



HE. Ms. Michelle Bachelet,
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 GENEVA 10,
Switzerland

Dear High Commissioner,

Please find below a joint submission from the Uganda Library and Information Association (ULIA, www.ulia.org.ug) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, Prins Willem-Alexanderhof 5, 2595 BE, The Hague, The Netherlands, www.ifla.org) for the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review in Uganda.

ULIA is the leading voice of information professionals in the country. Founded in 1972 as ULA (Uganda Library Association), it has focused on advocacy and engagement with policy dialogues and processes (especially library policies, freedom of information, copyright, e-government). In 2004, ULA became ULIA - the Uganda Library and Information Association.

IFLA is the global organisation for libraries and library associations, founded in 1927, at present with over 1500 members in more than 150 countries. IFLA works to represent the interests of library and information services and their users, and is committed to promoting the principles of universal and equitable access to information and intellectual freedom as drivers of development and well-being.

We are grateful in particular to Dr. Sarah Kaddu, of ULIA, for her work on this submission.

Overview

1. Communities throughout Uganda are served by a network of community and public libraries (approx. 45 and 132, respectively), a National Library, as well as library facilities in universities, schools and other educational institutions. They work to support formal education and offer informal learning opportunities, as well as to help deliver on socioeconomic rights through access to information and learning – e.g. to health, to work, to participation in cultural life, and others (e.g. as codified in Articles 23, 26 and 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). Drawing on libraries' experiences in these human rights fields, this submission aims to highlight some key current trends and good practices.

Right to education

Recommendations from the previous UPR cycle:

115.128 Take further measures to improve children's enrolment, access, quality and sustainability of education, especially for girls.

Quality education for all

1. *Trends.* Education remains one of the key policy and development priorities within the country. Recent policies like the *Education and Sports Sector Strategy for 2020–2025*, the *Early Childhood Care and Education Policy* and the *Inclusive Education Policy* aim to build equitable access to education for all and boost learning outcomes.¹

2. However, as elsewhere in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on educational and learning processes. In both 2020 and 2021, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, all schools and all tertiary educational institutions had to close for extended periods of time, affecting millions of learners. Some of the widely noted concerns associated with these closures, particularly of primary and secondary schools, include those around children’s well-being, safety and health (particularly of the girl child – e.g. with a significant rise in teenage pregnancies).²
3. Some of the key efforts to mitigate the impacts of school closures emphasised *access to learning materials*. The Government of Uganda, in collaboration with UNICEF and other partners, has developed and distributed print self-learning materials to primary and secondary school students throughout the country, in combination with educational programmes broadcasted through TV and radio, and an online learning platform.
4. *Equity in access to study materials* has remained one of the key priorities and challenges. For example, the distribution of print materials was prioritised for rural areas, where pupils and students were less likely to access TV, radio or online educational channels – but some of the encountered bottlenecks include e.g. difficulties in ensuring that all intended recipients receive their copies, attempts by third parties to sell the study materials, etc. Some survey evidence also suggests that many students and pupils, whether they relied on TV, print or radio channels, indicated that they need more information and resources to facilitate their learning during the school closures.³
5. Broadly, the above highlights some of the key priorities for realising and delivering on the fundamental right to education. These include: continuing and expanding the efforts to ensure equitable access to suitable educational and learning materials, ensuring the availability of inclusive and equitable learning and education mechanisms once the lockdown measures are lifted, and facilitating an environment which can help students who need it to catch up and boost learning outcomes.
6. *Good practices*. Throughout the school (and library) closures, there are examples of libraries and other stakeholders working to further broaden access to learning and reading materials, where this has been possible. These have ranged from remote online access to academic materials, e.g. provided by the Makerere University Library, providing books for home reading (the National Library of Uganda),⁴ providing a radio for children to listen to the official educational broadcasts (Arua public library),⁵ making more copies of the official self-study materials available (e.g. the Kitengesa Community library), or offering supporting learning activities (e.g. the PeerLink initiative).⁶
7. **Recommendation. The COVID-19 pandemic stressed the vital importance of equitable access to educational and learning materials for all. We strongly support measures which help ensure that all learners have meaningful access to the materials needed to supplement their learning. As part of this, we encourage stakeholders to continue to support and enable libraries to contribute to the push for wider and more equitable access to learning materials.**
8. Furthermore, once the epidemiological situation permits to lift the lockdown, ensuring an inclusive and enabling learning environment is a key priority. Broadly, school infrastructure and school facilities have been one of the priorities – and, as part of this, there are examples of initiatives seeking to leverage school libraries to support literacy and help facilitate good learning outcomes.
9. For example, *Africa Educational Trust’s* School Library Programme saw more than 100 school libraries open in the east of Uganda.⁷ Similarly, even throughout the pandemic, *Libraries of Love* restocked school libraries and established a new library, which students will be able to benefit from once the schools reopen.⁸ Another access model is mobile school library services – e.g. those established by the Kampala Capital City Authority. Their goal is to help boost learning outcomes at the primary school level, by providing materials relevant to the school curriculum and other resources beyond the curriculum.⁹

10. Such facilities, whether mobile or in-house, can enable a range of learning opportunities (e.g. book clubs and reading activities, reading buddy arrangements, computer skills lessons, etc) to support good learning outcomes - and make them available for all learners.^{10 11} Reports from Book Aid International and the National Library's *Inspiring Readers* programme in Uganda, for example, suggests that such facilities have helped boost class participation and students' confidence, as well as build up their reading habits.¹²
11. **Recommendation. Once it is possible to resume formal educational processes, ensuring an inclusive educational environment which helps facilitate good learning outcomes is vital. We encourage stakeholders to draw on, among others, the experiences of school library-based interventions to identify mechanisms that help support literacy, reading, class participation, student engagement and learning.**

Right to health

Recommendations from the previous UPR cycle:

115.115 Ensure a sufficient health budget, full and equal access to health services, in particular adolescent, reproductive and family planning services and relevant education.

Access to health information and learning opportunities

12. *Trends.* Access to health information and education is one of the key elements of the fundamental right to health. One such area, for instance, is sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) information. UNFPA, for example, notes its partnership with the Uganda Government, and the priority which has been assigned to SRHR interventions over the next few years, including both SRHR services and harmonised information.¹³
13. This remains an important priority both during and after the pandemic: a recent Rutgers study, for example, points out the unique challenges the COVID-19 pandemic brought to young people's access to SRHR information, e.g. with some usual sources of SRHR information unavailable or harder to access. In Uganda, the Rutgers survey results suggest that between 44% and 53% of young people who needed SRHR information during the pandemic felt they had received sufficient information (depending on the topic – from gender-based violence at 44% to STIs and HIV at 53%).¹⁴
14. *Good practices.* Since this remains a key priority for the coming years, it is possible to draw on existing initiatives and good practices to identify ways to further expand access to SRHR (and health in general) information, especially once the situation permits for the lockdown to be lifted. Within the library sector, for example, there are longstanding initiatives working to offer equitable access to health information and learning opportunities.
15. These include, for instance, a youth health camp held annually by the Kitengesha Community Library since 2014, focusing on such topics as HIV prevention and treatment, nutrition, and cancer. The Community Library also launched a woman's health camp (in 2018 and 2019), focusing on both general and more specific health questions (e.g. breast cancer). Both camps also leveraged ICT to support learning and access to relevant health information.¹⁵
16. Similarly, the Kawempe Youth Centre has launched various health initiatives – such as referral support, awareness raising, peer learning, and others.¹⁶ The Hoima public library has collaborated with experts to offer a Question-and-Answer service - including a section dedicated to health questions, with medical guidance, support and counselling from medical experts.
17. **Recommendation. Recognising the vital importance of equitable and meaningful access to health (including reproductive health) information, we encourage further adoption and support for such practices and community-based solutions (e.g. delivered through community libraries), as part of the overarching strategy to deliver on the right to health.**

Right to work, right to participation in cultural life and to benefit from scientific advancements

Recommendations from the previous UPR cycle:

115.137 Continue to promote sustainable economic and social development and improve the living standards of the people.

Skills and digital inclusion to support employment

18. *Trends.* 2016/2017 data by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics suggests that around 80-90% of employment in the country is in the informal sector. As elsewhere in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic and measures to curb the spread of the virus have had an immense economic impact, including a decline in employment and related loss of income. In Uganda, the World Bank reports that the economy is currently recovering from a sharp contraction, but household incomes and wages have yet to return to the pre-pandemic levels.¹⁷ As such, reducing economic vulnerabilities, particularly among the more at-risk groups, remains a key task.
19. *Good practices.* The above is clearly a formidable goal that requires multifaceted and comprehensive solutions. As part of the potential pathways to addressing this, it is possible to draw on some of the existing practices of learning and upskilling initiatives, which aim to support employment and income-generation in Uganda – particularly those focusing on more vulnerable social groups.
20. Some examples from within the library sector (before the pandemic) include *learning circles* in Uganda (and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa). These circles offer their communities access to online educational courses, and an in-person study group to facilitate learning. Following a training-of-trainers, 8 public and community libraries in Uganda launched learning circles, focusing on such topics as baking, entrepreneurship – or even digital skills. The libraries already saw some impacts, with learning group members finding or changing jobs, launching a business, or applying the newly learned skills in their work or enterprise.¹⁸
21. In addition, the pandemic has highlighted the key role that access to the internet and ICT can play in supporting employment and income generation (e.g. several e-commerce/online marketplace solutions launched in Uganda).¹⁹
22. However, both during and after the pandemic, the ability to benefit from such solutions clearly depends on access to the internet and ICT. Recent estimates by the Uganda Communications Commission suggest that about 50% of the population are connected to broadband internet.²⁰ As such, further measures to support meaningful digital inclusion (access to the internet, access to ICTs, digital skills, etc) can help ensure that more people can benefit from the opportunities the shift to digital offers.
23. One of the possible approaches that can help support digital inclusion is public access solutions. By 2019, the Uganda Communications Commission through its Rural Communications Development Fund partnered with the country's library network to set up computers, internet connectivity and WiFi in 10 public libraries. The key aim is to support both free and equitable access to the internet and devices, and offer opportunities for digital skills-building.²¹ Further initiatives and partnerships to offer digital skills training, particularly to help members of more vulnerable groups acquire marketable and practical skills, are underway.²²
24. **Recommendation: In light of these experiences, we encourage further adoption and further examination of digital inclusion and equitable upskilling initiatives, as part of the overarching strategy to supporting the right to work. Sustaining, supporting and further expanding library connectivity can help enable further adoption of the existing digital inclusion and upskilling initiatives.**

References

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- ³ <https://news.mak.ac.ug/2020/08/information-seeking-behavior-of-secondary-school-students-during-lockdown/>
- ⁴ https://bookaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2021.JAN_.Booklinks_final.pdf
- ⁵ <https://favl.org/2021/01/03/kitengesa-community-libraris-covid-catchup-scheme-in-uganda/>
- ⁶ <https://www.slideshare.net/favlafrica/peliuannualreport2020-march5th20211>
- ⁷ <https://africaeducationaltrust.org/stories-for-our-school-libraries-in-uganda/>
- ⁸ <https://librariesoflove.org/category/library-of-love-trips/>
- ⁹ <https://www.kcca.go.ug/library-events>
- ¹⁰ <https://favl.org/2020/11/19/33643/>
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- ¹⁷ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/265371623083730798/pdf/Uganda-Economic-Update-17th-Edition-From-Crisis-to-Green-Resilient-Growth-Investing-in-Sustainable-Land-Management-and-Climate-Smart-Agriculture.pdf>
- ¹⁸ <https://www.eifl.net/blogs/learning-circles-hit-african-public-libraries>; <https://web.aflia.net/literacy-and-beyond/>
- ¹⁹ See e.g. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/africa_s_digital_solutions_to_tackle_covid_19_en.pdf
- ²⁰ <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/business/technology/50-of-population-access-internet-new-ucc-report--3253850>
- ²¹ <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/igf-2019-%E2%80%93-day-3-%E2%80%93-raum-iv-%E2%80%93-dc-on-public-access-in-libraries-dc-pal-0>
- ²² See e.g. <https://www.nlu.go.ug/close-digital-devide-project>