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Public library politics: the Ugandan perspective

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Abstract

This paper provides the Ugandan perspective of the public library politics. It reports the views of politicians, civil servants and library association leaders regarding role of the public library and information services in Uganda and especially in the decision making process in government, democratic process in the country, and its contribution to the economic development and to policy priorities. The data was collected through literature review and a survey using questionnaires. The historical development of the public library is included as background to the study. Views resulting from the debate in the Ugandan parliament on public library services are included. Findings show the feelings of respondents on the importance and problems affecting the public library services. Recommendations provide a basis for public library development in the country.

1. INTRODUCTION

Uganda is a nation undergoing considerable transformation. Her vision 2025 portrays the country's future as …prosperous people, harmonious nation and a beautiful country. This aspiration envisages evolving a nation that is technologically advanced, competitive, self-sustaining with a growing economy, a healthy well educated society with a high quality of life and people living in a sustainable environment. But as the country aspires towards that goal,

there are many challenges that underpin her momentum to development. This is where politics begins. Politics is about provision of roads, water, drugs in hospitals and schools for children and of course libraries. The role of politics is also to provide mechanisms through which to drag out the country from negative factors. Some of these challenges are: a high population rate, illiteracy, poverty, diseases, low infrastructure development, multi lingualism and a predominant oral culture.

Uganda's population is estimated at 26.4 million people (Census 2002). The bulk (89%) lives in rural areas and only 11% are found in urban centres (Ministry of Finance Planning & Economic Development, [MFPED] 1998). The literacy rates are strikingly significant for this study. 38% of Ugandans are completely non-literate. 53% of these are females compared to 27% of the males (MFPED 1998). This is a high percentage. This leaves 62% as the candidate population capable of reading and using public libraries. It explains why society is basically oral in communication practices. But there are other factors to consider in the use of library services.

The per capita income is estimated at US $340, a figure that averages less than one US $ per day. By any standard, that implies low purchasing power among the population to afford information materials. It is an indicator of serious poverty. Poverty information indicates that Ugandans below the poverty line account 38% of the population.

In all 56 languages are recognized constitutionally (Uganda Constitution 1995) and spoken in Uganda. None of them is either official or a national language. Publishing of information in these languages is very insignificant and in some languages there is no literature at all. The official language is English while Kiswahili is the national language. None of these is indigenous. Yet information materials in public libraries are in English, a language that a majority of library users are not proficient in.

The basic infrastructure for information flow is generally inadequate. Due to a multiplicity of languages leading to fragmentation of information market, nascent publishing industry, unreliable information distribution network, a majority of Ugandans do not get information materials easily. It is estimated that Uganda has approximately 300,000 TV sets and about 10,000,000 radios. How many of these are working is uncertain (MFPED 2001).

Because of Universal Primary Education (UPE), there are 7 million pupils in primary schools. But almost all these schools do not have libraries. The situation is not any better in secondary schools. It is significant to mention that when UPE was first announced in 1996, it was the first time that library, albeit libraries for schools was considered important in a high-level policy pronouncement. President Museveni stated: "six million pupils will therefore require 21,429 schools, each school will require one laboratory and one library, which means a total of 21,429 laboratories and 21,429 libraries" (Museveni 1996:35). To the excitement of the country, the director of the public library services wished "if there was a similar expansion at the secondary school level, one could hope for a more literate society and hopefully more clientele for the public libraries (Birungi 2000). The director's statement provides an insight into the nature of reading public in Uganda.

Without being an alternative to using libraries, the Ugandan society is essentially oral. This is due to several factors, some of which have already been mentioned. But in addition a larger percentage of the population is not enthusiastic about reading and there is a general apathy towards (and lack of awareness of) the role of information in development and a poor information infrastructure (Ikoja-Odongo 2002). Private sector information institutions in most cases are out of bounds to non-members and where there are, such facilities, and membership may be expensive.

Government of Uganda recognizes that information is a vital resource for decision-making. This requires the development of an adequate national information infrastructure. She recognizes that effective participation of Uganda in the development of and deriving benefits from regional and international information system and programmes depends mainly on the existence of a strong national information infrastructure. Mapping of public information institutions reveals that there are only 20 urban public libraries and 3 rural libraries in Uganda today and a government owned radio and television station. There are private information centres including libraries by community initiatives and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). This is a very small network considering that only 20 districts out of the current 56 have a public library. And according to government policy (White Paper on Education 1992), rural communities are supposed to use school libraries where they exist. This policy runs into trouble. Many schools do not have libraries. There are not enough classrooms for schools. And classrooms where there are books are also used as study or teaching rooms. Against this background the study sets to present the Ugandan perspective of the public library politics. It aims at providing information on national and local government's attitude to public libraries in terms of their value for individuals and groups in society; their contribution to the democratic process; their contribution to economic development and their contribution to policy priorities.

2. Public libraries in Uganda: past and present

2.1 Historical Perspective
The starting point in the politics of public library in Uganda is traceable to the colonial times. Uganda was a British protectorate from 1890s to 1962 when the country became independent. During the British management of the Uganda affairs, it was established that there was a big problem of illiteracy. Policies could not be understood in a situation where people do not understand what they are supposed to do for lack of ability to read and write, and do some counting. The colonial government representatives who at that time regarded reading to be a stepping stone to civilization, which to them was a very important culture to introduce to the colonies, started public library services in Uganda.

The first public library in Uganda was set up in 1923 in Entebbe, first capital of Uganda, to provide reading services to expatriates. This status quo remained the same till the 1940's when the colonial government for the first time took positive recognition and responsibility to establish libraries nationwide. This action resulted from the growing feeling that rapid modernization of the territory largely depended upon an enlightened and educated population. So in 1944, Mrs. Elspeth Huxley was sent to East Africa to tour and recommend what the East African governments should do to improve the provision of books and magazines for the African reading

public. Her report, published in 1945, became the basis for the establishment of public libraries in Uganda. This report recommended the setting up of the East African Literature Bureau.

2.2 The East African Literature Bureau

The East African Bureau (EALB) was established in 1948, under the East African High Commission, to provide a public library service. The Bureau started with publishing of books in local languages, and establishing library services. The same year the British Council established its offices in Nairobi and took the responsibility of inaugurating library services in East Africa, with the view of handing them over to the individual countries. The Commission appointed Ms Annesley to survey and prepare recommendations for a literature organization for the regions. Her most important proposal, which later stimulated the planning for national library services, was that

> ' The bureau should develop a central library system to which existing and proposed small local libraries would be linked under the supervision of a trained librarian' Annesley in Were (1994).

The effect of this recommendation was the establishment of branches at Dar-Es-salaam in Tanzania and Kampala in Uganda.

In June 1959 the British Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster introduced to the House of Commons a five-point progamme aiming at the increased export of British books to its colonies. To achieve this plan the British Government intended to "assist, through the British Council, in the development of library systems in a number of colonial territories including the establishment of central libraries, regional branches, book vans and book-boxes" (Were 1994). Following this statement, the colonial secretary sent a dispatch on September 1959 to the Governors of East Africa informing them of the colonial library development programme. And in the absence of statutory library authorities or public systems it was proposed that the EALB be used as a springboard for library development because the Bureau was already running library service in East Africa.

As a follow up the Governors requested the colonial government for a library development advisor for East Africa. Mr. S.W. Hockey then working as education officer in Sudan was appointed in early 1960 to work out a library development plan for the three territories. In December 1960 Mr. Hockey produced his report that recommended a national four-tier system comprising of:
(1) Central headquarters for the whole system-responsible for selection, purchasing, processing and distribution to regional libraries.
(2) Regional libraries to operate lending and reference services; supervising branch libraries within the region; operating mobile, book-box and postal library services.
(3) District libraries to provide grassroots library services under the supervision of regional libraries, and
(4) Postal library services for individuals in remote areas Hockey in Were (1998)

The Uganda protectorate government accepted the report. In addition Mr. Hockey made other recommendations that are very important. In two recommendations he states that:

'Each country should develop its own National Library Service, based on a legislation which would establish a board to act as a controlling body whose functions would be to establish, equip and manage libraries (Were,1994) ….and each territory should consider a centralized library service and each branch of the service should contain a children's library Kigongo-Bukenya in Cox (1998).

Responding to that recommendation, government in 1962 sent a circular to all local authorities, inviting them to participate in the setting up of a National Library Service. The local authorities were required to make available in their own areas of jurisdiction library accommodation and subordinate staff. The Bureau was to provide books and professional assistance.

2.3 The Uganda Library Service
The EALB in Uganda assumed the name of Uganda library service in 1963. Its library in Kampala became the headquarters for administering a network of 'up country' libraries which had been started by enthusiastic community development officers.

On April 1964, East African Common Services Organisation (EACSO) handed the library services over to Uganda government, under the wing of the Ministry of Planning and Community Development, pending the formation of a Board.

2.4 Public Libraries Board
The first national legislation establishing the public libraries in Uganda under a Board was passed by parliament, September 1964. This Act mandated the Board to establish, equip, manage and maintain libraries in Uganda. This Board took over the services of EALB in Kampala.

2.5 New developments
2.5.1 Decentralization
The National Resistance Movement (NRM) government triggered off decentralization process in Uganda. The main objects of decentralization are to build a more democratic government that is responsive and accountable to the public, promote capacity building at the local level, and introduce local choice to the delivery of services, fostering a sense of local ownership. It is in that spirit that the Republic of Uganda Constitution 1995 provides under its national objectives and directive principles of state policy that: "Uganda shall be guided by the principles of decentralization and devolution of government functions and powers to the people at appropriate levels where they can best manage and direct their own affairs (Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995). One institution that fell in this arrangement is the public library service.

With the coming into force of the local government Act, (Local Government Act, No.1, 1997), it was no longer the responsibility of the Public Libraries Board to establish, manage, equip and maintain public libraries in Uganda, but the function of decentralized districts. This Act, among other things, decentralizes library services to urban or district authorities. Libraries were handed over between 1997-1999. However, the central government in all aspects of decentralized services retains the role of making national plans, standard setting, technical support and inspection through the national library.

But before libraries were handed over, board members toured all public libraries. The main purpose was to discuss modalities for the decentralization of the library services to District and Urban Councils as required by the Act. The second purpose was for the Board members to acquaint themselves with the libraries under their management.

The report of tours produced interesting information. The main aspects are:
- Most libraries are very small and occupy space not designed for their purpose.
- In some libraries, there were not enough facilities.
- There would be conflict in the law about who should run decentralized services. Two systems exist, the District Local government and Urban Authorities. This is not yet resolved.
- Most Authorities welcomed the idea of decentralization as provided by the law. It provided them with a sense of ownership.
- Most Authorities expressed fear that without matching funding, these libraries would eventually die a natural death. The decentralizing authority would make arrangements to transfer funds so that services do not suffer.
- Non-professional librarians are managing many libraries.
- In a few cases, it was expressed that library service was not a priority because Authorities were not satisfied with its importance. Some did not even understand what a public library is.
- Most Authorities had not internalized the role of public library in development. They suggested sensitization seminars to allow them understand the new institution better. For luck of funds these have not been done.
- Even after decentralization, the National Library of Uganda (which has been formed) which replaces the Public Libraries Board would continue with assisting these libraries through inspection, maintaining standards, and other technical matters.

2.5.2 Nakaseke Multipurpose Community Tele Centre and Library
UNESCO in partnership with International Telecommunication Union (ITU), International Development Research Center (IDRC), British Council, Government of Uganda and other local partners namely the Uganda National Commission for UNESCO, Pubic Libraries Board, Uganda Telecom Limited, sponsored a new information project, the Nakaseke Multipurpose Community Tele Centre (MCT). It was a three-year pilot project aiming at introducing new information and communication technologies and library services in the rural area at Nakaseke, Luwero District in Uganda, as was done in Mali etc. It was opened in 1997. The project was implemented to demonstrate the viability of the current conviction that providing information to rural communities catalyses the development process and results in improvement of the quality of the life of the people. The goal of the project is to stimulate rural development by facilitating access to information, learning resources and communication technologies in the Nakaseke community and support improved medical services through telemedicine. International and local support has ended. No impact assessment has been done. Continuation of the service is at balance. It remains to be seen if the local district council will seek more support or absorb the Centre into its budget.

2.5.3 Other local initiatives
One initiative is the Zigoti Book Centre in Mubende district. This Centre is the joint effort of the local community and the Public Libraries Board. The location of the Book Centre has enabled it to be integrated with other local social, economic, and educational programmes.

The other effort is the Rural Book Centre Programme. Following the success in Zigoti, the Board is encouraged to upgrade the centres at Gwaragwara, in Tororo District Eastern Uganda and Ibanda, in Mbarara District, South Western Uganda. It is the policy of the Board to support new initiatives upon request by the population through their leaders. Where the Board is satisfied, it asks the recipients to provide room and a trainable assistant.

2.5.4 The National Library of Uganda Act 2003
The latest legislation about public library in Uganda is the National Library of Uganda Act 2003 that provides for the National Library Act. The object of the Act is to establish the National Library of Uganda. The Act provides for the depositing and preservation of publications, the setting up of an information referral service and library co-ordination and to provide for other related matters. This finally repeals the Public Libraries Act, Cap. 121 of 1964.

The Act was passed in Parliament in September 2002 after the Committee on Social Services had incorporated the concerns of other stakeholders and the President accented to it in December 2002 and published in the Uganda gazette as Act No.2 of 2003.

One new issue about politics of development in Uganda is that for any Bill presented to Parliament, clearance must be made with the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. The purpose is to ensure that the Bill can be accommodated in the country's Medium Term Expenditure Framework. For the National Library Bill this clearance (certificate) was obtained and this implies the development of public library services is pegged on this.

2.5.5 Partnerships
The Board is continuing to establish relations with more partners. It is participating in programs relating to information service- including festivals, conferences, seminars, and some policy-making forums. It is an active participant in Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) campaigns organized by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. It participates in National Book Week Festival and the Reading Tent in conjunction with the National Book Trust of Uganda. It is also involved in UNESCO sponsored activities such as development of national book policy for Uganda. It has strong linkages with UNESCO, Book Aid International and Third World Books of USA that provide books and other assistance.

3. Approaches and Methodology
A total of 50 questionnaires were administered personally and collected days after and 37 (74%) were returned. Ten were politicians, twenty civil servants, and seven leaders of the library association. The sample consisted members of parliament, district local Council Chairpersons, Mayors, Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) of districts, Executive Committee members of Uganda Library Association (ULA). Chairpersons, mayors and members of local library committees are politicians. CAOs, Director and Deputy Director of Public Library Services are the civil servants.

The survey was designed to obtain from the participants in the study, their views regarding public library and information services and to obtain information about the decision making process in government departments with interest in the services.

The first strategy was to review literature about the public libraries in Uganda. Reports and minutes of Board meetings of the Public Libraries Board, reports of government, legislation, budget speeches and dissertations at Makerere University School of Library and Information Science were subjected to content analysis and relevant information extracted.

The second strategy was to modify the research instruments to conform to local conditions. In this way, two instruments were developed and employed for data collection. The first instrument was developed by IFLA and used to obtain data from politicians and civil servants (Appendix A). The second instrument was a modification of the IFLA questionnaire. This one was tailored to suit the Library Association executive members (Appendix B). Observation of the libraries as one way of comparing results especially by politicians was also done.

The instrument for the politicians and civil servants consisted of four sections. Section one sought to evaluate the public library to the respondent. Section two sought for the role of the public library. Section three looked for the influence of public libraries in decision-making and the last section asked questions of general nature.

The instrument for the executive members of Uganda Library Association (ULA) differed from that of politicians only in section one. It sought the responsibilities of Uganda Library Association, the most important function of the public library in Uganda today, the importance of the public library service to the Association and requested things members find satisfactory and not satisfactory in the public libraries of Uganda.

The third strategy was to develop the procedure for carrying out the study. It had initially been proposed by IFLA that that the study is conducted by interview technique and preferably recording it. This proved unworkable since the respondents wanted time to read and internalize what the study was about. This change of procedure deviated from that IFLA had expected. Instead it resulted into using questionnaires.

The administration of the instruments was done personally. Even then it took some time before the present sample was realized. Data collection required traveling distances twice or thrice before the questionnaires were retrieved. In some instances, telephone inquiry was made to find out if the questionnaires had been filled so that they could be collected some other day. On one occasion the respondent faxed the filled in questionnaire. However, observation of library services was done on the same days the questionnaires were delivered and/or collected since these libraries are located in urban areas.

Primary data was generated by questionnaires and observation while secondary data was captured through documentary sources. Data was disaggregated into three groups that were classified as politicians, civil servants, and leaders of Uganda Library Association. These groups were predetermined by the information they were supposed to supply. A general descriptive analysis was then prepared to present a broad view of the trends.

4. FINDINGS
This section presents findings based on the questionnaire. It covers four aspects namely; general opinions about the importance of public library service in Uganda, the role of the public library,

the influence of respondents' decisions about the operation of library services and future of library services. Findings are presented according to themes and by groups of respondents.

4.1 Importance of the Public Library
4.1.1 Politicians
Politicians were asked about the most important function of the public library service in Uganda. To this question, they responded that public library is important as a source of information – old and latest – and leisure, a reading place as well as a place for sustaining the percentage of literacy achieved in the country.

In relation to the work of the government, politicians confirmed that public libraries provide the ideal institution for both democratic and accountable governance that encourages development and information to the local government systems, disseminate government policies to the public as well as initiating and implementing government programs. In accomplishing the above tasks, public libraries provide them with information and other reference materials such as government reports, bills discussed in parliament, Acts passed in parliament, budget speeches etc, research information for project proposals and educate the community, which eases the implementation of government policies.

Politicians were satisfied with reports, a good reading environment, reference books, journals and archival documents in public libraries. Public library supplemented the work of school libraries and promoted education at all levels. And because most municipal councils, districts and schools do not have libraries, public library filled in the gap. They however outlined that public libraries are poorly stocked, most of them are in dilapidated state, the information is not up-to-date, some materials are too technical for an ordinary reader and the libraries are under-funded. They advised that public libraries consult with individuals and professional associations for improvement.

To confirm on the out of date information materials, one member of parliament commented, "If you visit some of these libraries, Madam Speaker, you will find that apart from being in dilapidated areas (buildings) and in personal houses [former Asian houses], most of the books are as old as the Public Libraries Act which was passed in 1964. The books are all on dusty shelves and they are in the cobwebs of history. So it is important that we (parliamentarians) support the idea of establishing these libraries and having a co-ordination Apex".

4.1.2 Civil servants
According the civil servants, public libraries provide new knowledge through reading. Libraries are reference centres that contain books about current and past events, hence, enhancing a reading culture. They support government development programs and support continuing education especially primary, secondary and university distance education as well as the general public.

In relation to the government, civil servants' departments coordinate service delivery in municipalities, implement government programs, and facilitate administration and supplement the provision of reading materials. Civil servants urge public libraries to provide their departments with reading materials, support FAL programmes and community empowerment. They said that they were satisfied with assay competitions, donation of books to schools, hospitable staff, reference books, journals, papers and UN publications and a constant update of reading materials.

However, civil servants said that the libraries are under-funded and very crowded due to limited space. Most books are also not relevant to a Ugandan situation.

4.1.3 Uganda Library Association
Leaders of Uganda Library Association see public libraries serving the following purposes: providing materials for education, information and entertainment, supporting learning institutions and implementing government objectives. They added that ULA aids government by guiding it about library issues, promoting Universal Primary Education (UPE), adult literacy and a reading culture, influencing policy formulation and research as well as networking of libraries in the districts.

To ULA, public library constitutes one of the key stakeholders in the profession, relates to the association's objectives, and provides a network of libraries in the community, provide information services and promotes ULA objectives. ULA members find the following satisfactory: provision of leadership roles to the ULA, development of the profession, organising conferences, improvement of library services through Information Technology (IT) and the supply of trained librarians and reading space. And about what they found least satisfying, respondents stated that, the community is not being informed about libraries, there is low attitude of decision makers towards libraries and information services, and modernising public libraries and to provide internet services has been very slow. They also highlighted on the absence of an information policy and the decentralisation of the library service without considering the policy first.

They therefore suggested that district administrations must plan for them in their budgets, fund and manage their libraries, strengthen the legislative base, recognize public libraries as equally important as other departments and make them accessible to all but get relevant materials to the right audience.

4.2 The role of the Public Library
On this aspect, the responses are presented in table form for ease of comparison and as provided for in the questionnaire table.

Table 1:   The role of public librariesN=37

Role of Public Library	Strongly agree		Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The public library is an essential public good	Pol	7	1			
	C.S	10	5			
	LA	6	1			
Libraries contribute to the government's policy objectives	Pol	4	4			
	C.S	7	6	1		
	LA	3	3			
Libraries underpin education	Pol	2	3		1	1
	C.S	8	5			
	LA	2		2		2

Libraries promote social inclusion	Pol	2	5	1		
	C.S	8	6	1		
	LA	2	3			
Public libraries are an essential part of a democratic society	Pol	4	2	2		
	C.S	6	6	1		
	LA	5	1			1
Libraries should promote freedom of information	Pol	6	1	1		
	C.S	11	2	1		
	LA	6	5	2		
Libraries have a capacity to make a difference in their communities	Pol	4	4			
	C.S	6	6	1		
	LA	5	1			
Charges should be introduced for the loan of books from the public libraries	Pol	1	3	3	1	
	C.S	2	9		4	
	LA	2	2	1	1	1

A summary look at the table shows that public libraries have an important role in the Ugandan society. A majority strongly agreed or agreed. Scores show that public libraries are an essential good that contributes to government policy and are vital for education. These libraries bring about social inclusion since they serve all categories of users irrespective of class, race or origin. This is an important finding and indicator of the need to strengthen this institution. Public libraries are demonstrated from the findings as an essential component of a democratic society because they promote freedom of information and they can make a difference in communities if these could be made available to all areas. It is an idea to think about when planning for more libraries. Findings also show that there is an acceptance to paying for services, which is a good recommendation.

Table 2:   The influence of public libraries

N=37

Influence of public Libraries		To a large extent	To some extent	To a less extent	To No extent at all
Advice from civil servants	Pol.	2	2	4	
	C.S.	3	10		
	L.A.		4		
Advice from professional associations	Pol.	3	3		2
	C.S.	4	8	1	
	L.A.	2	3		
Published standards on public library services (e.g. the IFLA standards)	Pol.	1	1	3	
	C.S.	8	5		
	L.A.	3	1		
Advice from individual professionals	Pol.	1	3	1	
	C.S.	2	8	2	
	L.A.	1	4		

Public opinion	Pol.	3	2	1	
	C.S.	4	6	2	1
	L.A.		3	3	
Items in the media	Pol.	1	2	1	
	C.S.	6	7	1	
	L.A.	1	3		1
Political ideology	Pol.	2	3	1	1
	C.S.	4	7	2	1
	L.A.		2	1	3
UNESCO public library manifesto	Pol.	1	1	1	2
	C.S.	7	6		
	L.A.	2	2		

From the table there is a divided opinion about the influence of the public library in decision-making as shown by the columns of to some, to a less extent and no extent at all. There is a strong feeling that the public library is not really so influential although it does as shown in the first column of strongly agree. This provides an insight that there is or there are some issues that require attention to cause the public library to be a force of influence in decision-making. From the findings above, under funding, age of information materials, size and small network, lack of policy appear to impact negatively on how much the public library can do to influence policy.

4.4 The future of the Public Library in Uganda
4.4.1 Politicians
Politicians indicated that they keep themselves informed through libraries, suggestion boxes, public opinions and in meetings. They argue that advances in information technologies will provide for up-to-date and global information, but the rural flock might take longer to pick up, as the technology is still expensive while many people are still illiterate. Politicians express fear that in the next ten (10) years, there might be continued lack of sufficient reading materials, sustenance may also become a problem, and even if the library service spreads more, it will not be used effectively, Uganda being a Third world country. Readership is declining. Theft of books and non-return of them is affecting libraries.

Politicians highlight that the study did not look at public library administration and decentralisation, government's position on public libraries and the plans to establish them in rural areas. The study did not ask about the government policies protecting and maintaining libraries. On this and as it happened in parliament it became clear that at the time of discussing the bill, Government had no policy on public libraries. One member pointed out, ″It has become clear to the committee that Government has no policy on the establishment and maintenance of public libraries although it recognizes their importance." On the recommendations of the social services committee, the committee said, Government should strengthen its role of encouraging districts to establish new libraries where they do not exist and support the existing ones. This statement drew attention of another member who reiterated the same feelings that a clear policy on establishment and maintenance of public libraries was necessary. It meant that Government does not have a policy on public libraries.

On administration and decentralisation of public library services the committee made some recommendations. On administration, the committee was concerned with the criteria of selecting

members to the Board because according to them the old Act gave the minister more powers something that brought about favouritism, nepotism, tribalism etc. They observed that affirmative action had not been observed. It recommended that women and the blind be represented on the board. On decentralisation one member raised an important issue. He said, "under decentralisation, it is very important that we at least have a public library in each district." This confirms that Uganda has a very small network of public libraries. They are only 20 in 56 district. Another member blamed the ministry responsible for not keeping in step with decentralisation of public libraries. He said, " The ministry has not played its oversight role over the libraries in the district." He knew that under decentralisation policy, sector ministries were supposed to lay down national standards for carrying out decentralised functions. He wanted to know from the minister concerned with public libraries whether the ministry had laid down national standards for district libraries. What has his sector done to support districts that are unable on their own to set up libraries to ensure that all Ugandans have access to reading material in their district as a national right?" Yet another rose to speak. "The Minister should not pay lip service to provision of library service, but he should demonstrate it. And I request that within a short time the Minister should come up with a ministerial statement on a programme of action not only to revamp existing library, in conjunction with the local authorities failure of which he would record his displeasure with the minister."[1]

4.4.2 Civil servants

On taking decisions about public libraries, various public servants also said that they are influenced by the quest for more knowledge, public opinion and needs of client priority. They however keep themselves informed through user needs assessments, publications, newsletters and the media, consultations, African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF) suggestions, seminars and libraries. Civil servants added that technological advances would supplement public library services; provide Internet services and modern information management, sharing information with the outside world. However, this will be costly in the short run. Other fears included under funding, fear of expansion without sufficient funds and sustainability, slow pace of coping with modern technology and reduction in space while users are increasing in number, many districts not having libraries including public libraries. And limited resources for public library services wherever they exist.

Civil servants highlighted issues left out as the facilitation of school libraries, low level of awareness of public libraries, their expansion and FAL services at sub county level.

4.4.3 Uganda Library Association

According to ULA advances in IT will encourage more users to utilise public libraries but will be handicapped if funding is not increased and may not yield much fruit, as many parts of the country do not have electricity or solar power.

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[1] All quoted matter wherever it appears in the findings and discussion are reproduced verbatim from the debate of public library bill in parliament (Sept 2002) and recorded in the Hansard. This debate culminated into the passing of the National Library of Uganda law.

ULA members hoped that local governments will provide funds because the public libraries are now decentralised but fears are that Internet cafés and rent-a-book are competing with public libraries, the new law is affecting them, whereas there is no policy on information.

Members also indicated that the study should have involved how the public libraries board controls other government libraries, government policy towards public libraries including the legal framework under which they operate as well as the need to network the libraries.

5. Discussion

Never before has the subject of public services occupied the minds of Ugandans, especially politicians, than the seventh parliament. The first discussion of this subject was done in the first parliament of 1964. During this time the politicians did not raise fundamental issues regarding public library development apart from supporting that let there be a network of public libraries.

It is in the seventh's parliament that fundamental issues relating to public library development have been raised. These issues include: insufficient public library services in the country, under capitalisation, cost of information materials, lack of the reading habit, lack of public library policy, absence of mobile libraries, state of information materials in public libraries, illiteracy and literacy levels, human resource needs, fear of "death" of the public libraries, Information and Communication Technology.

On insufficient library services, it was correctly estimated that the country lacks public library services. Of the 56 districts, only 20 have something like a public library. The problem partly arises from poor capitation.

About human resources, it is known already that people without sufficient qualifications run most of the libraries. The most qualified librarians are located at the headquarters. This is partly attributed to low salaries and wages. It is perhaps for this reason that members of parliament identified that the staff of these libraries ranges from volunteers, part-timers to full time workers. A count of them indicates that there are 112 librarians running the show with only one (0.89%) possessing a postgraduate qualification and is the director of library services, 14 (12.5%) having bachelor degree qualification (50%) of these are at the headquarters, 13 (11.61%) have diploma in library work (again with over 50% of these at the headquarters), 24 (21.43%) have certificates and 60 (53.57%) are school leavers.

State of information materials left a lot to be deserved. Most of the books are old, although in the recent times Book Aid International has come to help in a big way with very new stocks. The situation in the upcountry libraries was reported as worrying. According to most respondents and emphatically from parliament it is stated that libraries in the districts are more qualified to be archives of literature rather than libraries of current publications.

The reading habit has been identified as one of the most serious problems in Uganda. According to members of parliament, and investors in the publishing industry, the culture of reading seems to be disappearing from Uganda. There is no reading culture. It is even worse upcountry. To modernise there is need to enable people to read and write and do some numeracy. A reading culture is needed. Most of the children do not read; even the academicians do not read enough.

To build that point they say one should not be surprised that academicians are not publishing enough just because they have not read enough. This lack of reading culture has caused a lot of problems. For example it was easy to end up agreeing to something in parliament simply because one did not have enough background information. It is felt that there is a problem of lack of democracy in reading opportunities. They complained that instead of people going to watch videos and to drink, if there were many libraries upcountry, some of the people would go and read books for more knowledge.

Uganda's literacy rates oscillate around 62%, compared to development partners like European Union who are at 100% according to a member of parliament. It is the opinion that existence of public library in all districts would help to fight illiteracy within the society. Reading should not only be left to those people going to school, but also involve adult literacy campaigns that could benefit the people from villages. The reasoning is that an illiterate person or population cannot participate meaningfully and effectively in political, economic and social national development.

Likely "death" of libraries proved an interesting topic among politicians. They said that they had fear about priorities in the districts. With regard to decentralisation of public library service, they already knew that local governments are suffering from poverty. The district budgets are totally inadequate to meet their needs. They feel that the available resources could be applied to other things like fighting diseases, providing roads and education and so on, therefore the idea of providing libraries may be a secondary one. The entire library system could actually die. So decentralisation can actually kill this very important service. Local politicians and parliamentarians coincide on this point.

All groups in the study mooted information and communication technology as very important. The computers would be used for collection administration, and accessing online information. There is need for induction of more ICT in public library services.

All respondents identified poor funding as detrimental to public library sustenance and development. The committee in parliament established the public library budget as being poor and civil servants in these libraries know it already. Public libraries are starved because of lack of financing. And consequently this has led to a lot of short falls like having volunteer workers and in some places understaffing.

Respondents identified what the study left in the questionnaires but these were brought to light from the debate from parliament and upon them, recommendations that enabled the passing of the bill were incorporated.

6. Conclusion and recommendations
In relation to the findings of the study and the concerns of the parliamentarians, civil servants and members of ULA, the following conclusions can be arrived at. That although law has created the National Library of Uganda, the following remain teething problems:
   ❖ Uganda lacks a policy about public libraries, its development and sustenance.
   ❖ Ugandan public libraries do not cover the whole country.
   ❖ The libraries are starved of capitation.

- ❖ Information materials are inadequate, mostly out of date and sometimes irrelevant. Donations do not solve the whole need.
- ❖ Literacy levels and illiteracy continue to be major problems affecting public library usage wherever they exist.
- ❖ Decentralization of public libraries may not be the best thing for these libraries although it is good policy.
- ❖ Reading habit is very low. Alternative past times (videos and drinking) are threatening the very existence of public libraries.

However, in spite of the problems faced by public libraries in Uganda, it is true that the little that exists has been able to serve those who use them. Also the law 'remembering' public library as a necessary institution in the country has been passed in parliament. This law if and when implemented with its recommendations will restore hope, increase the number of these libraries, and perhaps turn around the reading culture. The importance of these libraries in the political, socio-economic and cultural life of individuals and communities has been recognized and government has as integrated the public libraries in all major government development programmes. These include: Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF), National Adult Literacy Strategic Investment Plan (NALSIP) 2001-2007 and the Social Sector Development Strategic Investment Plan 2003-2006.

In view of those conclusions, the following recommendations come out.
- ❖ There is need to build a reading culture. Schools especially primary schools and adult education classes should be sustained to play this role.
- ❖ Parents, the publishing industry and schools should play a bigger role in nurturing the reading habit.
- ❖ There is need for more support to libraries so that they do not die. Increase in budgets and paying attention to libraries as important institutions to society is necessary. Sensitization of leaders especially at district level to understand the need for libraries at their areas is important.
- ❖ A clear policy on establishment and maintenance of public libraries is necessary. The ministry responsible for these institutions is expected to provide such policy and implement it.
- ❖ Government must strengthen its role of encouraging districts to establish new libraries where they do not exist and support the existing ones.
- ❖ Government should fund libraries as one of its priorities.
- ❖ The link between the National Library and other public libraries should be clearly laid down in the establishment structure.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire politicians and civil servants

Introduction

The aim of this interview is to obtain your views regarding public and information services and to obtain information about the decision making process in government departments with an interest in these services. It is part of an international academic study and has no connection with any commercial or political organisation. Your answers will be in confidence and individual will be identified in the final report without their permission.

Please tell me your status: politician [　]　civil servant [　]

Please tell me your responsibilities in the (Department)_____

What in your opinion is the most important function of the public library service in Uganda today?_____

In relation to the work of the government as a whole how important is the work of your (department etc)?_____

In relation to the work of the department as a whole how important is the public library service?_____
_____

Looking back on your involvement with library what things have you found most satifying?_____
_____

And what have you found least satisfying?_____
_____

Using the statements on this card (card A) tell me the strength of your agreement or disagreement with the following statements about public libraries services. If you want to add to your answers please do so.

Role on public library	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The public library is an essential public good					
Libraries contribute to the government					

policy objectives					
Libraries underpin education					
Libraries social inclusion					
Public libraries should promote freedom of information					
Public libraries are an essential part of a democratic society					
Libraries have a capacity to make a difference in their communities					
Charges should be introduced for loan of books from public libraries					

Anything to add? Please do.

_____

Using the terms on this card tell me the extent to which the following influence your decision about the operation of library services. If you want to add to your answers please do so.

Influence of public libraries	To a large extent	To some extent	To a lesser extent	To No extent at all
Advise from civil servants				
Advice from professional associations				
Published standards on public library services (e.g. The IFLA Standards)				
Advice from individuals				
Public opinions				
Items in the media				
Political ideology				

UNESCO Public Library manifesto				

*What is the single most important thing that influences you when taking decisions about the public library service?*_____

_____

*What are the main ways you keep yourself informed about the needs and attitudes of the public regarding the library services in Uganda?*_____

_____

*How do you think advances in information and computer technology will affect the public library service in Uganda?*_____

_____

*What are your hopes and fears for the public library services in Uganda over the next ten years?*_____

_____

*Do you think there is anything of importance about the public library services in Uganda which I have not asked or to which I have not given enough attention?*_____

_____

_____

If Yes, please state it _____

_____

Conclusion

Thank you very much for your time, help and co-operation, it has been greatly appreciated.

Appendix B: Questionnaire for leaders of Uganda Library Association

Introduction

The aim of this interview is to obtain your views regarding public and information services and to obtain information about the decision making process in government departments with an interest in these services. It is part of an international academic study and has no connection with any commercial or political organisation. Your answers will be in confidence and individual will be identified in the final report without their permission.

Professional Association   [   ]

*What are the responsibilities of Uganda Library Association?*_____

_____

_____

*What in your opinion is the most important function of the public library service in Uganda today?*_____

*In relation to the work of the government as a whole how important is the work of your (Association etc)?*_____

*In relation to the work of the Association as a whole how important is the public library service?*_____

_____

*Looking back as chairman/president or member of ULA what things have you found most satifying?*_____

_____

*And what have you found least satisfying?*_____

_____

Using the statement on this card (Card A) tell me the strength or your agreement or disagreement with the following statements about public library services. If you want to add to your answers please do so.

*How does the national information management policy affect public library services in Uganda?*_____

_____

*Suggestions to the policy formulation committee to improve public library services in Uganda*_____ _____

Note* The remaining part of the questionnaire is the same as that of politicians