

	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 24/05/2007</p> <p>Strategies for Increased Access to Older Newspapers: the experience of Makerere University Africana/Special Collection Section</p> <p>Margaret Nakiganda Librarian, Makerere University Library P.O. Box 7062 Kampala, Uganda Fax: 256 41 540374 Mobile: 256 772 517185 E-mail: nakiganda@mulib.mak.ac.ug</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 73RD IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL 19-23 August 2007, Durban, South Africa http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm</p>	

Abstract

Makerere University Library has served as a Uganda National Reference Library since the enactment of a Legal Deposit Law in 1958. This has compelled every printer and publisher of books, newspapers, periodicals and magazines produced in Uganda to deposit a free copy to Makerere University Library within one month after publication. Since then, Makerere University Library established an Africana/Special Collection Section as its Legal Depository. Among the legal depository treasures is the collection of Newspapers, both government and private, dating as far back as 1900. Currently, the Unit has 67 titles of Newspapers totaling to 2,457 volumes. 29 titles are in English Language while the rest are in Local Ugandan languages. The newspapers have a very high demand from local and international University students, academic and non-academic staff, as well as researchers, lawyers, politicians, teachers, etc. This makes it important to increase access to these vital resources as well as to preserve them. Consequently, in 1972 a Microfilm Unit was established and equipment acquired. However, the equipment has now become obsolete and some consumables are no longer available locally. Recently, the library launched a Digitization initiative as an institutional repository to revamp the collection. This paper highlights the activities of the Africana Section in preserving and increasing access to older newspapers. Finally the paper outlines the strategies put in place to ensure increased access to newspapers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Makerere University is the oldest University in East Africa. It started in 1922 as a technical institution and a center of higher education for the three East African countries of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania (then Tanganyika). The decolonization processes of the

1960's and the struggles for self rule by the three East African countries made an East African University project less viable; so with Independence, each country went its own way and established its own national university. Makerere followed suit and became a national university in 1970 after an Act of Parliament with the mandate to produce knowledgeable and skilled manpower, carry out research and provide community services (Byaruhanga 1997:1). Over the years, Makerere University academic programmes and student numbers have continued to grow as well as the demand for library services and facilities.

Makerere University Library was established in 1940, emerging from a small tutors library. Since its inception the library has grown tremendously and prides itself in its unique collection of rare materials on African and Africans generally, but Uganda in particular. Makerere University Library's vision is to provide excellent library and information services. The mission is to meet the study, teaching and research information needs for sustainable national and regional development.

Makerere University Library has served as Uganda's National Reference Library since the enactment of a Legal Deposit Law in 1958. This has compelled every printer and publisher of books, newspapers, periodicals and magazines produced in Uganda to deposit a free copy to Makerere University Library within one month after publication. As a result, Makerere University Library established an Africana Special Collection referred to as "Africana Section" as its Legal Depository Centre. Among the legal depository treasures is the collection of Newspapers, both government and private, dating as far back as 1900. The newspapers have a very high demand from local and international University students and academic and non-academic staff, as well as researchers, lawyers, politicians, teachers etc.. This makes it important to increase access to these vital resources as well as preserving them in a suitable format.

Makerere University Library has been serving as the National Reference Library till 2000 when the National Library of Uganda was established by the Act of Parliament. Makerere University Library now serves as a second legal depository. Most importantly, Makerere University Library, as one of the first legal depositories in Uganda is the only institution which has maintained a relatively extensive collection of Newspapers and as such, it remains a focal reference point for all researchers. As newspapers accumulate, the institution faces a challenge of storage space; and as users increase, the print versions of newspapers get worn out, and mutilated. This makes it imperative to preserve the newspapers in non-print formats which would also increase multiple accesses of the same newspapers.

2. IMPORTANCE OF NEWSPAPERS

Uganda has gone through hard times under military governments characterized by wars and civil strife. Makerere University did not escape the ravages of these events. Literally work was greatly affected. The few Newspapers that were running by then were censored leaving out facts and events of that particular period. This reminds me of Tarcisio's quotation of President Thomas Jefferson of the USA (1800-1908) who used to

say “that if it were a question of having a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government he would choose the latter”. He thought in fact that mass communications were guardians of all other liberties; without free recording of events and free discussions of policies democracy could not endure (Tarcisio, 2000).

Newspapers record, print/publish stories of the events that are important to society at the time. They are authoritative and credible records of the significant issues and events as and when they occurred. They provide excellent memories of a country’s historical events and land marks. They are sources of textual evidence, useful to researchers, journalists, lawyers, politicians and the community at large. Howell (1996) describes them as “irreplaceable documents which provide vivid accounts of local places, events and people. West (1983) maintains that “there is no resource of local history as evocative of the atmosphere of any 19th century town as its local newspaper”. But Stoker (1999) points out that “newspapers were never intended by their producers to be a permanent means of storing textual information, and the recognition that they contain a mass of valuable information not available elsewhere, is only a comparatively recent phenomenon”. Therefore, being a valuable tool for reference there is need to preserve and protect them from theft, fire, mutilation and any other destruction that may lead to loss of information. Increased access is also paramount.

3. CURRENT STATUS OF NEWSPAPERS AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

The Newspaper collection has grown tremendously in the recent past. Many newspapers in both local and English languages have come up. Currently, the Unit has 67 titles of Newspapers totaling to 2,457 volumes. Twenty-nine (29) titles are in English Language (i.e. Mengo Notes, 1900-1970; The Uganda Herald, 1916-1955) while the rest are in Local Ugandan languages (i.e. Munno 1901-1996 and Taifa Empya 1961-1989).

Makerere University Library has three microfilmed titles (i.e. Uganda Herald 1924-1934; Reporter 1961-1966; and Uganda Argus 1955-1962. Although this preserves the newspapers and is better than the print format, digitization is preferred because it would save space and increase access by many users. Makerere University Library plans to embark on digitization of newspapers as well as converting microfilm records into digitized records

4. NEWSPAPER USAGE

The Newspaper Unit attracts many users of different categories who frequently come to consult e.g. Journalists, Politicians, Lawyers, Historians, Researchers, Teachers, etc. A short study was carried out in two (2) months, and during this time 15 users were interviewed who included historians, Journalists, Teachers, Lawyers and Researchers.

4.1 Historians

During the colonial days (i.e. 1900) Church Missionaries played the role of establishing schools and hospitals throughout the country. For proper administration of those institutions, they started an English monthly paper called

“Mengo Notes”. This paper used to be the communication channel of reporting activities from various parts of the country. One of the historians says that he consults newspapers for basic information to further his findings on how this country was governed. Another historian narrates that newspapers present events and opinions that are made public, such issues are open to criticism, correction, falsification and acceptance depending on their level of coherence and validity. Today the issue of land grabbing and disputes has cropped up due to the displacement of people during the successive wars (i.e. 1979, 1981-1986). Therefore, he consults Newspaper archives for reference on how land issues were being handled by then.

4.2 Journalists

During the misrule of Idi Amin (1971-1979) there was no freedom of Press in Uganda. People lived in fear and literary work were limited. Very few papers were running by then. For example, Voice of Uganda was the Government paper in English and Uganda Eyogera (translated as Uganda Talks) in the local Luganda language. Mukholi a journalist of the government paper (New Vision) compiles events of 1960-1980s comparing them to the events of today. He stresses that it is only in newspapers where he can get how the trend of events occurred. Besides, many events occur in society, natural and unnatural, incidentally, not all such events could be edited in ‘formal and serious academic books’. Consequently newspapers offer a good option of coding and storing such information lest it withers with time and space and gets distorted or extinct.. They give you the feel of that particular time.” Thus, newspapers are a useful reference tool.

4.3 Teachers of Primary, Secondary Schools and other Institutions

The 1979 war which ousted Idi Amin left almost every sector disgruntled. Most of the institutions and homes were ransacked into and records were destroyed. Fortunately, Makerere University Library Strongroom for Archives was spared. When I approached the teachers they told me that they were looking for lists of their names published in newspapers of 1960-1980. Lists of successful candidates used to be published in the Newspapers. They were Primary, Secondary and other institutions teachers who want to upgrade but have no authentic records of credentials to certify their attendance in the previous institutions of learning. To them the Newspapers serve as the basis for consideration for admission to higher levels of learning.

4.4 Lawyers

Talking to one of the Lawyers, he says he consults newspapers for reference to certain cases in courts which were run and left incomplete and complainants want to revive the cases. Newspapers used to publish the proceedings of courts which can be a basis of primary source of information to revive the cases.

4.5 Researchers

One researcher stated “that while a research study could be carried out by employing interviews and questionnaires, newspapers could offer another methodological option. Depending on what one is carrying his or her research study about, a documentary analysis of news reports in papers could be an alternative to interviews and questionnaires in data collection.” He continued to say that “they may have their own limitations of spreading rumours and false propaganda but if their writers and editors are inspired by integrity, responsibility and goodwill, newspapers are a mirror that reflects society’s image at a particular time. Consequently, one ought to read them with a critical mind”.

5. STRATEGIES

Given the high demand for Newspapers, Makerere University Library has gone ahead to put some measures in place to save the precious collection as outlined below:

5.1 Appropriate Planning

As a provider of excellent information services, Makerere University Library has been able to attract funding for most of its proposals to modernize the services. The donors include Carnegies Corporation of New York, EU, SIDA/SAREC and NORD. Makerere University Library current Strategic Plan has as one of its strategic objective to preserve and conserve the newspapers.

5.2 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The computer-library user ratio is improving with acquisition of more computers, services, etc. The digitized newspapers would then be put on a local (server to save bandwidth) and this would increase accessibility of the newspapers.

5.3 Microfilming

Microfilm according to the web definition is material photographed onto reels of film and needing a special reader to use. Many journal and newspaper back runs are stored in this format. The term ‘microfilm’ used to describe film that is used to store by photographic means, at greatly reduced size, facsimile images of a great number of original items, documents, pages of books etc. Newspaper prints are of poor quality paper with a relatively short life span and are classified as being too fragile for constant handling by the library users. Considering that fact, it is important to microfilm newspapers, and copies are made so that both the information and the originals can be preserved for future reference and research. Microfilming may have its limitations, but it is still the appropriate solution in low income countries. According to Tabb (2000), microfilming, while not perfect, has proven to be an effective technology for rescuing brittle paper and for facilitating access to endangered research materials. Microfilming created in accordance with international standards has succeeded in preserving millions of newspaper pages that would otherwise have crumbled into uselessness. It has also enabled

innumerable number of readers in distant location to gain access to the content of newspapers that they otherwise could not have used.

In an effort to save the constantly used collection, Makerere University Library revived its Microfilming Unit in 2000 (it had stopped in the 1980's) with assistance of the European Union under the Human Rights Development Programme. Experts from Universities of England Consortium for International Activities (UNECIA) trained eight members of Makerere University Library staff in Microfilm & Photography. The objective of the training was to systematically carry out microfilming of materials for conservation and information purposes, thus reducing the handling of original materials some of which is unique. The mission of the training was to establish, equip staff and manage a microfilm/photographic unit capable of satisfying the teaching, learning, research needs of Makerere by way of preserving, conserving and maintaining library collection, as well as sustaining itself by raising funds through its activities (Training Manual, 2000). At present there are three (3) microfilmed titles as already reported. Plans are underway to acquire modern equipment that can produce both 16mm and 35mm sheets. Currently, the unit produces 16 mm film width materials only.

5.4 Digitization

There is a digitization project currently going on in the library. It is a collaboration Program between the Libraries at the University of Bergen, University of Tennessee and Makerere University. The project started with digitizing research output in Science-based disciplines, and later expanded to Arts and Humanities. The major objective is to create an institutional repository which can be accessed online: One of the specific objectives is to develop a mechanism for collection, storage and preservation of all national documents and other formats of data for future use (USDL Project Proposal, 2004). A reasonable number of relevant documents already exists in the Africana/Special Collections section through the Legal Deposit Act as already indicated.

The Library plans to acquire appropriated equipment to expand the digitization project to include newspapers. Once the equipment is acquired, microfilmed papers would also be converted into digital records.

5.5 Skilled Manpower

For proper management, the newspaper collection, and indeed the archival collection, need a professional archivist. The Library recently advertised the post of an Archivist and once this is filled, it will go a long way to address the newspaper problem.

5.6 Indexing of Newspapers

Indexing of important events in the newspapers is also very useful as a quick access tool. It is an improvement of existing access points and it is been planned once the archivist is appointed.

5.7 Library Building Extension

Makerere University Library recently added 4,000 sq.metres to its existing space. This will provide space for library users and equipment needed to preserve and conserve newspapers.

6. CONCLUSION

With the expansion of the library building, more space for reading and storage of ICT equipment has been created. Increased ICT infrastructure and equipment will also increase access to newspapers. Resource mobilization and preservation and conservation are priority issues in the Library Strategic Plan.. This, for example, emphasizes promotion and facilitation of research, needs assessment of the conservation and preservation activities and digitizing and microfilming of rare collection. The strategies and planned activities will increase accessibility to newspapers as well as preserving and conserving them.

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