The National Library of Uganda: its inception, challenges and prospects

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Abstract
The research investigates the reasons for the establishment of the National Library of Uganda, examines the process of its establishment and outlines its challenges and achievements. The historical background of library services in Uganda is presented. A total of twenty (20) respondents were interviewed from library information services and institutions. Data collection is done by in-depth face to face interviews using open-ended interview schedule, observation and documents. Findings revealed that the NLU was established because of the decentralization of the public libraries to the district which left the Public Libraries Board with few functions and there was also a need for a body to coordinate library services in the country. The two institutions acting as national libraries were ineffective. The challenges faced by the NLU include among others the non-functional rented building, lack of library policy, limited financial and human resources. Some achievements of the NLU are the improvement of the reading culture among school children, publishing the National Bibliography of Uganda.

Introduction
The population of Uganda is 28.3 million (2002) with annual growth rate of 3.2% and fertility rate is 6.9%. There are over 40 languages and dialects and the literacy rate is 69%. Out of 82 districts only 29 districts have public libraries. The book industry is not well developed with few books published in the indigenous languages. Ugandans have poor reading culture. Libraries, in terms of funding are not a priority as compared to education, health, and agriculture.

The history of libraries services in Uganda just like most African countries is quite short as compared to the Nordic countries. Few libraries were established in Uganda before World War II. However, by 1923, the Uganda Society Library provided services for the European expatriates in Entebbe, who at that time were almost the only people literate in English. The Public Libraries Act, 1964 (Uganda, 1965) was enacted to provide for the establishment of a Public Libraries Board, whose responsibility was to establish, equip, manage and maintain public libraries in Uganda. The Public Libraries Board (PLB) was in charge of eleven branch libraries most of which lacked staff, books, funds and functional library buildings.

The library services were deteriorating and in 1967, the government instituted a commission of inquiries chaired by T.T.T. Nabeta. The terms of reference were to survey state of library services and make recommendations for future development. The Committee (Nabeta, 1968) recommended among others well organized, stocked and manned public libraries in order to cope adequately with the rapidly increasing readers’ needs resulting from the fast expanding educational facilities, local authorities to provide initial library accommodation, and employ library assistants for future training by the Board, provide more literature for school children and teachers and gradually for other users, develop regional libraries in order to reduce costs and delays from the central administration and appoint library inspectors. The recommendation were not put into effect except the closure of branch libraries which were poorly stocked, badly accommodated and inefficiently managed. Another Committee by A Nekyon was
established in 1968 to inquire into the administration and financial affairs of the public library services, how the PLB could raise its own funds to make it less financially dependent on government, and to re-organize the services into a far more effective body corporate. Nekyon, (1969) recommended the appointment of a director with administrative ability and experience, increase library personnel in all branches, the purchase of more books and the provision of better and more suitable buildings for the service, urged the local authorities to be more actively involved in the provision of library services, increase of mobile library services to cover all the four regions, improvement of postal library services, extend book box services to all community centres. This report could have made an improvement of public library services in Uganda, but it was shelved and no action was taken by the government.

The improvement of library services in Uganda was one of the projects under the second and third five-year development plans of 1966/67-1970/1971 (Uganda 1969 p. 146) and 1971/72-1975/76 (Uganda, 1973, p. 373). Plans were made to construct, equip, furnish and stock the Uganda National Library and headquarters in Kampala, 4 regional libraries and 16 branch libraries in the major towns in the country. However, funds were not provided for their implementation. The Board encouraged local initiative to raise funds through fundraising campaigns. With support from the central government the local authorities started the construction of the Teso Public. Similarly, Tororo Public Library building was extended and by 1976, 21 branch libraries were opened. In the Action Program 1977/78-1979/80 public libraries were restocked.

In 1971, the military took over government. There was a ban on imported books and censorship of local publications. Funds for books mainly from the development partners ceased due to the hostile political situation. Many qualified and experienced staff and expatriates fled the country. During the liberation war of 1979, most public libraries were destroyed and in others, books were looted or destroyed. During the rule of the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) government, an effort was made to rehabilitate public libraries and has continued with the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government. Public library buildings were reopened and rehabilitated, and restocked with the assistance of development partners.

Makerere University Library and the Deposit Library and Documentation Centre were the institutions responsible for collecting and preserving the national imprint by enactment of the Makerere University College (Deposit Library) Act, 1964 and the Deposit Library and Documentation Act, 1969 respectively. In these Acts, (Uganda, 1965, 1969) both institutions were legally required to collect, and preserve the national imprint. The Legal deposit laws are weak, obsolete and operating in the absence of a library policy. The publishers are unwilling to deposit two copies to each of these legal depository libraries free of charge. The Uganda National Bibliography, a publication of the Makerere University Library is irregular because of the weak, obsolete Act and also because of limited financial and human resources, it ceased publication in 1987.

The study will be guided by the following research questions:
• What was the motivation of the politicians and professionals that led to the institutionalization of the NLU?
• What were the activities of the politicians and professionals during the process of the institutional change from the Public Libraries Board (PLB) to the NLU?
• Which were the environmental changes and challenges that occurred in the library and information sector as a result of the institutionalization of the NLU?

Theory

5. Methods
The methods chosen for data collection are qualitative in nature. The reason being that I wanted to get a clear understanding of the reasons why the NLU was established at this point in time, the process it went through for its establishment, the challenges it is facing. I also sought to explore the consequences of the institutional change in the library and information sector due to the establishment of the NLU. I therefore used in-depth face to face interview with the guidance of the open-ended interview guide. This enabled me to get a deeper understanding from the respondents about their views on the NLU, their experience in the process of its establishment and its challenges. All interviews were conducted in offices and observations were made on the environment under which the NLU and the selected public libraries were operating. Documents constitute rich information sources about organizations (Hill, 1993). Annual reports, minutes of meetings, government policy statements that were repeatedly being referred to during the process of interviews were analysed. These documents enabled me to get more clarifications and verifications of facts and figures. The Hansard\(^1\) where I got the politicians’ views about the National Library Bill, 2001 and the establishment of the NLU.

The choice of the respondents was based on their importance to the study and they were therefore selected purposively (Patton, 2002). I selected 20 librarians to provide me with rich information and to enable answer my research questions. These included seven (7) heads of departments of NLU who are involved in the day to day running of the NLU and have experience of over 25 years in the former PLB. Their inputs in many ways determined the direction of NLU and had some knowledge and experience about the NLU and its transition from the PLB to NLU, their insights were deemed vital. I chose one (1) librarian from the Deposit Library and Documentation Centre, two (2) from Makerere University Library because both institutions have been performing some functions of a national library. Three (3) lecturers were selected from the East African...

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\(^1\) Transcripts of Parliamentary debates.
School of Library and Information Science because of their expertise in Library and Information Science, and two (2) executive members of the Uganda Library and Information and Information Science Association as representatives of the professional librarians. One (1) executive member of the Uganda Publishers Association was chosen because publishers are the partners with NLU as they have to deposit their publications to the NLU as required by law. Four (4) librarians in charge of public libraries from four districts, namely, Kampala, Mbale, Teso and Masindi were selected. Their views are critical because of the previous experience with PLB and how the NLU has affected their services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent Institutions</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Libraries Board/National Library of Uganda</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Makerere University Library</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deposit Library and Documentation Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uganda Library and Information Association</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uganda Publishers Association</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>East African School of Library and Information Science</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Libraries</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of respondents</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
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Table 1: List of institutions which contributed to the empirical data

**Results**

The results are categorized according to the research questions. *Firstly, what was the motivation of the politicians and professionals that led to the institutionalization of the NLU?*

The NLU was established because of the decentralization of the public libraries to the districts. The NLU would be responsible for supervising the decentralized public libraries, instead of having one officer at a desk in the MoGLSD to be responsible for public libraries as was planned. Plans for the establishing a national library appeared in the second and third five-year development plans of 1966/67 – 1970/71 and 1971772-1975/76 respectively. However, because of the political and economic problems, funds were not provided for their implementation. So the PLB staff felt this was the time to implement the plans. Any nation needs to preserve its documentation heritage and make it available for use. Uganda had no national library, although MULIB and DLDC were acting as national libraries, but they had their own clientele of students and staff. The general public could not go and access information from the two institutions, so there was a need for a neutral place where as many people as possible can go and have access to information freely. Most countries of the world have national libraries so Uganda did not want to be left behind. A national library of a country is a national pride such as the national museum and national theatre. Last but not least, the PLB staffs were going to be retrenched.
Secondly, what were the activities of the politicians and professionals during the process of the institutional change from the Public Libraries Board (PLB) to the NLU?

The idea of establishing the NLU was initiated by the PLB staff, who wrote a concept paper. They included functions: h) to support and promote adult literacy and education through the identification and stocking of post-literacy reading materials; i) to support the setting up of rural community libraries; and j) to promote the habit and culture of reading through reading campaigns and book exhibitions. These are not traditional functions of national libraries but before the Public Libraries Act, 1964 was repealed, it had embarked on these programs which are of great importance to the country. There was therefore a need for the NLU to continue with them so that they do not end up in total failure.

The paper was presented to the PLB Board and was approved. The paper was then sent to cabinet by the minister of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD) and was approved. The PLB staff wrote the contents of the National Library Bill, and referred to the UNESCO guidelines to legislation of national libraries, Namibian, and the Norwegian legal deposit Acts. The Bill was eventually drafted in 2001 and then presented to the Parliament by the Minister of State for Gender and Culture in September 2002.

The stakeholders who discussed the NLU Bill, 2001 with the Social Services Committee (SSC) of Parliament included representatives from library and information services, namely: the PLB, MULIB, DLDC, the Ministry of Public Service and Cabinet Affairs, Kyambogo University Library, Uganda Library and Information Association (ULIA), Uganda Publishers Association (UPA), Uganda Local Authorities Association and the Uganda National Archives. It was noted here that stakeholders like the booksellers, authors, and users were not represented. Some respondents expressed disappointment that they were invited to parliament after the PLB staff had drafted the Bill, and they got involved in the process when it is already in its final stage. They thought that this would have been an opportunity to update the Makerere University College (Deposit Library) Act, 1964 and the Deposit Library and Documentation Centre Act, 1969. They also argued that this process should have started with the librarians of the various institutions. There was an argument for MULIB to become the second national library, the reasons being that it has been a depository library since 1964. This was rejected by the SSC indicating that MULIB is already overcrowded with students and it is very difficult for the public to use that library. There was a proposal for transferring the legal deposit of MULIB to NLU, but this was rejected as it was special collection of rare books, theses, and dissertations. The professionals wanted the copyright office to be in the NLU, just like the US model whereby the copyright office is in the Library of Congress. This makes legal deposit more effective, in that a publisher registers for a copyright, as he/she deposits his/her copies, but was not honoured.

When the National Library Bill, 2001 was tabled in parliament the MPs were concerned about several issues. These included the lack reading culture, the poor state of public libraries, lack of funding for both the NLU and the public libraries, lack of government support to the library services, lack of library policy, lack of current relevant books, low literacy rate, lack of public libraries in most districts. Some MPs preferred the Bill to be called the Public Library Bill. They felt that the NLU should be directly responsible for
the public libraries. In other words, they did not support the idea of decentralizing the public libraries fearing that the services might collapse due to the fact that public libraries were not on the priority list of the local authorities and they lacked funding. All in all, the MPs wholeheartedly supported the Bill. The Public Libraries Act, 1964 was repealed and the National Library Act, 2003 was enacted establishing the NLU in January 2003.

Thirdly, which were the environmental changes and challenges that occurred in the library and information sector as a result of the institutionalization of the NLU?

It was observed that the Act is comprehensive enough, but some functions are difficult to implement. The case in point being that the NLU is under the MoGLSD while the public libraries are under the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG). The NLU is required to give standards advice, norms, and manuals, guidelines in respect of public library building, staffing, stock and information processing storage and retrieval; however, it has no authority over public libraries. It was argued that there is no library in the world that carries out all the functions of a national library. The NLU should focus more on acquisition, preservation, publishing the NBU and provide space for the collection of national and international publications, while other functions are performed by other libraries for example, MULIB and DLDC. A suggestion was made to have a between these three institutions.

It was noted that there is no mechanism to implement the Act. In function 5 a)² for example, it is not clear who is to follow it up, it is therefore left to the will of the publishers whether to deposit or not. There was an argument that it is too expensive for a publisher to deposit three (3) copies at the NLU, two (2) at MULIB and two (2) at DLDC putting into consideration the high costs of publishing in Uganda. With reference to clause 23 (3)³ it was viewed that there is no difference between the PLB and the NLU, since apart from the new director, all the staffs and the building are still the same, there is a need for recruitment and orientation of staff to the new national library services. Credit was given to the Act for catering for the visually impaired persons.

The National Library Act, 2003, is just like the previous ones of Makerere University College (Deposit Library) Act 1964 and the Deposit Library and Documentation Centre Act 1969 was formulated without a library policy. There was a suggestion that MULIB and DLDC Acts should be repealed in order to strengthen the NLU. One respondent preferred the establishment of subject national libraries like the United States namely the National Library of Agriculture, the National Library of Medicine and so on, but other professionals view it as an expensive venture. The publishers welcomed the establishment of the NLU, putting into consideration the publication of the National Bibliography of Uganda. They viewed it as a means of promoting the awareness of the availability of their books and thus encouraging their sales both nationally and

² Clause 5a) the right of the NLU to require every publisher of a book or document to deposit three copies of his or her cost to the NLU
³ Clause 23 (3) All staff employed by the Public Libraries Board immediately before commencement of this Act shall automatically be transferred to and become employee of the National Library
internationally. It was noted that some publishers are not aware of the NLU Act and those who are aware are reluctant to deposit free of charge two (2) copies to the NLU. A request was made to the NLU staff to sensitize the publishers about the importance of depositing their books in the NLU. Some of them find it very expensive to deposit to three institutions namely NLU, MULIB and DLDC, while others have decided to deposit only at the NLU and ignored the MULIB and DLDC. Others claim that they are not aware about the MULIB and DLDC Acts. It has to be noted here that these legal deposit acts are weak obsolete and are therefore could be easily ignored.

The decentralization of public libraries started in 1998 and by the year 2000, all public libraries had been handed over to the districts. Soon after the decentralization of the public libraries, public libraries were not budgeted for by the local authorities. The public library staffs were not paid salaries for six months with no funds to pay rent, water and electricity bills. Unqualified staffs were retrenched and plans are underway to recruit qualified staff with diplomas, bachelors and masters degrees depending on the size of the public library. The local authorities are ignorant about the importance of public library but with time some have come to appreciate it especially the ones that have gone for further studies to improve their careers. During the debate of the National Library Bill, 2001, Kapkwomu Ndiwa4 highlighted the effect of decentralization on the public libraries “as far as decentralization is concerned, it actually affected the public libraries. Some districts received it with reservations, others were scrambling for it, while others rejected it” He gave an example of Mbale whereby the district and the Municipality refused to take it. Tororo Public Library was in a dilapidated state and nobody was willing to take it. However in Kabalore, both the district and the Municipality scrambled for it. Public libraries are under different departments. Kampala Public library is under Education Information and Sports, Mbale under Community and Social Services, Teso under Education and sports, while Masindi is directly under the town clerk. The NLU is under the MoGLSD, while the public libraries which the NLU have to coordinate are under Ministry of Local Government (MoLG).

When we look back at the history of library and information services in Uganda, the challenges that were faced during the 1960’s and 1970s still linger on at the beginning of the 21st century. The NLU is housed in a non-functional rented building in which it was almost evicted in 2004 due to non-payment of rent of 127 million shillings in arrears. The NLU is housed in a non-functional building and therefore cannot carry out its functions efficiently and effectively. It has limited space for staff, users and library resources. The collection of the non-book materials such as photographs, films, sounds and video recordings have stalled because of lack of storage and preservation facilities. The NLU is responsible to assist districts to establish public libraries. It has been noted that out of the 82 only 29 have public libraries. More and more districts are being established, this is a setback for the library services in Uganda, since it is a policy that each district should have a public library. When a new district is established, it has to build district headquarters, hospitals, and schools and construct roads. Since graduated tax was abolished, the local authorities have limited funds, and a public library is not a priority.

4 MP for Kongasis county, Kapchorwa
The NLU Board which is the highest decision making organ of the NLU has not been inaugurated since December 2004. The functions of the Board are to establish, manage and maintain the NLU, to implement its functions, and to put in place procedures for the collection, preservation and use of its collections (National Library Act, 2003 clause 7). This means that without a Board, there is no recruiting, disciplining, training, firing or promoting of staffs. The general public is not yet aware about the NLU. There no transport to collect the legal deposit from the publishers all over the country and to distribute book donations to public and community libraries.

Even though the NLU is facing several challenges, it has registered some success. Land has already been secured east of Kampala to construct the NLU building. The architectural design is already in place with the assistance of UNESCO which hopes to assist the government in soliciting funds for the construction of the building. Other achievements, (New Vision, 2005) include the improvement of reading culture. The digital book mobile service started in 2003 by NLU in conjunction with US-based Anywhere Books and the World Bank’s Infodev. Thousands of books were given to the rural primary school children, using a print on demand unit loaded van. This enables both the children and their teachers to access files of digital books stored on remote computers, which they downloaded, printed and bound. The Local Book Purchase project enables the NLU to buy books from publishers in Uganda, and to distribute them to public and community libraries. This project supports the growth of the book industry in Uganda and provides children with books which they can easily relate to in contrast to the imported books thereby increasing their interest in reading. The School Library Project deals with selecting locally published books donated by NLU to primary schools, in the districts, with the hope of starting school libraries and therefore inculcating the children’s reading habits. In collaboration with the Uganda National Book Trust of Uganda (NABOTU) and with funding from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), NLU organized national Book week festivities public and community libraries.

Soroti district council together with NLU completed an office block and children’s wing of Teso Public Library building. This project was started in 1968 had stalled due to wars and political turmoil. Plans are under way to construct functional library buildings for Gulu, Lira and Moroto districts. NLU procured books from Book Aid International and were distributed to several public libraries. NLU supports technical, material and professional support for the community based organizations wishing to set up community libraries. Local governments in Kabarole, Mbale and Kampala, with assistance from the American Embassy established Internet. In Mbale Public Library, ICT services attracted more library users, which added value to the library services. NLU has developed the institutional website (www.nlu.go.ug) and there are plans to digitize the national imprint The Local Area Network (LAN) and Internet services are available for the public to access information. NLU is one of the institutions covered by the Programme for Enhancement of Research Information (PERI) run by UK-based International Network.

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5 The New Vision Newspaper (2005) 31st January marking the second anniversary of the NLU existence outlined its achievements.
for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP). Library users can therefore access both local and international databases under the program.

The first volume of the National Bibliography of Uganda (NBU) was published in 2005 with 31,000 titles, and 28 publishers. It also includes publications from MULIB deposited since 1987. The second volume was published in 2006 with 55 publishers depositing 708 titles. The NBU is published annual and it is hoped that its frequency will be increased as the publishing industry grows and the depositing of books improves.

NLU in conjunction with Uganda Library and Information Association hosted over 300 librarians and information professionals from 12 countries in Africa and beyond to the Standing Conference for Eastern Central and Southern African (SCECSAL XVI, in July 2004. The copyright and access to information conference for librarians all over Africa was successfully hosted by NLU in 2005. This conference was funded by IFLA and Commonwealth of Learning. Librarians from the community and public libraries with no qualifications were trained by NLU staff in 2005. They were taught basics such as record keeping, acquisition, library management, cataloguing and classification, management of children’s sections.

Conclusion
The establishment of the NLU is a welcomed initiative in the library and information sector of the country. It is a national pride whereby anyone looking for the national intellectual output can go to NLU and have access to this information. Although it has registered some success in some areas, it has a lot of challenges some going as far back as the 1960s. However, with the assistance of the stakeholders, the government commitments and the development partners, there is hope that many of these challenges will be solved.

References


