

**Beyond These Walls:
Library Outreach Programme at Makerere University**

By

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Abstract

The paper presents Makerere University Library Outreach programme, highlights what the Library has done in the past about outreach. It also presents newer outreach activities and identifies potential challenges to outreach programme and suggests tentative solutions to it. The paper concludes with a call to support the programme. The paper is informed by experience, literature, consultation with some colleagues and observation.

Preamble

Chairperson, Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to begin by humbling myself with a statement of caution that I am perhaps not necessarily the best person to deliver this address. Key note addresses are more often than not meant to raise interest in a particular event, draw the attention of the participants to attend it or even raise the enthusiasm among the prospective participants. I firmly believe that there are many other people in our profession who could have done this better. If I do not make it, I have provided my apology beforehand. However I accepted to shoulder the challenge and thank the management of the University library for proposing and honouring me to share with you the very little I know of this subject and within the context of the work Makerere University Library has done and is doing in this area. I will base my presentation on the length of time I have been associated with the Library as a worker, a regular user and observer of the University Library activities for over thirty years now. I will relate this experience with the activities of outreach in the university libraries I have visited, used, or read about in different parts of the world. Exchange of views with colleagues also helped me put together this paper. It is perhaps because of that track record that the library leaders used to select me. To me this is an aspect of outreach in itself for which I am proud to be part.

Introduction

Over the past fifteen years or so, interest in Outreach among academic libraries of developing countries as elsewhere in the developed world has been growing steadily. This does not suggest that outreach started so lately; rather, it started a long time ago. Likely explanations of the present interest are revealed from the trends taking place globally and specifically in higher education. We note that the increasing number and diversity of student body, growing use of information technology and electronic information resources in higher education, the desire for specialised library services to target user groups such as faculty administration (lecturers), open and distance learning, and the international students are responsible for this development. Other reasons could be corporatisation of higher education, competition for limited resources, economic rationalism and changes in academia (Dunn and Hinsch, 2007)

Outreach in academic libraries takes a number of forms but usually is built around a commitment to instruction, the right of everyone to access information as one of their fundamental rights and the emerging need to work together in partnership. This paper therefore provides insight into the Library Outreach Programme at Makerere University. It highlights the traditional library outreach programme as evidence that this programme has been on for a long period of time but concentrating mostly on campus community, providing services to the faculty and students. The paper examines the current efforts in outreach programme beyond the campus which is the theme of this year's Outreach programme. To get that aspect, the paper firstly provides an insight to the Makerere University Library history.

Background

Makerere University Library as the nerve centre of the University that supports teaching, research and other academic programmes has a short history. It was in 1945 that the first stock of books that created the foundation of what is now the University Library was received. The first library was located in the Main Building. The important role this Library played during the subsequent years was recognized by the passing of the law establishing it as the national and international centre for the receipt and use of documents from governments and international organizations around the world. This is the Makerere University (Deposit Library) Act 1958, an act that made provision for the deposit and preservation of copies of books printed and published in Uganda.

During the formative years of its history the Library grew rapidly from a one-room four walled institution to a big library embracing several sub libraries including Education, IACE, Veterinary Medicine, EASLIS, Albert Cook, Kabanyolo sub libraries that we have today. This development is associated with the growth and diversity of education provision at the University through the years. In the 1980s the Library ran into trouble as did other departments of the University and sectors in the economy of the country. The University was hard pressed to meet its obligations. There was no money to buy books, the University Press was basically a printer and the University Bookshop was closed. To save the Library from collapsing from what Prof. Escarpit called “book hunger”, Government introduced a scheme of Book Banks and this led to the creation of Book Bank Libraries in all Faculties.

Since then the Library collection has been growing and building up various information resources over the years. Today we can proudly say the University Library has the biggest and probably the richest collection of information

resources in various formats in the country and probably in the East African region and beyond. That's why it is the centre of excellence in the provision of library and information services. The library has the highest number of well trained and competent library professionals (about 50 of them) working as part of the team of 230 employees to serve the estimated 34 thousand students undertaking various programmes and close to one thousand and five hundred academic and administrative staff engaged in academic work, research and personal improvement and leisure reading. The library is operating high tech information resources alongside the traditional hard copy and print medium. OPAC connects users to the collection. The Library serves the normal, visually handicapped, as well as learners taking courses by distance model. It is the teaching centre for proficiency in information literacy and is connected to the internet service twenty four hours. The Library has a wireless connectivity that hotspots entire campus. It holds about 30 local databases and several regional and international databases both Offline and Online such as DATAD, Pubmed, Medline Plus, Emerald, EBSCO, AGORA, EDD, ELIN, HINARI, USDL and Makula. It manages online subscription for about 100 online journals and about three hundred e-books accessed through Net Library database. The Library hosts over twenty full text journals and over ten on free access. In addition the library has a collection of almost 400,000 monographs, about 82,000 bound serials and subscribes to about 330 journal titles. The library is also a repository for historical archives of the prominent historical like Dr Albert Cook, works of the Church Missionary Society, and reports of colonial government to the present, strong collection of Africana and a big number of the United Nations documents. Rich collection of pictures/photographs, newspapers, gray literature in the form of dissertations is kept for use within its walls. Usage of the Library runs in thousands of students, staff and visitors per any one year. The recent development is the merger of the Book Bank with the parent stock and the creation of a strong base of book archives. Consequently, librarians have changed from being traditional store keepers concerned with protection of books against

theft, mutilation, and pilferage, to that of information officers, navigators, and cyberarians who find themselves in the vast ocean of reading materials and are busy trying to satisfy their clients who want information anytime and anywhere (Mahajan, 2005).

Outreach in Academic Library

What is Outreach? While there are different interpretations of what constitutes outreach, this is an important question because our understanding of the ways academic libraries operate may not fit the meaning we have in our minds. For instance Maura B. Thompson, the *Outreach Manager of Cyberchase*, made an attempt by telling people she worked in outreach. Their response was generally, “what do you call outreach? Like Thompson I asked someone recently what he understood by the concept “outreach”. Flatly this person answered, “Reaching out”. This kind of answer could easily also come from this gathering. It is a sticky question with a lot of grey areas; one whose answer changes depending on outreach audience and climate. To make the picture brighter I needed further inquiry and went to several sources. I cite a few of them here if they can be of help in our discussion. For instance American Library Association defines “outreach” as any programme of activities initiated and designed to meet the information needs of unserved or inadequately served target group. Oxford Advanced Learner’ Dictionary (2005) defines Outreach as the activity of an organization that provides a service or advice to people in the community, especially those who cannot or unlikely to come to office or hospital etc for help. At the University of Louisville, “outreach” is about going past boundaries. Boundaries in this context are defined by any number of factors including location of the library, the instruction, the community or cultural factors such as race, national origin, age, education, profession. At Cornell University Library USA “outreach” programme includes close collaborations with

the faculty and graduate students and initiatives aimed at the undergraduate students in humanities and social sciences that the university serves. The goal of outreach in this university is to effectively increase awareness of the universities broad range of services among Cornell faculty, students, and staff while also extending its outreach efforts to local community groups and remote users. Outreach is an act or process of reaching out and attempts to provide services beyond conventional limits. It is the ability of one community to work beyond its boundaries to provide for another community in need. This explanation is in line with the brief the University Librarian sent me. In this brief the theme focuses on community outreach and highlights the role of the University Library in improving information service delivery beyond the university community (Musoke 2010). Outreach is therefore about understanding customers, using communication techniques which are most appropriate for linking with them, earning trust and acceptance from them and developing partnerships and working relationships with them and their community organization.

Outreach programmes at Makerere University

Earlier on I stated that Outreach programmes at Makerere University did not start just recently. The University library has been building on successes and challenges every year that passes but perhaps without making reports and disseminating the outcomes about it widely. So, very few people knew it. Some of the outreach initiatives that the library initiated and carried out in the past include:

- Provision of libraries at the halls of residence
- Liaising with the faculty or academic departments in book selection to develop relevant collections
- Joint running of Book Banks

- Supporting outside libraries with information management tools like Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme
- Supplying tertiary institutions with books considered to be of little use to Makerere University but of most relevant use in such institutions
- Participating in the University's Exhibitions
- Providing reference service online, directly face to face, by mail and by telephone
- Document Supply Service
- Offering a number of information sessions and tours to visitors who come and tour its libraries under on spot guidance of the expertise of its librarians. This is usually done at the beginning of each semester or continuously as the visitors come.
- Marketing the library through display of new publications using specially designed glass fronted cupboard
- Publication of the East African Health Digest
- Bindery services.
- Book Exhibitions in collaboration with Publishers, and other organizations.

Current Outreach Programme Activities

Using its expert staff, the University Library is expanding and developing new products and projects. The Library is also continually searching for new ways of reaching its patrons including:

- Digital reference
- Current Awareness Service (CAS) is run in conjunction with international organisations on days such as TB Day, World Cancer Day and World Meteorological Day etc.
- Hosting workshops aimed at raising interest in electronic information and the attendant transformation of scholarly communication giving academic librarians chance to take on new roles across the University.
- Self archiving using a fairly newly created Uganda Scholarly Digital Library (USDL). USDL is a collection of scientific research papers by at Makerere University researchers. It is the official Institutional Repository (IR) of Makerere University. It is a major contributory to the Universities' visibility and ranking.
- Microfilming and photography
- Information competence training programme to staff and other relevant members of community.
- Participating in international conferences to sell and learn of the best practices
- Participating in events of national importance by displaying thematic information products such as World AIDS Day documents
- "Pick what is Important" documents on display
- Attending campus events such as the University Open day and regional events such as the East African Universities Exhibition
- Offering user-centred services e.g. disability friendly services such as Braille, larger print, recorded and electronic texts

- Providing internet instruction. This collaborative imperative between the library and faculties working together is a visible contribution. In their article *Internexus: a partnership for internet instruction* Sally Kalin and Karol Wright (1994) describe the collaboration between the faculty and library in teaching Internet skills to campus community as a way of creating proficient users of the internet who then can use the skills to discover “applications in their own disciplines.” Makerere University Library is doing exactly this.
- Providing off-campus sites with information products and access rights.
- Collaborating with institutions like KCC and Fountain Publishers to display and promote issues of national importance and other subjects ICTs and entrepreneurship.
- Centre of Ugandan history e.g. displaying “War Victim”, keeping safe custody of Buganda Agreement 1900.
- Centre for an Award winning Film “King of Scotland”
- Helping schools improve their libraries with cataloguing, spine marking etc.

While this may be a long list, it may not be that comprehensive of what the entire Library is doing. An important thing is to understand and appreciate that the role that the library is playing in outreach is immense. Commitment and foresight by its staff is what makes the difference. The Library, we note, started a regular event of Outreach in 2009 and today it is participating for the second time. This period coincides with the World Library Day as well as the time the Library is implementing the Makerere University Strategic Plan 2008/09 – 2018/19. The Plan unequivocally recognises the support functions of the Library in the University. It highlights that the University Library plays a crucial role in providing

support to the functions and intellectual developments of the University. One of the cornerstones of the Plan is anchored in ensuring a user-centred Library and Information Service and sustaining effective institutional linkages. One specific strategy is the need to increase Library Outreach services with the performance indicator being Outreach services (Makerere University 2008).

Challenges

As I stated earlier, an event like this one aims at raising people's interest, making them feel good and enthusiastic about it. It would be best to say nice things only. However, I must on this occasion say that for us to enjoy this programme more in the future, we need to point out the challenges that the outreach planners should bear in mind so they do even a better programme. Here I will highlight just a few. The immediate challenge I see for Makerere University Library is the need to define what constitutes "Outreach". Is it everything every time and year? Definition of our type of outreach should be given and placed on the Library website for people to see and understand what the Library stands for in this programme and University. Earlier on in this presentation I highlighted how different people and institutions defined this concept. The position is that different people and institutions see and emphasize it differently. But their position is posted on the net for all to see. Let's be specific about ours. It is what will make a difference. For instance at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), its outreach programme is based on the databases it makes public. It is an active and open programme that is ongoing. The mission is to grant access to, and understanding of, MIT outreach opportunities and offerings. Its goal is to enable those who want to take part in MIT outreach programmes to see what is available for them (MIT Outreach database). MIT outreach efforts are an active, open engagement between MIT and the communities. This engagement is an

acknowledgement of the fundamental relationship that exists between MIT and the public at the local, national, and global levels. The programme allows members of the MIT community and the general public to access listings of outreach programmes at MIT. Because Makerere University is doing this the second time, we have not known yet what it did best last year and where emphasis is being placed this year. This is something we have to learn and develop for ourselves as a consequence of our actions. In this connection, I would like you to join me and treat any success of our Outreach programme as a journey, not a destination. It has been there although formally started last year, 2009, and it is here this year and will continue to be organized years to come.

The second challenge derives from the heterogeneity of the community outside the university walls. While it is a little easier to understand the learning and information needs of those registered at the university because of the disciplines they are following, it is a lot more difficult to state really what constitutes the information needs of diverse communities outside the campus walls. And it is not professional to assume we know them. It is therefore important at this stage to suggest that in the process of extending services beyond its walls, the library should consider establishing the position of the research and outreach librarian. The role of this officer would be to engage in the marketing of the library services, designing new modes of service delivery and, new services and running the programme in a coordinated business-like approach. The aim would be to constantly identify the needs of different groups of library stakeholders and develop appropriate and focused services to meet their needs. A scheme called Customer Knowledge Taxonomy (CKT) would be appropriate (Daneshgar and Bosanquet 2010:23-24). This taxonomy enables librarians to assess Knowledge about Customers (KAC), Knowledge for Customers (KFC) and Knowledge for Customer (KFC). The second duty would be to cause and improve communication with all stakeholders using various methods. This approach has worked well in

Brookes University Library in the UK (Brewerton, 2003). The third would be conducting research and eliciting feedback from stakeholders, identifying and creating effective solutions to user needs, promoting value and showing the value of the library's services and content to them. Such person should be one capable of relations management and thoroughly knowledgeable of library services and its content.

The third challenge that I see coming as the consequence of reaching out to the communities outside Makerere University walls is the need for the Library to take on extended responsibilities among its stakeholders to teach information skills besides information literacy workshops. Mastery of information skills is one avenue by which people will appreciate and participate in information outreach programme. It has been discovered empirically that information resources are not effectively utilised in Makerere University Library because of inadequate and in some cases poor information skills (Kakai, et al 2004). What therefore will be the situation out there especially in high schools where there are no libraries? The need is self evident.

Other challenges include but not limited to funding and partnerships. Funding is certainly crucial to the development and implementation of the University Library Outreach Programme. Funding sources will primarily consist of monies from within the Library budget. To my knowledge of Makerere University there is little in the resource envelop for all Library activities. The Library therefore needs to look far for grants from well wishers. The challenge is to develop or obtain the support necessary for the development, implementation and continuity of the Outreach programme at the University. One suggestion would be to apply for grants or investigate other sources of funding including revenue generating programmes. Another way could be developing and or obtaining collaborative relationships with individuals and groups interested in the provision of information

to specific group of consumers. This is how to build networks and promote knowledge partnerships.

To sustain and make the Outreach programme more professional to a greater extent, partnerships are inevitable. Working collaboratively has the advantage of better exposure and promotion. The most critical internal partnerships will be the faculties when events are being staged by them. In the external environment institutional memberships with various library related organisations across the country, region, continent or rest of the world would produce potential partners some of whom can sponsor outreach programme for a year or so provided it is based on what they want done to raise their own image as well. Trying consortia arrangement such as CUUL is a remarkable proposition. The point is to plan and implement outreach programmes that promote both the Library and the partner.

As a reminder, one other thing to do is for the Library to take steps and evaluate what it does in its outreach programme and produce a report that brings together all successes and challenges or failures in one document and place it on the net. Besides just knowing its customers with their interests, it is important that the organizers ask few questions in different stalls. For instance it could be asked; How do you find the University Outreach programme – is it educative? Is there something we could do differently to make the event more responsive to your needs? What could that be? If we were to hold another workshop or exhibition, what would you like to see done better or introduced or added? I am sure this would help the Library do more and better in the future. I am not suggesting that it is doing badly but there is always room to do better. That's why we "Build for the Future" always.

Conclusion

Makerere University Library is a premier library in Uganda. The Library is a knowledge Bank and Knowledge Museum, and it is a public information centre. It is continuing with Outreach programme in the spirit of extending its innovations, excellence and relevance across the country. The programme has something to learn from and promote learning. It works as Knowledge Fair, always offering something new and thematic. An adequate budget, plan promotional campaigns, and development of a link from the Main Library website to Outreach website with blogging utility is required. It cannot do it on its own but needs financial support not only of the mother institution, and Government, but also from private sector and civil society. The international donor community have and continue to give tremendous financial support. We have expertise and experience to run it. Let's listen to the voices of our stakeholders but never judge them. But ask them to judge us. The future is here for us to make a difference. It must be a journey of continuous change. Let's all rise and support it. Thank you.

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