**FOREWORD by THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA RT. HON. DR. RUHAKANA RUGUNDA**

**Librarians as agents of change: the transition to electronic health information**

In the early 1990s, a small satellite orbited the Earth, pole to pole, quietly dropping off e-mail message at least twice per day to computer and ham radio-based ground stations in Africa. This early, quite rudimentary Internet system was called HealthNet, and Albert Cook Library at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, was one of the sites where clinicians and researchers waited eagerly for the satellite to pass over.

Inside Albert Cook, Library director Maria Musoke and her young assistant Sara Mbaga made sure the equipment on site was operating and secure, even building a cage around the ground station! They pulled down messages, all in ascii text, and saw that they were delivered (by hand) to the right people. They downloaded and printed the weekly HealthNet News, posted it on the library notice board, and circulated it to clinics, making the latest research available to clinicians and researchers at the university and beyond. These librarians were central to the success of HealthNet in Uganda.

I am happy to write the Foreword to Dr Musoke’s book, as I saw this Project start, grow and subsequently play an important role in arming both clinicians and researchers in Uganda with up-to-date information to improve their clinical and research performance. During my tenure as Minister of Transport and Communication, I was pleased to be part of this HealthNet team-as a government official who was trained as a pediatrician and had served as Minister of Health. The team also included well-known AIDS researcher Nelson Sewankambo (recently retired as the Principal of the college of Health Sciences at Makerere) and Charles Musisi (now a successful IT expert in the private sector).

I recount the story of those early days to illustrate that it was not enough to have Internet access, however nascent. The vast store of information that could eventually be tapped via the Internet called out to Librarians as agents of change. These information activists reached out from the university to health workers-at the referral hospital, the rural clinic and a variety of sites in between.

The person who worked and continues to work tirelessly to move electronic information from the Internet and push it into the active service of improving health is Dr. Maria Musoke, former Director of Albert Cook Library and University Librarian, now Makerere University Professor of Information Science and author of this book.

From the early days onwards, Dr. Musoke has been a leader in outreach, the reinvention and re-envisioning of how health information can be tailored for a variety of audiences. She thinks globally while acting locally in Uganda. In the field of health information access, she stands as both a midwife and a pioneer.

Her devotion to health information- its access and use- now moves across a very broad band, not only in the halls of academia but also in hospitals and in rural clinics in isolated or remote areas. Her mission has expanded beyond the technical intricacies of receiving information from a satellite and distributing it to clinicians and researchers to that of engaging librarians in the process of empowering people in communities-rural and urban- to find the information themselves.

She has traveled regularly with a team of doctors, nurses, and midwives to train rural health workers, inform community members, and influence health outcomes. She has assisted librarians in repackaging information so that it supports field visits and helps local people with their health problems.

Her commitment is to translating knowledge into practice and to examining the value of information and its ability to affect the bottom line of better health. With this book, she offers a clear model of literacy and advocacy- how librarians in developing countries can reach out to rural health workers with great impact on health outcomes.

If you go to the Albert Cook Library today, you can still see those HealthNet antennae on the roof. They have long since given way to the inexorable movement of technology to very large satellites and undersea cable, but Dr. Musoke insists that those antennae should remain on the library roof-as historic lightning rods that preserve the memory of those early days of Internet and health information access in Africa and continue to inspire us all.