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Uganda: Future of Libraries Key to Achieving Development

BY GEORGE NTAMBAAZI, 4 NOVEMBER 2012

OPINION

ON October 29, the Vice-President Edward Ssekandi, commissioned Makerere University main library new building extension part II.

Hardly three months ago, President Yoweri Museveni commissioned the first part of the library which cost sh3.4b.

All this has been done in commemoration of Uganda's Golden jubilee, Makerere University's 90 years of existence and Carnegie Corporation of New York 100 years centenary celebrations.

Ssekandi said the Government commits approximately 16% of the national budget to education. However, the proportion that goes to development of public libraries was not clear.

The magnificent extension has 8,000 square metres of reading space, 300 computers, a multi-media unit, software for users with disabilities, to mention but few. The structures imposing architectural design and modern fittings is a testament of Makerere heading to a new direction.

According to the Education Standards Agency and the National Council for Higher Education, adequate library space is one of the key quality assurance issues that must be met by our higher educational institutions.

Casting aside the perennial song of underfunding, Makerere, this time, fully funded the extension from its internally-generated funds. From the success of this project, the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Ddumba Ssentamu, vowed to take, this development across the academic community.

This is through public libraries in the country, policy makers and business professionals and the public by replicating the synergies planted at Makerere for better information access and sharing.

Anyone familiar with Makerere University may notice that the former acting Vice Chancellor Venansius Baryamureeba and Ddumba may exceptionally differ from each other.

However, they share a common strategic purpose that summons their talents, aims and efforts. It steers their ambitions into result-oriented organisational milestones.

A glimpse at the expanded College of Computing and the towering Mapeera House, respectively, bear true testimony to the achievements of these two gallant sons of Uganda.

In a passionate appeal for recognition and appreciation of the roles of libraries in nation building, Makerere University chief librarian Prof. Maria Musoke, noted that the character and efficiency of a university is gauged by the treatment of its central organ, the library.

She also stressed that her staff may be poorly remunerated, but their anxiety to innovate for users and for the future remains strong.

She, however, noted that in spite of the impetus given to the libraries the world over, in Uganda there still lies a huge disparity between the sympathy they get and the support they receive.

From my experience both at Makerere and during my post-graduate studies in Germany, I learnt that libraries are not only important for reading and research but also play a crucial role in preserving history, ensuring the continuity of cultures and civilisation.

They are a place for freedom, and where young people begin to envision the future. For our country to achieve first world status, the Government must continue looking into the future of libraries, envisage all the contingencies, and allocate resources to them.

An educated and research-based population is key to development.

The writer is Makerere University Alumni

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