

UGANDA WOMEN WRITERS ASSOCIATION (FEMRITE)

**A REPORT ON THE SIXTH WEEK OF LITERARY ACTIVITIES
CARRIED OUT UNDER THE THEME:**

“Books And the Reading Culture: A National Issue”

24TH TO 28TH JANUARY 2005

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1.0 BACKGROUND TO WEEK OF LITERARY ACTIVITIES

1.1 Introduction

FEMRITE has for the last five years carried out week- of- literary- activities aimed at promoting reading, writing, and bringing together the stakeholders in the book industry. Normally, the activities of the week include:

- Training workshops
- Public readings
- Book launches
- Writers' Nights
- Public lectures
- Fundraising dinners

The first week of literary activities was held in 2000 and presided over by renowned Ghanaian writer and professor of literature, Ama Ata Aidoo. The theme of the week was: *Celebrating Women Writings in the New Millennium*.

The second week of literary activities was held in 2001 and presided over by Prof. Taban lo Liyong, a celebrated Ugandan-Sudanese fiction writer and poet. The Prince Claus Fund sponsored Prof. Taban's trip from the University of Venda, South Arica, where he lectures, to Uganda.

The third week of literary activities was held in 2002 and organised under the general framework of the theme: *Creative Writing in Uganda - Challenges and the way forward*. The chief guest was Prof. Okey Ndibe, Nigerian-American writer and Fulbright professor.

The forth week of literary week of activities was held in 2003 and presided over by Prof John Ruganda. This week mainly concentrated on young people interested in creative writing. Participants for the workshop were from secondary

schools who gathered at the National Theatre for five days exploring creative writing.

The fifth week of literary activities, was held in 2004 under the theme Gender and contemporary writing.

1.2 The 2005 Literally Week of Activities

Uganda Women Writers Association (FEMRITE) held her Sixth Annual Week of Literary Activities from 24th to 28th January 2005. The week of activities is a multi-dimensional event for FEMRITE. It is a time when FEMRITE holds activities to reach out to communities and the public to share information about books and in the process, a platform is created for members of FEMRITE to publicise their works. The week's event also creates an opportunity for other organisations and individuals interested in the book industry to generate and share information on important literary issues. Other objectives include creating strategic alliances, encouraging young people to embrace the value of reading and writing, creating fora for upcoming and established writers to interact and encourage one another.

1.3 Justification for the event

The theme for the 2005 Week of Literary Activities was; ***Books and the Reading Culture: A National Issue***. This was in response to the low importance attached to books and reading, a phenomenon that has been attributed to government policies that relegate books and culture to the background and to the lack of relevant policies on books and reading. Yet, books and reading are tools that any developing nation should endeavour to put at the forefront because both are key to development and civilisation. Creative writing is not a neutral process. The artist draws from her social experiences personal values and ideologies to come up with a work of fiction. The more one reads, the

more ideologies, values and social experiences that one encounters and integrates into their own, to become better humans.

It was also important to hold the event in order to bring writers together to identify how they can effectively engage in promotion of reading, alongside other partners in the book industry, and to make a statement to policy makers about the importance of books and reading as a national issue, necessary for effective development.

1.4 The objectives and expected results for the 2005 Week of Literary Activities were:

1. To identify advocacy issues in the promotion of reading, for writers to engage in
2. To bring writers together and create a fora for them to share their works
3. To create a fora for writers to interact with policy makers relevant to the book industry to debate the relevance of books and reading to national development

1.5 Expected results

1. Advocacy issues in promotion of reading identified
2. Writers brought together to share their works and other literary information,
3. Writers inspired to write more and to participate in promotion of reading.
4. Fora created for writers and policy makers relevant to the book industry to interact
5. Publicity for FEMRITE and other partners in the book industry

1.6 The activities of the week included

- Opening Ceremony/Public Reading held at Makerere University Main Building
- Advocacy Writers' Workshop held at Makerere University – Forestry Dept
- Public Dialogue and Book Launch held at Hotel Equatoria – Anisha Hall
- Writers' Night held at Uganda National Cultural Centre (National Theatre)

The activities were sponsored by

- East African Book Development Association through National Book Trust of Uganda
- Embassy of the United States of America – Public Affairs Office
- Makerere University Literature Department
- HIVOS

ACTIVITY I

2.0 OPENING CEREMONY / PUBLIC READING

The opening ceremony / public reading was held in collaboration with Literature Department, Makerere University. The reading was held at Makerere University-Main Building on 24-01-2005. The theme of the event was ***Peace***. Professor Jack Mapanje officiated at the ceremony.

2.1 The programme officer's remark

The FEMRITE Programmes Officer for Information and Capacity Building, Ms Hilda Twongyeirwe, welcomed the participants and explained that this was the opening of the FEMRITE's sixth Week of Literary Activities. She highlighted the importance of the week of activities in the history of FEMRITE. She briefly commented on the theme of the week, which was ***Books and the Reading Culture: A National Issue***. She explained that each activity of the week had a theme and the theme of the readings at the opening ceremony was ***Peace***.

Twongyeirwe highlighted the importance of peace in the world and the lack of it, and said that there was need for writers to participate in the fight for peace, using their writing skills. She said that the world was faced with a lot of turmoil and bloodshed, which are crumpling lives worldwide. She added that FEMRITE chose 'PEACE' as the theme of the opening ceremony for the 6th Week of Literary Activities to show their solidarity with the rest of the world. After her remarks, she acknowledged the presence of distinguished personalities like Professor David Rubadiri - Vice Chancellor of the University of Malawi, Mr Henry Barlow, Professor Austin Bukonya and Dr Kalema, Dr Muranga.

2.2 The Chairperson's Remark

In her welcome remarks, the Chairperson FEMRITE, Ms Winnie Munyarugerero explained that every year, FEMRITE, assisted by her partners in the literary

world, organised a week of literary events. She expressed FEMRITE's appreciation to the American Embassy, Makerere University and East African Book Development Association through the National Book Trust of Uganda (NABOTU) for sponsoring the 2005-week of activities. She thanked Professor Jack Mapanje for accepting the invitation to officiate at the Public Reading.

2.3 The readings

A number of participants read their works of art, which included poems, short stories and novel extracts. All of them were depicting the importance of peace while a few were depicting hope of peace to come.

The readings were as follows:

NAME OF READER	TYPE OF WORK	TITLE OF WORK
Beverly Nambozo	Poem	Yellow Skies
Allan Tacca	Essay	
Mildred Kiconco	Poem	Bust Cistern
Regina Amollo	Novel Extract	A Season Of Mirth
Bob Kisiki	Essay	
Philo Nabweru	Recitation and song	
Jocelyn Ekochu	Story extract	Not Until I Find My Daughter
Dr Kalema	Poem	Africa in pain, by Sam Iga
Professor Austin Bukenya	Poems	

2.4 Introducing Prof. Jack Mapanje

Ms Monica Chibita, a senior lecturer in Mass Communication, Makerere University, introduced the chief guest and gave a few remarks about him. She introduced him as:

- A Malawian national currently a Senior Lecturer in English, School of English, University of New Castle in the UK (Teaching 2 MA modules: Memoir Writing and Literatures of Incarceration).
- A poet, a linguist, an educationist and a critic
- An Honorary Professorial Fellow, School of English, University of Leeds, the UK;
- Honorary Doctor, University of Sterling, Scotland, UK
- A Professor who has enjoyed an extensive writing career for a very long time.

2.5 Remarks from the Chief Guest

In his remarks, Prof. Jack Mapanje, expressed his gratitude to the students of Nairobi University - Kenya and Makerere University, Kampala for the support they gave him when he was arrested in 1987 and detained for three and half years without trial on the orders of the then Malawian president. They wrote and staged two different plays, protesting his imprisonment. Nairobi University students wrote a play and adapted it to film format and even made T-shirts with the words "*Free Jack Mapanje*" written at the back. He was, however, released one before week before the show was staged. Makerere University Literature Department staged a very successful play protesting the dictatorial regime. The Professor said that the East African concern touched him.

Prof. Mapanje expressed his gratitude to FEMRITE for having invited him and given him the opportunity to interact with the Makerere University community and the Uganda writers.

He discussed the writing trends and patterns in African literature from the first generation of writers to the present. He said that the first generation of writers extolled the virtues of colonialism while the second generation was critical of the colonialists and colonisation. The third and fourth generations, he said, are made up of writers of roaming minds who came after the colonial era. He said that he considered himself among the roaming minds because his works were about the social political life as he observed it around himself.

Talking about peace, Professor Mapanje said that there are two sides on which writers can participate in the struggle for peace. There is the short term, which is reactionary in that writers write reacting to a given situation that may have arisen. The second one is the long term, where writers may continue writing with the hope that their work will eventually promote peace.

Prof. Mapanje made a number of recommendations.

1. He suggested that it would be useful if Ugandan writers formed a Human Rights Network to protect the writers' rights and monitor what goes on with other writers in the world so as to give each other support where necessary. He said that some countries have done so already.
2. He also pointed out the fact that there is need to hold writers' festivals to update each other on what is happening in the writing world at any one time. The festivals would also act as a link between established and budding writers, to ensure continuity in writing.
3. In his comments on the colonial system of education, the professor pointed out the fact that women were never given any platform to be heard, a situation that had continued up to the present day. In that respect, he commended FEMRITE for creating a platform for women to speak out through their works. He praised FEMRITE for *Tears Of Hope*, a publication highlighting the abuse of rural women's rights. He however noted that not many rural women could read such a publication. In view

of that, he recommended that it would be good if FEMRITE could spread to the rural areas in terms of publishing more in the languages that rural women can read and involving them in telling their stories.

4. He suggested that it would be interesting for writers to come up with school programmes to ensure interaction that would nurture continuous generations of writers.

At the end of his presentation, Prof. Mapanje read from his latest collection of poems, ***The Last Of The Sweet Bananas*** and ***Of Chameleons and Gods***.

ACTIVITY II

3.0 WRITERS' WORKSHOP

3.1 Introduction

The Writers Workshop was held at the Faculty of Forestry, Makerere University on 25th January 2005. The facilitators were Dr Robinah Kyeyune of School of Education, Language Department, Makerere University and Prof. Austin Bukenya of Literature Department, Makerere University. The Theme of the workshop was ***Advocacy in Promotion of reading.***

Ms Hilda Twongyeirwe welcomed participants, taking time to explain the fact that the workshop was intended for both the established and budding writers. She quoted Professor Jack Mapanje as saying that it was of utmost importance to bring the two groups together. Twongyeirwe said that workshop was motivated by a complaint among the stakeholders in the book industry, that writers were not doing enough in the promotion of reading and writing. She urged participants to use the workshop to learn more about writing and to work out a way in which to contribute more towards the promotion of the reading culture in Uganda.

SESSION I:

Facilitator: Dr Robina Kyeyune

The session started with self-introductions in which participants were mentioning the benefits they expected by the end of the workshop. The following expectations came up:

3.2 The participants' expectations;

- Networking with teachers and learning more about creative writing.
- Getting a wider knowledge of writing
- Learning how to get a wider distribution of the published works

- Getting greater inspiration to write
- Getting more ideas on getting children to read
- Getting more equipped with the knowledge on how to contribute to society as a writer
- Sharing experience with other writers
- Learning about the publishing process
- Learning how to elevate the writers' profile
- Learning how to involve rural people in writing and reading after school
- Getting more ideas on how to improve the reading culture
- Building confidence as a writer
- Getting encouragement from other writers and readers.

Dr Kyeyune, commented on the above expectations and explained that most bottlenecks in writing came up because writers did not come together often, to share experiences and find solutions to their problems. She commended FEMRITE for bringing writers together to share their experiences and forge a way forward.

3.3 Introducing the Keynote Speaker

On behalf of the FEMRITE Chairperson, Ms Florence Ebila, a member of the Executive Committee welcomed the participants and delivered the chairperson's apologies. She had pressing work at ACFODE and could not attend the workshop. Ms Ebila explained that the workshop was part of the FEMRITE annual week of activities and encouraged participants to attend the whole day and benefit fully from the workshop. She then invited the Chief Guest, Mr James Tumusiime, Chairman, National Book Trust of Uganda (NABOTU) to give Keynote Speaker. Ebila thanked Mr Tumusiime for having agreed to come and give the speech and be part of the writers' workshop. she introduced him as a man with a passion for reading and writing, who had already done a lot in in the two fields. She said that Mr Tumusiime was the best person to officiate at a function where

participants were seeking solutions to the poor reading culture that was wrecking the country.

3.4 Presentation by Mr James Tumusiime – Chairman, National Book Trust Of Uganda (NABOTU)

Mr Tumusiime thanked FEMRITE for honouring him by inviting him to open the writers' workshop. He commented that traditionally, only very important civil servants were invited for such functions even when they knew nothing about the functions and speeches had to be written for them. He therefore commended FEMRITE for breaking the tradition and inviting a player in the book industry. He further, he said that he was happy to be part of a team that was brainstorming to find some solutions to problems faced with the book industry. He added that in order to come up with a plan of action, the problems that have been hindering writers from effectively promoting the reading culture must be identified.

Problems hindering writers from promoting reading culture

He identified them as follows;

1. Organisational weakness:

Mr Tumusiime said that so far FEMRITE was the only serious writers' group that was organised to bring writers together. He lamented however, the fact that it was exclusively a women's organisation. He wished to see a change in this regard. He challenged the men to form a Malewrite. He also pointed out the fact that Ugandan authors did not work as a team to promote their works and the reading culture in general.

2. Lack of training of writers:

Since training facilities for writers are lacking, they do not know how the book industry operates. They have high expectations, which are never met, leading to frustrations.

3. Un-tasted benefits from writing:

Other than textbook writers, other writers, especially creative writers, do not know what benefits there are in writing. This is a serious problem as it destroys motivation.

4. Poor mobilisation

There is lack of publishers who promote authors. Mr Tumusiime said that an author without a publisher is like a car without a tyre. Obviously, such an author will not be able to do anything effective to promote the reading culture. A publisher who promotes authors promotes reading.

5. Cultural barriers:

A good number of authors, including the established ones, hold back their talent for fear of exposing their thinking to the public. They think that other people may criticise them and look at them as not being serious. This hampers the growth of writing and therefore cannot promote reading.

Advocacy issues that writers can engage in;

- The National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) should revise their lists, to include more Ugandan writers on the school curriculum, which at the moment features foreign writers mainly. This will be one way to motivate local writers and to give students the opportunity to read books that they relate to them.
- Promote the growth of the local book industry in a holistic way
 - Get involved with other players in the book industry and work together on strategic ideas

- Influence government to buy local books from local bookshops. This will promote bookshops, which will in turn stretch a hand to authors. More books will then be published.
- Take an interest in the education policy and see how it operates.

To address the above issues, Writers should:

- 1.** Target and engage curriculum developers and policy implementers and government and demand attention towards the growth of the book industry in Uganda.
- 2.** Engage in the promotion of the growth of the local book industry -publishing, distribution, library network, etc.
- 3.** Take interest in the education policy towards reading: language issues, literacy issues e.g. functional literacy, adultery literacy etc.
- 4.** Form a strong lobby group of local writers, which is gender balanced, and includes authors in different languages and categories of books.
- 5.** Get training in order to appreciate the book industry in the country, on how to get published, author publisher agreements, so that they are able to appreciate the book industry in the country.
- 6.** Join other stakeholder organisations and actively participate in promoting a reading culture
- 7.** Lobby the media- radios, TVs, magazines, etc, to have an interest in books and to feature authors, carry book reviews, discuss books and maintain a spotlight on books and reading.
- 8.** Bring the private sector on board to associate themselves with writers and their works – just like they do with sports, music and other popular activities and personalities.
- 9.** Enlist the support of politically powerful individuals by involving them in the writers’ activities and lobbying them for support, which you can then use to influence other policies.

10. Write creatively, persistently and for pleasure not just money. Read extensively for pleasure to your family members and peers and review other authors' books.

Mr Tumusiime's presentation generated a discussion in which he exchanged different ideas about NABOTU, with participants.

3.5 Questions and Comments arising from Mr Tumusiime's Presentation

Question: What is the role of NABOTU?

Answer: People who had an interest in the book industry in Uganda set up NABOTU as a civil society initiative. Its roles include:

- To sensitise people about the book industry
- To encourage other stakeholders in the book industry to form interest groups
- To act as an umbrella for all stakeholders in the book industry

Question: What has NABOTU done to train writers about the book industry?

Answer:

NABOTU has been helping in training stakeholders by holding conferences, holding readings through the Reading Association Of Uganda and community libraries, training booksellers in selling and marketing their books as well as training publishers in distribution, editorial skills and management of authors. There has not been any specific training for authors.

Question: Why are books in local languages not included in the Literary Awards?

Answer:

NABOTU gives an opportunity, annually, to authors in all languages to compete for the awards. When the awards were introduced, local language books were entered but there were no judges who could read the books and this eventually led to removing them from the competitions. Participants requested NABOTU to resume accepting local language books and making arrangements to have them read. The would promote the local language sector

Members were encouraged to interact with Mr Tumisiime during break time in order to discuss with him, more about the book industry

SESSION II:

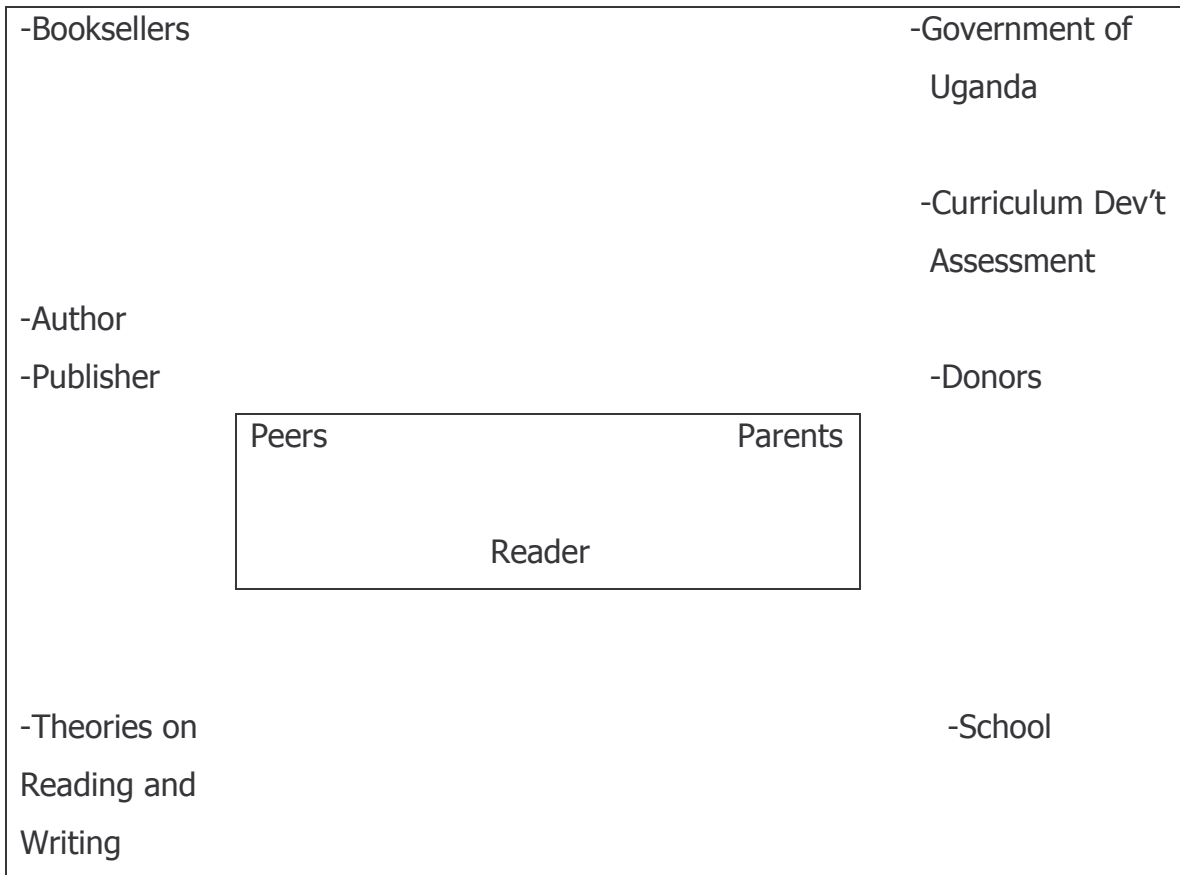
3.6 Where Is The Gap?

Facilitator: Dr Robinah Kyeyune

Objectives:

- To identify problems that hinder reading
- To identify advocacy issues
- To come up with a plan of action

Illustration showing the major sources of problems affecting the reading Culture in Uganda



Source: Dr Robinah Kyeyune

Dr Robinah Kyeyune briefly commented on the above major sources of problems affecting the reading Culture in Uganda and asked members to brainstorm about

each of them identifying ways in which the above stakeholders caused problems to the reading culture. The following results were arrived at by the different groups.

1. The Government Of Uganda:

- Does not encourage writers to produce more books, for example by putting up a fund to support them
- Does not subsidise the cost of books so as to enable the reading society to buy them
- The curriculum is crowded, leaving very limited time for reading for pleasure
- The Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) picks very hard and boring books so as to make it hard for students to pass examinations

2. Authors and publishers:

- They don't read and research enough and as a result they produce boring and sometimes irrelevant material which discourages the reader
- They do not promote their books
- They often stress the need to write for money
- Due to lack of research, they don't possess the broader knowledge on topical issues
- They use a language that is not suitable for their readers

3. Schools:

- Emphasis is placed on textbook learning (teaching in a way that is aimed on passing exams other than understanding).
- Books are not available for students to read

- In most schools, classroom learning is from Monday to Saturday and students are given take home assignments. This does not leave them any time to read
- Students are spoon-fed and this results into limited reading and research skills
- Teachers themselves don't read and therefore students lack role models.
- Large numbers in classes lead to limited books available to students and limited attention offered by teachers.

4. Donors

- They influence policy makers and dictate on the curriculum

5. Theories on reading and writing

- The belief that reading is for academics
- Reading is individualistic and makes people mad

6. Booksellers

- They do not have enough marketing skills and therefore few people buy books
- They hike prices such that even those who would buy books cannot afford to

7. Parents

- Conflicting interests and negative influence
- Financial constraints leading to lack of reading material
- Domestic work is given priority over reading
- Parents themselves don't read and therefore children lack role models
- Negative attitude towards arts subjects

8. Peers

- They feel that reading is not socially acceptable, preferring other forms of entertainment like discos and videos
- They influence the reader not to read

9. Readers

- There is preference for foreign authors
- The craze about science subjects
- The need to please parents and peers who may criticise literature
- The age of the reader which may determine her/his preferences

4.7 Objectives of National Curriculum Development CENTRE (NCDC)

Dr Kyeyune informed participants that it was interesting to note that the objectives of NCDC draft literature syllabus are not very far from objectives of most organisations promoting reading and writing. It was the approach that differed. She outlined the following as the objectives stipulated by NCDC:

By the end of Senior Four, a student should be able to;

- Appreciate indigenous and foreign literature
- Differentiate between literature genres
- Communicate effectively through speech and writing about the environment and human issues
- Create works of literature in form of poems, short stories and plays

She also added that teachers do not enforce the above objectives as they handle language and literature classes.

SESSION III

4.8 Bridging The Gap

In order to identify ways in which the gaps could be bridged, Dr Bukenya discussed Kenya and Tanzania as case studies in reading and writing.

Tanzania

Dr Bukenya observed that Tanzania's literacy rate was higher than that of Kenya and Uganda a situation that resulted from the language factor. He gave a brief history of Tanzania in the 1960s, saying that during that time, Tanzanians led by revolutionary Nyerere, decided to be progressively monolingual, and chose to promote Kiswahili. They brought it to the highest levels in literary production making it both a national and official language. Tanzania has also developed a Kiswahili cyber web, which has made it an international language. The monolingual approach was less expensive and more effective than being bilingual. All literacy materials were in Swahili and almost all Tanzanians were able to learn to read and write.

However the approach led to two mistakes, which are currently affecting their education system;

- They suppressed the local languages and people felt deprived
- They taught English as a second language, instead of teaching it as a foreign language. This led to the drastic falling of the English language an aspect that ended up affecting their international repute.

5.2 Kenya

In Kenya, two approaches helped in promoting literature in general, and Kenyan literature in particular.

- They integrated language and literature as one subject in secondary schools. This meant that since language was compulsory, and literature was part of language, then literature also became compulsory. In effect, every secondary school student in Kenya learns literature. This has helped to improve the reading culture.
- They used concentric spread, that is, they started with teaching Kenyan literature, followed by East African literature, then African literature, literature in the Diaspora and finally European literature. Kenyan literature is given priority, such that every body reads Kenyan literature /authors.

The Kenyan stakeholders in the book industry continue promoting literature and reading in different ways. Following are some of the examples;

- The Kenya Publishers Association is very strong and conducts workshops in which they train stakeholders the book industry.
- Once books are on the curriculum, they are staged during the annual National Literature Festivals. Novels too are dramatised and adopted into play forms.
- There are school festivals stipulated on the school calender featuring drama, oral literature and poetry. Students are encouraged to produce their own works, which are recorded on video and sold to Education Media Services. That way, students are encouraged to read for inspiration and to write.

Dr Bukenya decried the lack of literary guides, which has prevented Ugandans from teaching Ugandan literature. He said that Ugandans should write guides on books that have been written. He emphasised the need for author-publisher cooperation. He said that once the guides are written, the National Curriculum Development Centre should be lobbied to put Ugandan books on the syllabus. Then sales would be guaranteed and all concerned would be happy.

He advised Ugandan writers to tap the readers at an early stage, down at the grass roots. This, he said, can be done by writing for children as well. He said writers should envisage their audience, that is, whom are we writing for and what are we writing about? He said that a bit of humour should be included in order to capture and hold the interest of young readers.

Drawing from the discussion on Uganda players and the lessons from Kenya and Tanzania, participants moved into the session of laying out strategies to fight the poor reading culture.

SESSION IV

4.9 Setting goal posts in search of better writing and reading practices

Facilitator: Dr Robinah Kyeyune

In this session, participants compared the past activities to the present ones and identified the achievements, the failures and challenges in order to plan for the future. Participants worked in groups and came up with the following:

Summary of group discussions

In the past writers:	Present
<p>1. Worked with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Publishers -Booksellers -Readers -Other writers -Communities 	<p>Working with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Other writers -Booksellers -Publishers -Makerere University -NABOTU -NCDC
<p>2. To</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Get published -Be promoted -Sell -Be publicised -Be circulated and read 	<p>To</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Network some more -Get published -Get our books on to the syllabus
<p>3. Achieved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased sales -became known -inspired readers -entertained readers -informed people -improved writing skills -got published 	<p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to promote reading/writing -raise writers' profile -improve writing skills -increase sales -publish more books
<p>4. Failed to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -market well -make good covers -publicise effectively -get funding -promote reading -to meet the targeted readership 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -lack of funds -competition from foreign authors -readers' attitude -poor reading culture

Summary of the thoughts about the future

<p>Work more strategically with a more specific agenda with the following:</p>	<p>In order to:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -NCDC, UNEB&MOES -NABOTU -Other Uganda writers -International Writers -Booksellers -Readers -The media -Donors -Librarians -Schools -Higher institutions of learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Get our books onto the syllabus -Get more funding -Have more workshops -Form more strategic Alliances

In order to achieve the above, participants worked out the following plans:

<p>Plan to:</p>	<p>In order to:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Get adequate funds -Write more -Write better -Sell more aggressively -Market more effectively -Work with all the partners in promotion of reading & writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Organise more writers/readers activities -Have more books to present to policy makers -To compete with the international writers -To be more read -To compete with the international market To form a stronger lobby group

4.10 Specific advocacy issues that participants agreed on

At the end of the workshop members came up with a priority list of advocacy issues

1. Drawing from the Kenyan and Tanzanian case studies, participants agreed upon Lobbying NCDC and Ministry of Education and Sports to create a section of Uganda Literature on the Syllabus so that Uganda texts are not subjected to competition with the more established books. This will also help greatly in the development of Ugandan Literature.
2. Lobby Ministry of Education and Sports to have Literary festivals as part of the school calendar so that they are recognised by the state
3. Lobby the media to get more interested in the Book Industry and
4. Do a research about the Education Policy in Literacy promotion, in order to be able to influence it
5. Do a research into reading and other literacy practices in schools and communities, policy environment, global issues selling in fiction in order to have up-to-date information
6. Lobby strategic politicians and to have their support so that they can even table some of the issues on behalf of writers.
7. Engage in extensive reading in order to be role models in promotion of reading.
8. Engage in reviewing other authors' books in order to support each other and to promote each other's works.
9. Recognise Literature and Language teachers as major stakeholders in the development of literature and reading. It was important to network with them more with them, carry out workshops with them and involve them in the development of Ugandan Literature.

ACTIVITY III

5.0 PUBLIC DIALOGUE AND BOOK LAUNCH

5.1 Introduction

The American Embassy - Public Affairs Office funded the Public Dialogue, which was held on 27th January 2005 at Hotel Equatoria. The main speakers were Mr Michael Gonzales, the Deputy Public Affairs Officer and Mr Henry Barlow a creative writer and senior citizen of Uganda. The speakers gave very brilliant and inspiring presentations that generated a lively discussion. The theme of the dialogue was: Integrating Books and the Reading culture into national development **and book that was launched was** ShockWaves Across the Ocean. The event was attended by a cross-section of over 150 people, making the debate more interesting.

5.2 Summary of Mr Gonzales' Presentation

In his presentation, Mr Gonzales stated that reading helps society to be creative, to understand itself, to assess itself and its relation to the world around it, to learn from history—both its own and that of others, to pass morals down through the generations, and to grow. Indeed, reading is powerful and relevant to national development. He discussed the effects of reading on early *childhood* development and said that children who are exposed to books early do better than other children at understanding different concepts, giving them a competitive advantage over their peers. He called upon parents and other adults to set reading example to the children.

He added that reading is the foundation for all other formalized learning, and the stronger a child's reading skills, the more favourable children look upon reading, the more readily they will turn to books for information, entertainment, and knowledge throughout their lives. This will be true when they advance to

university, when they go into business, when they become civil society activists, when they join politics, and whenever they embark on new endeavours.

Mr Gonzales gave examples of the works of fiction that he has read and which have made a difference in his life as a development worker. Reading mysteries for example trying to figure out the string of clues and to differentiate between what is mentioned in passing and what is a crucial link to answer the burning question of who had done it, demand logical thinking and very strong deductive reasoning skills from the reader. At the same time, they allow their readers to sharpen their logical and critical analysis skills that are neglected by a school system that relies overwhelmingly on memorisation. He challenged the audience to point out any skill that is more critical than deductive logic for the business executives, the police, attorneys, diplomats, members of civil society, politicians and other members of the cast of protagonists who shepherd society toward development?

Mr Gonzales said that *Fiction* allows us to perceive life from someone else's perspective allowing the reader a unique opportunity to truly appreciate the values, cultures, experiences, challenges, joys, and pains of others. By understanding one another and coming together through the mutual tolerance and understanding, communities can better collaborate toward development.

He called upon all Ugandans to play their role in building a sustainable reading culture and advised authors to tell their stories in a catchy way that makes readers see the characters and come to know them, feel the dry heat of the sun beating down on us, the soft cushion of the grass underfoot, or the passion of rage against the villain, and to be credible. He encouraged the establishment of public libraries as an aspect that contributes a lot to the development of a reading culture. "Reading puts the world at our fingertips and as we incorporate those experiences and lessons into our lives, that is what shall contribute to

national development,” he said. That is what will make us more prosperous and compassionate. That is what will spark national development. Mr Gonzales emphasised that reading has a very direct impact on our development through developing different skills within the readers. He concluded his presentation by paraphrasing Martin Luther King’s remarks that, ***“Reading can be our mountain top, and once tapped, the knowledge and experiences that books contain, can lead us to the promised land of a more prosperous Uganda”***

5.3 Summary of Mr Henry Barlow’ Presentation

Mr Barlow thanked FEMRITE for bringing writers together and for her efforts in the promotion of reading and writing as tools to development. He told a story of his growing up, and said that during his childhood, most families possessed only two books: the bible and the prayer book but that did not deter his interest in reading. He still read them for new information and for the fun of reading. He emphasised the fact that while the availability of books is very essential a child can be encouraged to read even when there are very few books available, saying that women have the power to influence their children’s attitude towards book and reading. Women are closer to their children and therefore have a bigger role to play in the promotion of reading and writing.

Mr Barlow said that the reading culture in Uganda has grown through phases;

- The colonial period which came with the bible and the prayer book as the major reading materials available
- The post-colonial period in which students gathered a few books while in school but never read them afterwards
- The period that followed, which saw the increased interest in reading coupled with increased growth of reading material
- The present period, when there is lots of reading material but also lots of other activities competing for attention, which have greatly affected the reading culture.

He praised FEMRITE for promoting reading and reminding society of the need to read. He encouraged the organisation to keep up the effort and called upon other partners to join it.

Mr Barlow called upon writers to work as a team and to encourage one another in writing and promotion of reading. He quoted Prof. David Rubadiri and Prof. Cook, for having encouraged him to expose his own writings, which he never knew would be of great acclaim once out in the public.

In addition, Mr. Barlow despised members of society who read titles of books and newspaper headlines without reading the body. Such fellows end up joining discussions they hardly know anything about and they make themselves a laughing stock. Mr. Barlow ended his presentation by reading one of his favourite poems titled "*Women My Bane*" from his book, *Building the Nation and Other Poems*.

5.4 Comments and contributions from the audience

- Mrs Bukenya Geraldine from National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) encouraged writers and other stakeholders in the book industry to come together and form a strong team to influence policy makers. She said that the interests of government with regard to reading and writing and the development of Literature were the same interests as those of the stakeholders in the book industry. She added however that there was need for the two groups to work together in laying strategies of what the country and the citizens wish to achieve.
- On a different front, Mrs Bukenya called upon parents to encourage children to read from early childhood, by buying them the relevant books suitable for their age, and also by giving them audience and listening to them when they require it.
- Mr John Biggyemano a civil society activist called upon the audience to promote reading in rural areas and schools by donating books and newspapers, which they no longer need. He said that sometimes people have the hunger to read but they have very little access to reading materials.
- Ms Nalubwama of Women and Gender studies Makerere University commended FEMRITE for their work in promotion of reading and for bringing together people from all disciplines to participate in the debate.

- She said that the reading Culture is an important aspect of society that everybody who cares for their nation must participate in, adding that it was important to link reading to other spheres of development.
- Engineer Azziz Ssenoga expressed his appreciation to FEMRITE for opening up and engaging in activities that include men and non-FEMRITE members. He said that it was important to engage in a holistic development in the book industry instead of factionalising into sections that do not serve the purpose. He said that a united front was a better approach.
 - Matovu Twaha a government official from Kalangala district called upon writers and other stakeholders in the book industry to continue organising such fora to raise awareness about the importance of the book. He said that reading was important because it empowers the reader with choice, a crucial aspect in creating strong minded decision makers required by the nation.
 - A secondary school student posed a challenge to writers and publishers, saying that according to his own assessment, a book is an ***endangered specie*** because currently, there was less interest in books as never before, a worrying situation that was likely to continue. "What are you going to do?" He asked nobody in particular. He called upon writers to carry out massive campaigns in schools since most of the reading should take place in school environments. Participants agreed to the challenge and said that that was the reason such fora were being organised and added that the challenge was not to writers and publishers alone but to all those who loved books and knew their value.
 - Margret Masozera a teacher of literature and a counsellor with secondary schools called upon writers to support one another by reading each other's works before going to look for market elsewhere. She took the opportunity to display her own book, which had just been published.
 - A number of writers and publishers expressed disappointment about the way NCDC had continuously ignored to fight for and uplift Ugandan Literature. Members agreed that in addition to other literatures from the rest of the world, Ugandan Literature should be given the opportunity to be taught in Ugandan schools in order to promote the Ugandan writer and to preserve the Uganda Culture.
 - Members called upon NCDC and Ministry of Education to reform the education policy, to give reading as a subject a priority in order to develop a strong reading culture. A member pointed out that most students were not doing well at school because they lacked the ability to read and to express themselves. Reading sharpens analytical skills that society needs from her citizens after school.
 - A participant reminded the audience that in the olden days, story-telling sessions were important in developing children's analytical skills. He called

- upon mothers especially to resume the art of story telling as a means of preparing children for the love of stories and the love of books.
- A young mother shared an experience of how she places books in strategic places to attract her children to read them without her pushing them to do so. She also said that she ensures that she sets aside at least 20 minutes everyday for reading. She encouraged other parents to try her tricks to impart the value of reading and writing in their children.
 - A participant, who equated poor reading culture to disease, advised those involved in promotion of reading to start what he called reading clinics. This would be a project taken to schools, hospitals, children's homes, prisons, etc, to give opportunity to the disadvantaged groups to also enjoy reading.
 - Hon. Mary Karoro Okurut called upon policy makers to make reading a priority. She decried the poor reading culture and encouraged stakeholders in the civil society to join FEMRITE and make a difference in the book industry. She promised to bring it to the attention of parliament.
 - Giving a vote of thanks to the two presenters, Hon Karoro said that their thought-provoking presentations would go a long way towards promoting the reading culture. She applauded the American Embassy Public Affairs Section, for the financial support they have rendered FEMRITE over the years in the bid to promote reading. She expressed hope that more civil society organisations would emulate American Embassy in supporting organisations that promote reading and writing. She expressed special thanks to the Embassy of the United States of America for their support to FEMRITE activities and to the book industry in general.

Book Launch

At the same event, FEMRITE launched her latest publication ***Shock Waves Across The Ocean***, a novel by Ms Bananuka Jocelyn Ekochu.

5.5 Remarks by the author

Ms Ekochu expressed happiness to every body that turned up and thanked them for their support. She said that her interest in writing was rooted in reading, and that right from her childhood, she enjoyed both reading and writing. She encouraged all those intending to write to be passionate readers.

Talking about the actual writing process of her book, she said that at first she did not have the resources to come up with a book but many people contributed to

the whole process that finally brought it to the publishing stage. She commended FEMRITE for the conducive atmosphere and facilities availed to members to use for their creative writing.

Commenting on how she suffered looking for attention from publishers to look at her first novel, she called upon publishers to respect first time authors. "They need to be given chance to prove themselves," she said. She thanked American Centre for their interest in Promotion of reading and for sponsoring the Public Debate, an avenue that made it possible to have her book launched. Ms Ekochu ended by reading an extract from her book.

5.6 Mr Gonzales Launched Shock Waves Across the Ocean

Mr Gonzales emphasised the authors' responsibility in contributing to not only a reading culture, but also in ensuring accuracy in what they write. "The key is to write something that moves people, that resonates with people, that makes people see what the writer imagines in his or her own eyes. Writing literature is an art. Assembling the building blocks of language into a story is a craft, but writing literature is an art," he argued. He commended FEMRITE for fostering creativity and harnessing its resources for the betterment of its members, and for reaching out to make a noble contribution in society, the reason the Embassy of the United States of America, was proud to be one of the sponsors of the week's activities.

He reminded the audience about the linkages between books and the establishment of a reading culture and national development. "The points raised are very pertinent and the American Embassy recognizes the need for a literate society that reads well and reads often if this, or any country, is to achieve its maximum potential. That is why we fund the Reading Association of Uganda's reading tents, that is why we support Literacy Fairs upcountry, that is why we will be donating 25,000 books to various schools and students over the course of the coming few months. That is why we maintain an Information Resource

Centre at the Embassy. That is why we contribute to FEMRITE's Literary Week of Events each year. It is because a reading society is powerful", the chief guest emphasised.

He praised *Shockwaves Across the Ocean* as a story that provides great insight into the Ugandan society congratulated her on a job well done and for the courage to bear her soul so that readers may glean the mysteries. On that note he launched the book upon which Jocelyn Bananuka Ekochu autographed copies for the people that were waiting.

ACTIVITY IV WRITERS' NIGHT

6.0 Introduction

The Writers Night was held at Uganda National Cultural Centre popularly known as the National Theatre, on 28th National Theatre. The writers' night was moderated by Mr Bob Kisiki and Ms Sharon Lamwaka assisted by Beatrice Lamwaka, Jemoe Nanyonjo and Margaret Ntakalimaze. The objective of the Night was to bring together writers and readers to celebrate all forms of Ugandan literature. Participants ranged from children of Primary school going age to established writers like Prof. Austin Bukonya. The variety was amazing.

6.1 Presentations

There were 25 poetry and short story readings/recitations, poetic chants, songs and a music instrumental. There was a riddling / Koyikoyi session, which came in all languages, where Prof. Bukonya of Makerere University challenged participants with rib breaking riddles that no one was able to interpret.

Summary of presentations

	Name of artist	Type of art
1	Phyllis Muthoni	Poem
2	Jocelyn Ekochu	2 short stories
3	Akankwasa Bobo Melvin	Poem
4	Atwongyeire Doshi Stella	Poem
5	Hilda Twongyeirwe	Story extract
6	Phiona Nakamatte	Poem
7	Margaret Mukankaka	Poem
8	Hassan Omar	Poem
9	Simon Ebong	Short story
10	Edna	Poem and prayer
11	Rose Nanyondo	Extract
12	Beatrice Lamwaka	Extract
13	Earnest Katwesigye	An instrumental
14	Margaret Adutu	Poem
15	Clare Ihunda	Poem
16	Regina Amollo	Extract
17	Rosey Sembatya	Poem
18	Glaydah Namukasa	Short story extract
19	Sam Iga	Poem
20	Isaiah Etong	Poem
21	Anthony Guma	Poem

It was quite an interesting and creative night. Participants were treated to lots of charcoal roasted goat meat.

Unfortunately however, the event was almost ruined by a rainfall but participants were relocated to the Green Room in National Theatre. The rain did not stop for sometime and many people who had not yet come were not able to come. Over

100 people turned up for the event. This was a low turn up compared to the number of people who had confirmed their participation.

7.0 General Evaluation of the Week of Activities

The theme for the Week of Activities was "***Books and the Reading Culture: A National Issue***".

Reflecting on the objectives and expected outcomes of the week, some of them were achieved while others are long term and will not be achieved in a day.

The first objective was to identify advocacy issues in the promotion of reading, for writers to engage in.

All the activities of the week contributed to a holistic output. Many issues for advocacy were raised during the week of activities and they will form the background information for the Lobbying Strategy towards building a firmer reading Culture in Uganda. FEMRITE will organise a series of activities leading to the negotiation of supportive policies regarding books, writing, reading, literacy and literature teaching in Uganda.

The second objective was to bring writers together and create a forum for them to share their works.

Writers from different groups and publishing houses came together to share literary information, to read from their works, and to give suggestions for strategies for promotion of reading. A fora was created for writers to interact with policy makers relevant to the book industry to debate the relevance of books and reading to national development. It is hoped that the activities were inspirational for the established writers to write more and the aspiring writers to start writing and to participate more in promotion of reading.

There was also good publicity for FEMRITE and the partners who supported the week of activities. There were news items about the week both in the print and the electronic media

The third objective was to create fora for writers to interact with policy makers relevant to the book industry to debate the relevance of books and reading to national development.

The different activities were well attended and most people showed interest in working with FEMRITE in highlighting the importance of books and reading, in relation to Nation-Building. There will be a series of follow-up activities and FEMRITE looks forward to continued support from the partners especially those who supported the 2005 Week of Activities and were involved in generating the ideas.

Evaluating participants' expectations;

- Networking with teachers and learning more about creative writing.

(done)

- Getting a wider knowledge of writing

(fairly done)

- Learning how to get a wider distribution of the published works

(fairly done)

- To dramatise Uganda's problems as depicted in Ugandan writings

(Not clear)

- Getting greater inspiration to write

(done)

- Getting more ideas on getting children to read

(fairly done)

- Getting more equipped with the knowledge on how to contribute to society as a writer

(fairly done)

- Sharing experience with other writers

(done)

- Learning about the publishing process

(not done)

- Learning how to elevate the writers' profile

(fairly done)

- Learning how to involve rural people in writing and reading after school

(not done)

- Getting more ideas on how to improve the reading culture

(Fairly done)

- Building confidence as a writer

(fairly done)

- Getting encouragement from other writers and readers.

(fairly done)

In conclusion, the FEMRITE Annual Week Of Literary Activities, 2005, was a success.

FEMRITE is very grateful to the following partners & supporters

- East African Book Development Association through National Book Trust of Uganda
- Embassy of the United States of America - Public Affairs Office
- HIVOS
- Makerere University - Literature Department

Attached are Newspaper cuttings for the week of activities