

A Global Approach: Setting Up a Preservation Program at Makerere University Library in Kampala, Uganda

ABSTRACT

A project dedicated to enhance management at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, was funded by the European Union; in total, eight man-months were allocated to the library. The purpose was to determine the areas in which preservation awareness could improve the long-term stability, security, and accessibility of the library holdings. The overall objective was to integrate the preservation function, embodied in individual activities, within the management of the library.

In 1999–2000, the task was undertaken on site by Frederick A. Bearman, book conservator and consultant in library collections conservation, Eléonore Kissel, paper conservator and consultant in preventive conservation, and Colin Venus, consultant in micrographics and photography.

Following an evaluation phase during which the assets and problems of the library were jointly assessed by the consultants, a program was set up, comprising the following activities:

- conception of a three-week preservation management study course and workshop to train thirty members of both curatorial and technical staff;
- establishment of a maintenance and conservation unit within the existing bindery and training of selected binders;
- establishment of a photographic laboratory and facility in the library and training of selected staff.

In 1999 three consultants were solicited by UNECIA (Universities of England Consortium for International Activities)¹ to form the Technical Assistance Team to

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Makerere University of Kampala Library (MUKL). Their collective brief was to set up a preservation program for the library holdings, each professional within his or her specific field of expertise: preventive conservation for Eléonore Kissel, book conservation and collections management for Frederick A. Bearman, and photographic and micrographic reproduction for Colin Venus.

The project being financed by the European Union Human Resources Development Program (EU-HRDP),² its goal was to focus on professional development. Indeed, it quickly became clear that training and documentation were going to be the keys to success for implementing an effective preservation policy. This presentation will follow the chronological order in which the various activities took place, as they were planned sequentially so as to constitute a coherent, although not all-encompassing, program.

THE SETTING

Makerere University (MUK) is located on one of the seven hills surrounding Kampala, Uganda's capital. This prestigious location was initially selected for the foundation of Makerere College, built in 1922 under the British protectorate. The school was turned into a higher education facility, formally renamed in the 1950s "East Africa University." Within the next two decades it was to become a thriving learning environment for students of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan, and other English-speaking countries located in the easternmost part of the continent.

However, political events during the 1970s and early 1980s, under the leadership by Idi Amin Dada, led to a massive reduction in academic and technical staff due to death, disappearance, and exile. Under acute suspicion because it was perceived by the tyrannical regime as a possible source of dissension, the university functioned haphazardly during several years. This period, quite naturally, induced the progressive decay of university buildings and grounds. Since the mid 1980s and the arrival in power of General Museveni (who today still heads Uganda's gov-



Fig. 1. Makerere University's Main Library building, front view. Notice the dust road that leads to the entrance, allowing a thick red dust to enter the library and settle on the shelves and books, disfiguring the library holdings and potentially causing abrasion. (Photo by E. Kissel, 1999)

ernment), Makerere University has somewhat resumed its regular course of activities, however still impaired by major needs in all aspects of its development. In fact, the situation described below is worsened by the very popularity of MUK, student enrollment reaching well over 22,000 whilst the facilities were initially designed for approximately 7,000.

It is this realization that prompted MUKL, as well as other departments of the university, to request funding from both non-governmental and governmental organizations such as the EU (fig. 1). The project managed by UNECIA called for eight man-months on site, which were used as explained below.

INITIAL PRELIMINARY SURVEY

A twist in the planning made Eléonore Kissel arrive first on site, in March 1999. She was to survey the context and henceforth propose an action plan; she was thus propelled "Team Leader," a title that doesn't bear justice to the formidable collective effort and camaraderie which underlined the whole project.

The first few visits enabled the team to ascertain that the library had undeniable assets, most notably:

- a somewhat sturdy, well-ventilated building: few mold infestations occurred, although Uganda has a tropical climate (fig. 2);
- a library which had been carefully designed and initially well, even somewhat luxuriously, equipped;
- very diverse holdings, typical of what would be found in a university library (free access and reserved printed books, periodicals and theses, with additional archival and photographic holdings);

- a staff conscious about security issues and the importance of keeping the books usable as long as possible. However, several major problems were also identified, of which a list follows:

- absence of preservation strategy, including acquisition, deaccession, holdings maintenance, conservation and reformatting policies;
- insufficient staffing in all areas of the library;
- lack of initial training in preservation for most support, security, and maintenance personnel;³
- lack of continuing training in preservation for most professional staff;
- insufficient maintenance of existing buildings and facilities;
- insufficient security procedures and security equipment;
- insufficient data about physical characteristics and current condition of holdings;
- incomplete equipment, and incompatibility of equipment to some aims;⁴
- lack of local possibilities for service back-up and supplies ordering, or inadequacy of supplies routinely ordered.

Soon after the team met in Kampala, it was jointly decided to set up a training program for the library staff. The three main areas identified as needing consultancy were:

- internal policies (i.e., policy making, budget prioritizing, conscious sharing of resources, etc.);
- theoretical knowledge (i.e., raising preservation awareness of both staff and users);
- technical skills (i.e., teaching specific techniques in the fields of conservation and microfilming).

It should be noted here that, as part of MUK, the library is meant to serve as an income generating as well as an academic support unit. It is funded by the Ugandan



Fig. 2. MUKL main building, side view. The construction allows the air to flow freely through the building, as most of the windows located behind the lace-like concrete panels are opened. (Photo by E. Kissel, 1999)

government, the university, and donations. The budget allocated by the state is mostly deemed fit for everyday running costs, while the use of university funding is somewhat less rigid. For instance, it may be used to improve the facilities housing library materials, or to sustain a microfilming program.

However, it was found during the inception phase that a significant part of the funds provided by the university had been set aside for MUKL's extension project. Indeed, plans had been drawn for the building, although no comprehensive survey regarding needs in terms of space and functionality had been conducted. Furthermore, most of the library senior staff were not involved in the planning stage, and no technical specifications were established by professionals of library facilities and preservation. Although a new extension to the existing main library building would undoubtedly be necessary to accommodate the increase in the number of students, it was noted that in the meantime few maintenance activities were carried out on the existing facilities. This was mainly due to funding shortages, partly caused by budget savings set aside to fund the new extension.

The budget allocated to the EU-HRDP project would only allow for importing a few preservation and micrographic supplies. While all three consultants realized that their proposal of training courses hardly answered the wishes expressed in the initial grant request to purchase a digital camera or an HVAC system, training did seem the best procedure to raise awareness, while progressively directing the library staff towards autonomy in terms of holdings preservation and management. To sustain the momentum it was hoped the training could induce, the first step was nevertheless to establish an interest group within the library.

TECHNICAL PRESERVATION GROUP

The Technical Preservation Group (TPG) was established by the library staff in the time between the inception and the implementation phase, upon the recommendations made by the consultants in March/April 1999.

The TPG consists of ten members of senior staff, representing the various functions embodied in MUKL: legislative (head librarian, deputy head librarian); administrative (administrative assistant); and executive (six librarians representing various sections in the main library, branch libraries, or technical services). The chair person is the librarian head of the Africana section of the main library, which holds the most specific collections, on which the preservation efforts will be particularly focused.

It was found by the consultants that the composition of the TPG was perfect, inasmuch as its members agreed to relay information to their colleagues, regardless of their ranking in the university. During July, the consultants were

invited to TPG meetings and acted as a support for decision making. For instance, they gave advice regarding the basic preservation courses that will be forwarded by several TPG members to assistant librarians and support staff that had not been able to attend the initial training sessions.

The effects of the dedication of the TPG were immediately perceptible, as its members promptly organized to write and make official the policies necessary to implement preservation management within MUKL.

Specific topics were allocated to various staff members of the TPG, which will monitor the requirements and outcomes of:

- acquisition and weeding of holdings,
- access to holdings and security,
- photocopying and microfilming,
- pest management,
- buildings maintenance,
- disaster preparedness and response.

Furthermore, it was planned that the TPG would in due time be transformed into a Committee (therefore empowered with increased capacity for implementing decisions), after approval from the University's high administration.

PRESERVATION TRAINING PROGRAM

The preservation training program was held over a period of three weeks, with classes on every working day. Thirty participants gathered, all hierarchical grades mixed; librarians, library assistants, binders, as well as staff from the university's museum and herbarium were invited. Most members of the TPG managed to find the time and successfully attended the training. Certificates were handed out at the end of the program, an incentive to sustain attendance even though the consultants knew it was difficult for both professional and technical staff to attend such a demanding program.

The talks were given by Eléonore Kissel and Frederick Bearman, as well as teachers from other departments⁵ and MUK-based consultants.⁶ It is hoped that these collaborations might have contributed to generating a sense of community among staff from the entire university.

The topics covered in the program were, in chronological order:

1. General concepts in preservation and conservation
2. Manufacturing materials and structure of library holdings
3. Environmental impact on holdings
4. Biological degradation agents (fig. 3)
5. Users and keepers (fig. 4)
6. Disaster planning and recovery
7. Documentation.



Fig. 3. Damage by insects on book covers made of strawboard. Live pests are not considered a nuisance in everyday life, and therefore are not eradicated within the library. (Photo by E. Kissel, 1999)

The classes were both theoretical and practical; whenever possible, examples were sought within the boundaries of the library. Suggestions for modifying a problematic situation always took into account the specifics of MUKL and its staff: the tropical environment, the academic setting, the limited budget, and the cultural background were always kept in mind. Handouts were distributed at the end of each one-, two-, or three-day session, serving as a basis for a small preservation documentation center.⁷

As with any teachings, the underlying principles were:

- learning to see—chrysalids hanging from the walls and dust on the shelves!
- learning to act—how to dry books that have been flooded!
- learning when and where to turn for help—as exemplified by Frederick Bearman's idea of holding the last session in the library's Internet room, so participants could become familiar with the preservation related web sites and free resources.

BOOK AND ARCHIVE CONSERVATION TRAINING

Although some good collections care practices had manifestly been in operation in the preceding years, we were all conscious—consultants and library staff alike—of the widespread insect infestations and the lack of preservation awareness by the staff who were carrying out simple collections care procedures. These and other problems were to be addressed by the three-part training agenda. The overall objectives of the training programs were much enhanced by the construction of a new secure area for the microfilm laboratory and a purpose-built room in the main bindery for conservation work.

The first part of the project was conducted in July 1999. It involved raising collections care awareness by delivery of a three-week preservation management study course including hands-on workshops. Over thirty senior librarians from throughout the MUKL network, including selected bindery staff, attended the courses. At the conclusion UNECIA diplomas for full attendance were handed out to each participant in a formal but friendly ceremony.

The next stage involved creating a special collections maintenance and conservation unit. A team of six bookbinders, selected from the main and the two branch library binderies, was instructed in collections care and basic non-interventive conservation skills (fig. 5). Training stressed the testing of materials for pH levels, making appropriate enclosures, the identification of library and archive collections degradation agents, and general washing and flattening techniques for single sheet items. The teams

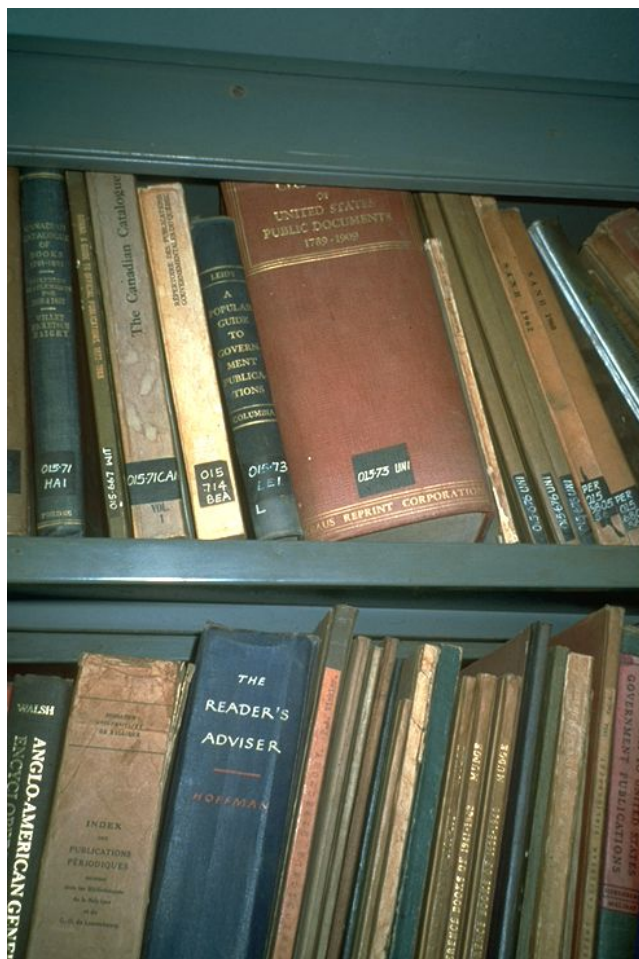


Fig. 4. Lack of space and, to a certain degree, of awareness or training favors disarray in the stacks. In this case, the books are higher than the space between shelves, and therefore cannot be removed without risking severe mechanical damage. (Photo by F. Bearman, 2000)

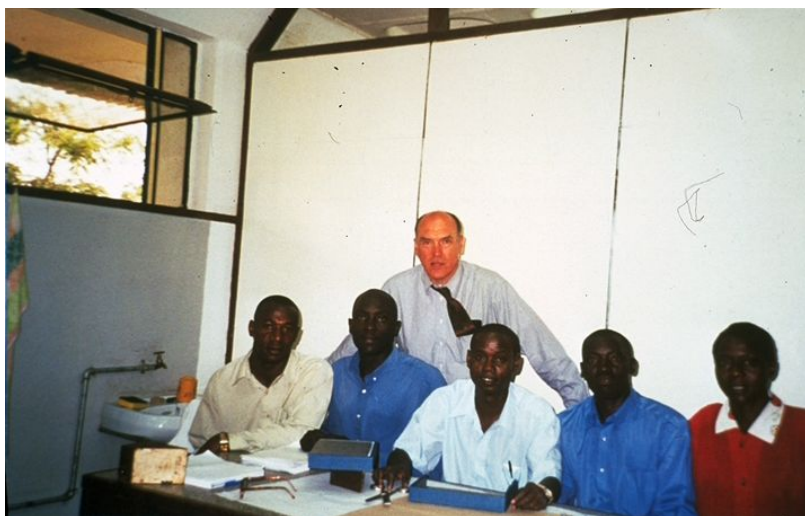


Fig. 5. Frederick Bearman with five binders from the Book and Archive Conservation Training Programme. (Photo by F. Bearman, 2000)

responded well to training and were later appointed to staff the new conservation unit. Other skills taught involved a study of the overall management of the bindery. Bindery managers and members of the TPG were instructed in the use of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analyses and the benefits offered from the introduction of a work time points system for controlled management.

REFORMATTING TRAINING

The third phase focused on establishing a new microfilming and photographic laboratory within the main library. The aim here was to train staff to a standard at which—by the end of the project—a fully operational microfilming unit was in action (fig. 6).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the project was to determine the various ways in which preservation awareness and practical know-how could improve the long-term stability, security and accessibility of the library holdings, to the benefit of quality education for the students at Makerere University. In the future, the outcome of integrated preservation management should be accounted for in terms of reduced risks of damage, as well as in a lower rate of mechanical and chemical degradation of holdings. The outputs could be measured numerically (e.g., number of pamphlets boxed) while, whenever possible, collection condition surveys should be used as objectively verifiable indicators of the projects' achievements. However, this is a step beyond what was performed in 1999–2000.

So far, it is fair to say that many of the staff involved in one or several of the training programs expressed a

renewed enthusiasm for their everyday activities. Although difficult to assess objectively, this output is the fundamental basis without which preservation management could not be implemented in the library. It is also perfectly in phase with the overall purpose of the European Union program funding this consultancy project.

It should be mentioned that the project took place during the last year of a triennial plan funded by the EU-HRDP, as it ended in March 2000. Sadly enough, the European Union shifted its priority towards primary education, thus leaving the library staff without any possibility of recourse for additional consultancy, as may periodically be needed on specific topics within the next few years.

Nevertheless, the EU-HRDP conservation and preservation grant funded a successful

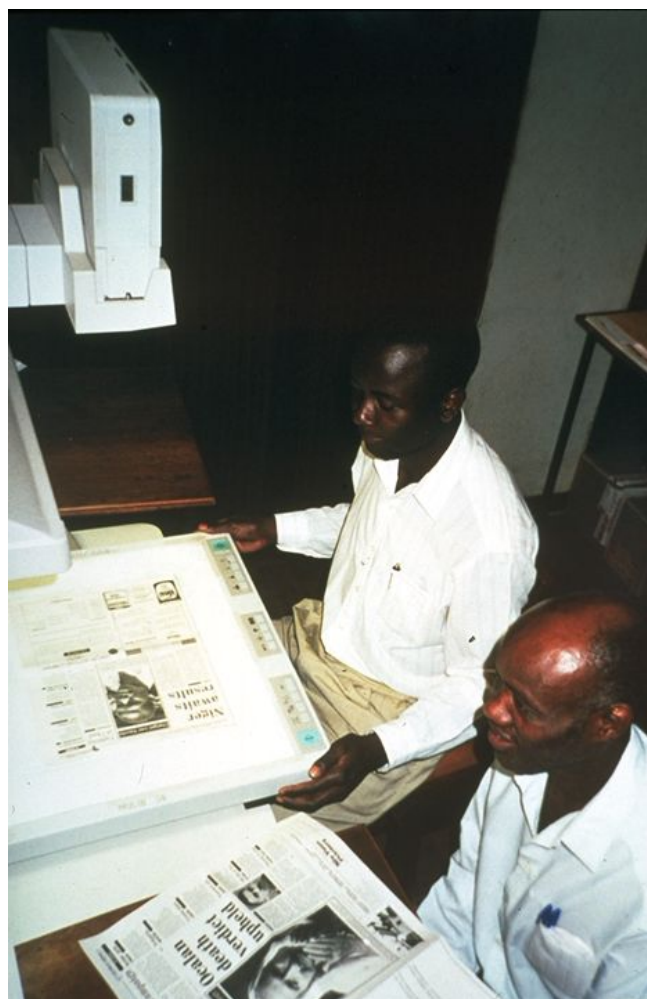


Fig. 6. Two microfilming technicians working in the reformatting laboratory. (Photo by F. Bearman, 2000)

management program. Indeed, the net result for MUKL was a functioning microfilming laboratory, a conservation and collections care unit and a university library system which is now in a better position to establish preservation priorities and respond to conservation needs.

NOTES

1. UNECIA is a firm set up by a consortium of British universities in order to respond to tenders put forth in international programs. Therefore its activities spread out over widely ranging projects, MUKL's being the first one dealing with cultural heritage preservation.

2. Should a reader wish to seek further information from the European Union archives, the project code for MUKL was 7 ACP UG 013 HRDP.

3. There was no space set up specifically for maintenance or conservation work. The three existing binderies (one in the main building and two detached units located in annexes) were cluttered with broken or otherwise unused equipment, pointing to the fact that technical staff had not become aware of the impact their environment might bear on the quality of their work. As for reformatting, although two members of staff were given basic training at the time of microfilming equipment delivery, this personnel had since been allocated other tasks, the equipment being left in disarray.

4. The electronic camera purchased by MUKL with EU funds would not allow the microfilming of periodicals, although they were considered priority items for reproduction. This situation occurred because the proper expertise had not been sought after when preparing to spend an important amount on highly technical equipment.

5. Professor Kaddu, lecturer in the Zoology Department (Faculty of Science), taught a session on entomology. He subsequently agreed to continue helping the library staff by conducting identification of insect species whenever required and monitoring zoology student research projects on topics such as pest eradication in the context of libraries under tropical climates (for instance, using traditional non-polluting essential oils as insect repellents).

6. A team of consultants from the Estates and Works Department, namely P. Mc. Anena, O. Shittu and A. Ayo, jointly taught a session on facilities surveying and preventive building maintenance. They subsequently agreed to conduct a comprehensive survey of the Main Library building, establish costing, and provide advice as to priority maintenance or repair activities.

7. Of course, any donations would be welcome! Please contact the authors for additional details.

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