

UGANDA COUNTRY REPORT 1998 - 2000

Isaac Kigongo-Bukenya
Uganda Library Association

Introduction

I am delighted to be the one presenting this country report on behalf of Uganda Library Association. Let me use this occasion to welcome you into the new century. A century where information rules and where governments everywhere are getting to a realization that information is a crucial resource that calls for investment. Uganda Library Association realized this long before the opening of this century. That is why in our Strategic Plan of Action 2000/2002, the importance of information is highlighted in our guiding vision which is stated as, "Working Towards Integrating Libraries & Information Centres into the Daily Lives of Ugandans". We believe that for libraries and information centres to become key actors in the information economy they should be involved in offering a solution for society. This report therefore attempts to shade light on some information activities that have helped to transform the lives of most Ugandans for the most part of the 90s and now the 2000s.

Education and Training

East Africa School of Library and Information Science, Makerere University, had the pioneer batch of MSc Information Science conferred their Masters degrees last year and early this year. This is one step ahead in localizing the education and training of Library and Information Scientists at a post-graduate level in Uganda.

University Libraries

There has been considerable growth in the number of University libraries resulting from the liberalization of the education sector in Uganda since 1994.

- In total there are now two public universities i.e., Makerere University and Mbarara University of Science and Technology
- Seven licensed private universities including Islamic University in Uganda, Mbale, Nkumba University, Uganda Martyrs University, Nkozi, Ndejje University, Bugema University, Uganda Christian University, Mukono and Busoga University and, Kampala University whose operation licence is still pending.
- Some of these library services are now running ICT units to supplement all other information resources that they have. Makerere University has signed an agreement with the US government to avail them with a wireless link to the Internet.
- Makerere University Library Service has teamed up with ITEK Library and Uganda Christian University to network and share resources. This is the first such arrangement in Uganda.

Teacher Training

- Following the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE), the government with support from the World Bank undertook the process of rationalizing all Teacher Training Colleges which process gave birth to Primary Teacher's College (PTCs) and saw some of them close down. The aim was to retain a few PTCs, well equipped to include libraries to enhance the education of the teachers.
- Government started a textbook development project run by the Project Implementation Unit under the Ministry of Education and Sports to ensure adequate supply of school textbooks in all schools.
- The Ministry of Education and Sports runs Teacher's Resource Centres basically targeted at meeting the information needs of teachers in the field.
- Government also established the Uganda National Institute of Special Education (UNISE) to meet the education and provision of learning materials for pupils and students with learning disabilities or special education needs.

School Libraries

- School libraries continued to limp through most of the 1990s. This is because government does not have a clear-cut policy on the development of school libraries in Uganda
- Following the introduction of UPE, government has worked towards reducing the textbook to student ratio without necessarily following this up with a concrete school library development policy.
- All secondary school head-teachers of government schools are under instruction to recruit persons to run school libraries at certificate level. Uganda Library Association has taken up this issue with the concerned ministries.
- However all is not lost for school libraries because there is a general trend especially in private schools to establish modern libraries to support learning.

National Archives

- The Uganda National Archives received a grant from DANIDA to construct an archive-purpose building. Work on this project is set to begin soon.
- Also the same grant is supposed to help the Ministry of Public Service build a Management Information System for all government Ministries to give them greater control over information.
- A draft Archives and Records Bill was submitted to Parliament and is due for debate.

Public Libraries

- Following the enactment of the Local Government Act (1997), all central authorities were compelled to hand over the running of institutions and provision of services to local authorities under what is commonly called the devolution and decentralization of powers
- Public Libraries Board started on this process in 1998 and accomplished the decentralization of all public libraries in early 2000.

- Public Libraries Board is to reconstitute itself into a National Library Board and a National Library Bill in draft form is due for presentation to Cabinet after which it is to be transmitted to Parliament for debate.
- PLB continued to support community initiatives aimed at establishing community libraries and resource centres throughout Uganda.

Telecentres

Another phenomenal development in the provision of information services in Uganda during this period was the establishment of pilot telecentre projects in Uganda.

- Nakaseke Multipurpose Community Telecentre and Library Project located in Luwero district, opened its services to the public in March, 1999. The international partners in the project include: International Telecommunication Union (ITU), IDRC and UNESCO. The local partners include: Public Libraries Board, Uganda Telecom. Ltd., and Uganda National Commission for UNESCO. The purpose of the project is to assess the impact access to modern ICT and library can have on the development of a rural community. The centre has been equipped with telephones, fax, computers with Internet connections, books, videos, facility for telemedicine and other information resources. The success of this project will determine the design of similar projects elsewhere in Africa.
- There are telecentres in Buwama and Nabweru in Mpigi district run by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology with support of IDRC under the ACACIA project.

Cybercafes

Cybercafes are places with several workstations which have Internet connectivity. They run on a purely commercial basis and provide both e-mail and Internet services to the general public. In Uganda this became a trend starting mid 1999 and right now there are about 12 such places in Kampala alone. They have helped in demystifying Internet and e-mail usage in Uganda for it is not unusual these days to find Ugandans owning e-mail accounts.

Parliament Library

With support from DANIDA and USAID, government established a fully fledged research unit and library to cater for the research needs of parliamentarians. The library has a full connection to the Internet hence making it easy for our parliamentarians to access global resources in addition to enhancing communication and networking with legislators elsewhere in the world.

H4>Telecommunications & Internet Service Providers

- The telecom sector was liberalized and this led to the formation of the Uganda Communications Commission to regulate this sector and also offer operation licences to companies wishing to broadcast, offer e-mail/Internet services, offer radio communication service, etc.
- Uganda Telecom Ltd., the largest telephone network in Uganda, has been floated for sale and we hope the new owners will help to drive telecom tariffs down and that their

superior technology will help to boost telecommunications in Uganda, a move that will work to stimulate Internet access.

- Private telecom operators have been allowed into the Uganda market, a move which has seen many more Ugandans own a phone. It is hoped that competition will certainly bring down the telecom costs and hence cheaper communication for Ugandans.
- Internet Service Provision in Uganda has been led to the creation of more Internet surfing points for Ugandans e.g., one company runs such units in Select shops run by Shell Petroleum stations across the capital, Kampala.
- New products such as metronet offering wireless links to the Internet are also available on the Ugandan market.

Agricultural Information System

The government of Uganda through the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries established the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) to co-ordinate agricultural research in 1993. The Agricultural Research Information System (IARIS) was thus established to gather research data and disseminate research results for the benefit of the agricultural community in Uganda. There are about eight libraries fully dedicated to the dissemination of agricultural research findings and collection of data to include in FAO's AGROVOC database.

Health Information System

The Ministry of Health through its Education and Communication Department runs health education programmes to educate the masses on health hazards. The Ministry of Health established AIDS Information Centres distributed throughout Uganda to educate Ugandans on the dangers of HIV and AIDS. Most of these centres operate resource centres with lots of information on AIDS. Other information sub-systems under the Ministry of Health include a Child Health Development Information system, family planning units, maternal health etc.

Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) have become key players in the development process in Uganda. Some NGOs are involved in literacy and post-literacy campaigns and some operate resource centres which serve as knowledge databanks about the organization. Others provide specialized information services e.g. women, human rights, conflict resolution etc.

Civil Society Organizations

Organizations to promote the book and culture have sprung up in the recent past.

- The National Book Development Council has been working closely with UNESCO in developing a National Book Policy for Uganda.
- National Book Trust of Uganda (NABOTU) an umbrella organization constituted by publishers, booksellers, printer, librarians, readers and all persons with a stake in the book industry, has a vision to turn Uganda into a reading nation. NABOTU has organized

National Bookweek Festivals, reading seminars, writing contests and author awards to achieve their vision.

Bibliographic Control

Post-graduate research theses constitute a larger part of the collection held by the Africana Section in Makerere University Library. A project to create a database of these thesis is in advanced stages and there are already indexes and abstracts of the same.

Uganda Library Association

A strong Library association is a prerequisite for sound development of Library and Information Service related activities in any country. Some of the highlights regarding Uganda Library Association include:

A new team took Office for the term 2000-2001. The team is comprised of the following persons:

Mr Elisam Magara, EASLIS, Makerere University - **Chairman**
Mr Frederick Mukungu, Uganda Christian University - **Vice Chairman**
Mr Charles Batambuze, Public Libraries Board - **General Secretary**
Mrs Allen Ssuna Ssonko, American Center - **Treasurer**
Mr Dick Kawooya, EASLIS - **Editor**
Mr richard senooga, EASLIS - **Assistant Secretary**
Ms Carol Atono, EASLIS - **Assistant Treasurer**
Mr Godfrey Luyimbazi - **Member**
Ms Lilian Akishule, Institute of Economics, Makerere - **Member**
Mr Charles Hashaka, Makerere University Library - **Member**
Ms Alice Endra - **Member**
Mr Justin Kiyimba, ITEK Library - **Ex-official**
Mr I.M.N Kigongo-Bukenya - **COMLA Representative**

ULA launched its strategic Plan of Action 2000/2002 on February 25, 2000 in a ceremony that attracted over 150 Library and Information Science Professionals and hosted a high powered delegation of government officials led by Hon. Basoga-Nsadhu, Minister of Information, office of the President. The plan is available on the Internet at <http://www.ou.edu/cas/slis/ethics/ULA.htm>