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## Golden Jubilee Uganda

### Nsibirwa: The man to whom Makerere owes its existence

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Nsibirwa Hall (former Northcote Hall) at Makerere named after Nsibirwa in recognition of his contrib  
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To mark 50 years of Uganda's independence, New Vision will until October 9, 2012 be publishing highlights of events and pro- ling personalities that have shaped the history of this country. Today, GILBERT KIDIMU looks at the outstanding contribution of Martin Luther Nsibirwa, the former Buganda Katikiro, who allocated the land on which [Makerere University](#) main campus was built.

This year, September 5, will be exactly 67 years since Buganda's Katikkiro, Martin Luther Nsibirwa, was assassinated at the main entrance of Namirembe Cathedral. He was shot as he made his way into the church for morning prayers.

As Makerere next month kicks off celebrations to mark 90 years of its existence, perhaps the current main campus would have been located elsewhere had it not been for Nsibirwa.

When the colonial administration wanted to expand Makerere College to establish the University of East Africa in 1945, some Baganda were against the allocation of more land on Makerere hill.

"The colonial government had searched for land all over the region and had found no central location big enough for a standard university," says Rhoda Kalema, the late Nsibirwa's daughter.

In Makerere, most of the land available was private mailo. At fi rst, Nsibirwa tried to convince the landlords to let the central government have the land, but none would have any of it.

But seeing the golden opportunity it was for Uganda if the university was constructed here, he later, in his capacity as Katikkiro, manoeuvred and convinced the Lukiiko to pass a resolution that enabled the colonial government to acquire more land for [Makerere University](#).

“So, he gave out the land amid protests from several Baganda. That is what led to his assassination,” says Rhoda Kalema, the late Nsibirwa’s daughter.

The land that was subsequently leased from Kabaka’s government recently became a centre of controversy once again after the expiry of the lease. The Kabaka has indicated interest to recover it.

The allocation of the land for the university was so controversial Nsibirwa was assassinated in 1945 as he left Namirembe Cathedral. He was aged 62 years.

“Because he was killed at the church and was a regular member, the church leaders decided to bury him there,” says Rhoda Kalema, who was 16 years at the time of his assassination. Nsibirwa was shot by Ssenkatuuka, a driver.

Although his death is linked to disagreement over the allocation of Makerere land, his assassination is also believed to be associated with the controversy related to the Namasole (king’s mother) seeking to remarry a commoner. Nsibirwa did not object to the young queen re-marrying a “commoner”, which was a highly emotional issue.

In his book, *The Struggle for Land in Buganda 1888-2005*, Samwiri Lwanga Lunyiigo says Nsibirwa had in 1941 been forced to resign by the Lukiiko for supporting the remarriage of the Namasole.

For decades, Nsibirwa’s extensive contribution to the existence of Makerere was never recognised until 15 years ago in 1997 when former Northcote Hall was renamed Nsibirwa Hall. Tanga Odoi, the spokesperson for [Makerere University](#) Staff Association, says in the university’s 90 years of existence, Nsibirwa holds a special place.

“He advocated for children to have an education. He sensitised people to look at the university as something that belonged to them and not the colonial government.”

Kalema says her father loved and believed in education in spite of having not attained formal education himself.

He further gave away his personal land in Mulago for the construction of a dormitory for the School of Nursing, and was compensated with land in Kansanga on Ggaba Road, a remote suburb at the time.

“He made sure all his children were educated. The girls went to Gayaza and the boys were sent to King’s College Budo.” He also sent his nephews to Mengo Senior Secondary School.

It is also said giving out [Makerere University](#) land further caused more trouble to Nsibirwa’s family even after his assassination. His children became a target of the enraged Baganda.

“The Police had to protect us and restrict our movement,” Salongo Semu, one of Nsibirwa’s children, said at a thanksgiving ceremony in 2008.

## Background

Born in 1883 to Kiwana, a fi Sherman in Buwe, Ssesse islands, and Priscilla Bulyaba; Nsibirwa was educated from Katikkiro Sir Apollo Kaggwa’s home. He learned writing, reading and administration skills from the colonialists. He grew up under the guardianship of his uncle Temiteo Mulondo, who was a friend of Katikkiro Kaggwa.

Martin married Damali Namawejje. He later married three other women; Erina Nankya, Nawume Kipanda and Veronica Namuddu, with whom he had 11 sons and 14 daughters. Four of his children are still alive. They are Eseza Kironde, Robina Sserwada, John Nsibirwa and Rhoda Kalema. The number of grandchildren, great and great grandchildren is so large that it is

unknown.

Kabaka Frederick Muteesa II in his book, The Desecration of my Kingdom (1967), says: “Nsibirwa was thought by the governor to be the man with the experience to run the country.”

Achievements

Nsibirwa is also remembered for his great mobilisation skills. During the Second World War, he mobilised educated Baganda youth, including three of his sons and three relatives, to fight in Ethiopia, Libya and Burma.

He won honours from the British Government and Kabaka Daudi Chwa II. The Britons conferred upon him the honour of being a Member of the British Empire for his outstanding performance in leadership. He campaigned for immunisation against small pox and ensured food security and peace in the kingdom. Nsibirwa is also credited for building the Twekobe in Bulange, Mengo.

Charles Peter Mayiga, the spokesperson of Buganda Kingdom, echoes the fallen Kabaka explaining that Nsibirwa’s contribution to Uganda and Buganda is noteworthy, especially in the education sector.

“He was also the first Ugandan to advocate for electricity to be generated here. He further suggested the introduction of piped water in the country. Nsibirwa also served twice as Katikiro owing to his outstanding performance,” adds Mayiga.

What others say about Nsibirwa

Rt. Rev, Paul Luzinda, retired Bishop of Mukono Diocese  
As a Katikiro of Buganda, Nsibirwa is remembered most for offering land on which Makerere University was built and requested the colonial government to extend water and electricity to Buganda Kingdom.

Prof. George Kirya, former  
MUK vice-chancellor His contribution of donating land where MUK stands can never be forgotten and for that, NorthCote Hall was renamed Nsibirwa. He left a big legacy.



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Harry

Nsibirwa Oyee! A great man! I'm a graduate from that MUK to which Nsibirwa contributed that greatly! Nsibirwa Oyeeee! Rraaaaaaa!

Bonabana

Mh If some one reads this story it seems you are reading in the old Testament the great Kings,One Dr. from Bahams said theres nothing rich like the cemetery, is true, Oh my G-d  
Uganda has hidden history from us these people should be in History,May the L-rd rest his soul in everlasting peace.He deserves Honor.Amen

Dan Ngoro