16th April 2019).
- A Public talk at Uganda Museum (17th April 2019) on the theme: Books: Their role in bridging the Health Information gap for all.
- A Public Author Reading and NLU Annual Author Award at Uganda Museum (18th April 2019), where we listen to works of some of our best authors and writers as well as rewarding them

for the crucial role they are playing in regard to the development of our book industry.

### NLU Services

- Formulation of Library policies
- Consultancy (digitization, research and training)
- Community reading promotion activities
- Issuing of ISBN
- Compiling & Publishing the National Bibliography
- Provision of support and guidance to government MDA's in regard to library services
- Providing Library standards and guidelines
- Provision of access to Uganda's documented heritage
- Development of libraries for the public (including children libraries)
- Legal deposits center (to enforce legal deposit Act)

### Current projects:

- Donating books/ information materials to public and community libraries and to selected Training teachers in managing libraries
- Development of children Libraries in Public and community libraries
- Promoting a reading culture among children through digital features (e-readers) in schools and communities
- Inspiring Readers/ Book Havens, where focus is mainly on promoting the reading culture through library outreach services to schools.
- Local Content for African Libraries (LOCAL) Project implemented in partnership with World Reader and ALIA.
- Establishing Open Access Centers in public libraries. The libraries are equipped with computers fully connected to the internet to train youths, school children and civil servants in ICT usage.



Preserving documented Heritage through digitization at NLU



E-reading brought to the children's library



Children using the e-book

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