



**Preserving the past and creating the future: a case for
Makerere University**

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Abstract

Makerere University Library is the oldest library in Uganda, serving as an Academic Library, a Legal Depository Centre and a National Reference Library. The entire library collection consists of over 400,000 monographs (excluding archives) with an annual addition of about 2,250 books (excluding donations). The Legal Depository Centre is housed together with the Library's Special Collection in the "Africana Section" of the Main Library. The Special Collections consist of rare books, archival, photographic, microfilm and newspaper collections as well as the institution's reports, minutes, theses and dissertations (totaling to 28,512). The Library attracts a lot of users who constantly consult the information materials making the collection prone to poor handling, damage and deterioration. This is coupled with environmental factors that encourage the growth of various micro-organisms leading to loss of information. Preservation measures have therefore undertaken to ensure that the information continues to be accessible and the originals preserved for future reference and research. This paper highlights what the Library collection entails, its usability, the preservation initiatives undertaken, the challenges and a way forward.

1. INTRODUCTION

Makerere University is the highest and oldest institution of higher learning in Uganda. It was founded in 1922 as a technical institution and in 1949 it became a University College in special relationship with the College of London then a center of higher education for the three East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania (then Tanganyika). It became a fully-fledged National University after an Act of Parliament in 1970. Among its main functions, it was mandated to provide instruction to all those admitted to the university, make provision to the advancement, transmission and preservation of knowledge and to stimulate the intellectual life in Uganda (Makerere University Act, 1970:904).

Makerere University's current mission is to provide quality teaching, carry out research and offer professional services to meet the changing needs of society by utilizing world wide and internally generated human resources, information, and technology to enhance the University's leading position in Uganda and beyond (Makerere University Strategic Plan, 2007/2017). Over the years, Makerere University academic programs and student numbers have continued to grow as well as the demand for library services and facilities. This has had an impact on the usage of library materials, calling for preservation attention.

At the Centre of the University is the Library system comprising of the Main Library, which is situated at Makerere Main Campus. Makerere University Library Service was founded in 1940, emerging from a small tutor's library (Sitzman, 1998:188). It was housed in the Main Administration Building until 1959 when it moved to the present premises (Makerere University Library report, 1976:153). The present premises were constructed in a total area of 4,000 square meters. It was extended in 1962, 1972 and 2006 increasing the area to 12,000 square metres with a seating capacity of over 2,000.

Makerere University Library Service comprises of the Main Library and 9 branch libraries in different disciplines of study programmes, i.e. Albert Cook Medical Library, Education Library, Institute of Adult and Continuing Education Library, East African School of Library and Information Science Library, Veterinary Medicine Library, Makerere Institute of Social Research Library, Makerere Institute of Agricultural Research Library at Kabanyoro, Institute of Statistics Library and Social Science Library.

The Library's vision is to become a centre of excellence in the provision of quality information for teaching, learning, research and national development. The mission is to meet the study, teaching, research and outreach information needs of Makerere University for sustainable national and regional development (Makerere University Library Strategic Plan, 2007/2017).

1.1 The Library Collection

The entire library collection consists of over 400,000 monographs with an annual addition of about 2,250 books excluding donation and exchange; 82,000 bound serials with an annual subscription of 330 serial titles. There is a Book Bank System that came into existence in 1990. It comprises of basic prescribed textbooks, which are shelved in different departments of the University. The Book Bank collection is currently approximated at 182,000 books. In addition, Makerere University Library serves as National legal deposit unit since the 1958 Act. This implies that all works published in and on Uganda, including government publications are deposited there. It is also the depository of various other publications from regional and international bodies. It became a National Reference Library in 1972. These

collections together with the archival materials and dissertations are housed in the Africana Special Collections Section of the Library. The Library also provides services like binding, microfilming, digitization, preservation and conservation. It has ICT facilities in almost all the branch libraries with a training unit in the Main Library. ICT facilities are planned to grow and to cater for the Library users' changing needs (Strategic Plan 2007/2017). Digital preservation is one of these needs.

1.2 Users

Given the varied kinds of collections at Makerere University Library, it attracts a lot of users who constantly consult the information materials. The current number of registered users consists of 20,000 undergraduate students, 2,000 postgraduate students, 2,500 members of Academic and Administrative staff and about 1,000 external researchers. With all the categories of materials mentioned above being constantly used, the collection is prone to poor handling, damage and deterioration, in addition to environmental factors that favour infestation of insects and rodents leading to loss of information. It is therefore, important that preservation measures are taken to ensure that the information continues to be accessible and the originals preserved for future reference and research. Following Feather's emphasis (as cited in Eden et al, 1999:31), materials that are wanted and used by the library users have to be preserved, or acceptable substitutes provided. Other materials may be permitted to survive, but utility has to be the ultimate determinant of preservation. In an effort to save the library collection, Makerere University Library has taken the following preservation initiatives:

2. PRESERVATION INITIATIVES

Following the IFLA Principles for the Care and Handling of Library materials (1998), preservation specifically means the provision of an appropriate level of security; environmental control; storage; care and handling that will retard further chemical deterioration and protect library materials from physical damage. It could be the provision or right circumstances in which materials can survive through the desired life span.

In March 1999 three consultants namely Mr. Frederick Bearman, Ms Elenore Kissel and Mr. Colin Venus from Universities of England Consortium for International Activities (UNECIA) under the Project "Strengthening of University Level Education" came to Makerere University Library to carry out a needs assessment survey. Some of the problems and needs identified were as follows:

- Absence of a preservation strategy, including acquisition, de-accession, holdings maintenance, conservation and reformatting.
- Insufficient security procedures and security equipment.
- Lack of initial training in preservation for most support, security, maintenance personnel and professional staff; and
- Inadequate binding work organization within the library

The consultants recommended that a Preservation Technical Committee be constituted and that workshops be conducted for senior and junior members of staff in order to implement the project. To this effect, a Preservation Training Programme of seven modules was conducted from 8th July to 27th July 1999 for library staff at Makerere University. The participants were from both the Main and branch libraries. There after, the following implementation measures were initiated:

2.1 Conservation

Feather (1991) refers to the term conservation as an aspect of preservation activity. Dureau and Clements (1986) define conservation as those specific policies and practices involved in protecting library and archival materials from deterioration, damage and decay, including the methods and techniques devised by technical staff. Cook (1980:117) says the bindery department of the libraries has the responsibility to the care, repair and binding of library materials. Igbino (1993:43) states that repairs of damaged library materials by the in-house bindery often save libraries a lot of money as well as earning some money from outside jobs. In-house repairs ensure that the library has complete control over its bibliographical resource. Makerere University Library has a Bindery Section where conservation of materials is done, for instance, repairing and replacement of torn books, rebinding of soft cover materials, newspaper binding, lamination and all craft works. Binding is the main method that the library uses for preserving book materials. All this is geared at maintaining and preserving the collection for future use.

2.2 Microfilming

Microfilming, also called microphotography, is the process that involves photographing information materials onto reels of film at high reduction factors, requiring a special reader to use. The term 'microfilm' (according to a web definition) describes film that is used to store by photographic means and at greatly reduced size, facsimile images of a great number of original items, documents, pages of books, etc. 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 the effective technology for rescuing brittle paper and for facilitating access to endangered research materials. A big portion of the library collection in Africana is classified as too fragile or valuable for constant handling by library users. Part of it is of unique nature that it needs to be preserved for future prosperity. In addition a lot of the material published in the past 100 years (especially the newspapers) was printed on poor paper quality with a relatively short life span. Preservation microfilming would be the viable solution for these materials; however, the available equipment at Makerere University has limitations that have led to the postponement of this activity. Currently, the thesis and dissertations collection are being reproduced onto microfilm for preservation purposes.

2.3 Archives

Makerere University Library has a wide collection of archives located in Africana/Special Collections of the Main Library and at the Albert Cook Medical Library. The Africana archival collections include works by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Uganda, Personal Archives of outstanding Ugandans, all Ugandan Newspapers and Newspapers of the East African region, and University collections emanating from or about Makerere e.g. Council Minutes, Theses and Dissertations. Other unique forms of information materials are kept on microforms e.g. microfilms of periodical back runs, information materials on East Africa and some international newspapers such as The Times (London). The archives also have a music collection and a rich collection of photographs depicting various Ugandan cultures, geographical features, former rulers, etc. All the archival documents are maintained in their original format and utilized in a Closed Access environment. However, the Library plans to acquire all the necessary equipment, have specially trained personnel to handle and maintain the library's collection for the present and future generations. In 2007, an Archivist trainee was recruited, and re-organisation, documentation and classification of the archives embarked on in March 2008, with the help of data processing assistants. So far 27,899 (75%) of the archival records have been classified and documented, ready for entry into the online

catalogue. All the documented archives are being kept in new file folders, pocket files, metallic boxes and cabinets, and acid-free boxes. Makerere University Library uses the VTLS Virtua Integrated Library System that now has an archives module installed and functional in the 48.1.9 version. In March 2008, an expert from VTLS conducted a Training of Trainers seminar on the archives module. More library staff will be trained how to enter archival data into Virtua as soon as the validation and classification of the archives is completed.

2.4 Photography

Among the Library's greatest treasures is a large collection of photographs by various men and women who witnessed the shaping of the history of Uganda. Prominent among these is Dr. A.T. Schofield. Dr. Schofield was one of the Missionary Medical Doctors to come and work in Uganda in the early 1920's. He had a wide interest in the country and traveled extensively. In addition, he was a prolific photographer who took his camera and used it to the maximum wherever he went. The result was an immense collection of photographs at the library, which form the bulk of our present Photograph Collection. The photographs range from the various aspects of traditional rulers of the time e.g. Kabakas of Buganda, Abakama of Bunyoro, Toro, and Ankole (including their tombs, palaces, drums and xylophone, musicians, executioners, medicine men and coronation ceremonies); various personalities; sceneries of various towns, mountains, and cathedrals; athletics groups, and various medical aspects – hospitals, patients, to name but a few. In a move to preserve the collection the photographs are arranged and filed in plastic enclosures, albums, frames and a few in digital format for proper storage. However, all the negatives in the collection are quite old. The film negatives are fading, the nitrate films are threatening to explode (as cautioned by an expert); and the glass negatives likely to break because of the poor storage conditions. The Library Management is however, taking all the necessary precautions to ensure that this valuable resource does not disappear. It is planning to contract a Company that will reproduce all the negatives on modern and safe material. This will involve copy-photography, developing and printing of the collection. Plans are also underway to make a set of paper copies to be scanned and stored electronically as digital files. This may lead to setting up a database for the photographs. The photographs are a unique set of visual information that is of great importance to various researchers who use them as illustrations in their publications. They also serve as historical records, educational visual aids, and entertainment for those who love photographs.

2.5 Photocopying

Woodlee (1988:15) from his observation of most libraries in Africa says, "We have seen that a majority of the libraries substitute photocopies of restricted materials". The implication is that a lot of photocopying is done in the libraries to reduce usage of the restricted original materials as a preservation measure. It is also possible that a lot of photocopying of parts of library materials is done for research purposes at a fee, however, this is done in-line with the library's copyright rules and regulations that allow photocopying for strictly educational purposes. Photocopying is therefore used to prolong the lifespan of the library collection, but the process stresses the book and exposes it to wear and tear. This operation therefore needs to be handled with care. At Makerere University, the Library owns and manages all the photocopiers within the library service. This ensures that copyright laws are regulated and a photocopy of the restricted materials (some of which were published in the 17th century and are still useful to users) is provided for use while the original is preserved. In situations where selfish users mutilate the most demanded documents (like law cases and some theses), the original document is used to replace the missing or damaged pages.

2.6 Digitisation

Digitisation was initiated in the Library in 2004 with training workshops conducted to upgrade the librarians' skills and capability to handle digital projects. This was done in collaboration with Tufts University; University of Tennessee, Knoxville; the Monteson Centre in USA and the University of Bergen in Norway, who provided expertise support in digitisation. A few members of staff were sent to these institutions to observe and learn how digital projects are handled. The skills gained were later used to implement the Library's digitization initiatives. One of the currently running digital initiatives is the institutional repository, called Uganda Scholarly Digital Library (USDL), where research output under the following categories is being archived: published articles, thesis and dissertations, conference papers and reports, technical and working papers. However, most libraries typically target archival and special collections materials such as historical documents and photographs in their digital projects (as cited in Piorun & Palmer, 2008:223). The archives and special collections in the Library were the initial targets for digitization, but they were not well documented and classified. Documentation and classification have now been embarked on, with plans to acquire the necessary equipment to enable digitization of the archives to progress. Once this is embarked on, preservation of the library's restricted materials will be ensured for future use, with access promoted online.

2.7 Lamination

This is another method of preservation of printed materials. According to Unomah (1988:50) materials, which are fragile and brittle due to degradation and those involved in fire, need lamination to restore and strengthen the documents for durability. 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 for reference by researchers. As the main focal reference point for many years, this collection has been over used with no surrogate backup maintained because most of the old newspapers were printed on large sheets of paper that could not be photocopied as a preservation measure. Microfilming was considered, but the available equipment could not handle the large paper size. Lamination was the alternative measure and this is being outsourced specifically for the newspapers in very bad conditions because the outcome is voluminous and costly.

2.8 Reprints of Newspapers

Uganda government was one of the publishers of some of the old newspapers archived at Makerere University Library. The New Vision, a government owned Newspaper Company whose journalists frequently refer to the old newspapers in the Library at Makerere University started a project of reprinting some of the heavily used newspapers as a preservative measure to ensure that the information is not lost. They are working in collaboration with Makerere University Library that is providing the archival newspapers for reprinting, a copy of which is being re-deposited for preservation.

2.9 Disaster Preparedness

In the context of libraries, McLntyre (as cited by Tibenderana, 2000:1) describes a disaster as "an event whose timing is unexpected and the consequences seriously disruptive". A disaster in a library therefore results in the sudden destruction or removal of records and documents from accessibility and use. In response to the emergency measures required in most modern libraries, Makerere University Library's building has catered for the

following: emergency fire exits, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, public address systems, telephone networks and alarm systems. In the recent past two years, Uganda has experienced a series of fires claiming buildings in the city, towns and schools. As a precautionary measure, Makerere University Library Management invited an executive from the Uganda Police Fire Brigade Department to sensitize and train Library Staff on the dangers of fire and how to use the available equipment to control fires during emergencies.

2.10 Security Control Measures

Preservation of documents with no security measure to minimize thefts can slowly lead to the loss of all the vital documents kept in the library. Makerere University Library has book-check systems in three of its libraries that are used to minimize theft cases. The Main Library also has CCTV cameras that are used to monitor the activities of users in the library.

3. CHALLENGES

Despite the numerous endeavors taken to ensure that the Library preserves its valuable resources, Makerere University Library, with its steadily growing collection, increasing number of users and the demand for provision of excellent library services still faces preservation challenges. These are enumerated below:

3.1 Preservation Policy

During the preservation needs assessment conducted by the European Union in 1999, various policies were recommended for development. Among these was a preservation policy document (currently in draft form) that would spell out the various plans and activities required to steadily maintain the library collection for the future. In addition to the draft preservation policy, the Library has continued to be guided by the EU's training materials. As Matenje (1996) argues, the African region and indeed developing countries at large have lagged behind in policy development. Policies are however among the Library's priority activities in its current strategic plan.

3.2 Skilled manpower

For many years, the Library has maintained an archival collection with no professional archivist to manage it. The archival collection was mishandled and exposed to deterioration in the absence of a professional. Many of the plans to properly preserve the archives were postponed because of lack of proper documentation. The post of an archivist was advertised twice, in 2005 and 2006 but did not attract a suitable candidate. The Library then recruited a professional librarian in 2007, who is being trained on the job as an archivist. She has so far proved very resourceful to the collection.

3.3 Environmental conditions

Uganda lies in the tropical region that experiences high temperatures and excessive humidity, which encourages the growth of various micro-organisms. Makerere University Library's collection has therefore not been spared by the environmental enemies of information materials like temperature, humidity, light, biological infestation and pollution. The air conditioning of the Strong-room that houses the archival materials broke down in the 1980s and has not been reinstated. Plans are underway to replace it.

3.4 Microfilming Equipment and accessories

The microfilming equipment that used to handle large documents on 35 mm roll film became obsolete in the 1980s. The newspapers and other publications on large sheets can no longer

be reproduced on microfilm. Currently, the unit microfilms theses and dissertations on 16 mm film, using a modern microfilm camera. This camera, however has fixed reduction sizes that limit the kinds of materials handled. Acquisition of microfilming consumables and accessories available only in the developed world has proven to be problematic due to the long process involved.

3.5 Photography

A big portion of the Library's photograph collection that is still on nitrate film and on glass negatives has been poorly stored and is now chemically dangerous. The Library is looking for funds to higher a company that can duplicate the negatives onto new negative films, with paper photographs reproduced.

3.6 Storage space and facilities

The Library still lacks an ideal storage environment for its archival collection. The current archives room used to have regulated environmental conditions broke down, leaving the collection exposed to the dangerous humid conditions. The room is not big enough to serve as a reading room as well, thus, the collection is again left to the mercy of the users while they use them in the general reading areas. The Library is planning for appropriate storage space to accommodate the archives.

3.7 Financial constraints

Financial constraints are the biggest problem that the University Library is facing. There is not enough money to buy all the necessary materials to preserve and conserve the library materials. Machines have been down for so many years due to lack of funds. Fumigation, for instance is an activity that needs to be done regularly, but due to limited funds, it is only done once in a while. In addition the cost of materials used in preservation and conservation are too expensive.

4. WAY FORWARD

A number of plans are under way to ensure that library materials are appropriately preserved for the future. For instance, Phase II of the Library extension may provide space for library users and more room to accommodate the Archives. Ordering of the necessary archival equipment and preservation material are continuously done. Training of an Archivist for further studies in preservation and conservation is underway, with hopes that a professional will help in ensuring that proper procedures in handling library materials are adhered to.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is not sufficient just to acquire, process and make documents accessible, their maintenance is equally important. Maintenance of the library collection demands two things, that is, preservation and conservation. Preservation aims at continuously maintaining the original state of the documents by use of different strategies while conservation entails reconditioning the already "sick" materials in order to "recoup" or improve their lifespan. In this regard Makerere University Library is trying all possible ways to preserve its past collection for future use.

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