

Makerere launches book on Uganda folktales

The Department of Literature at Makerere University in collaboration with the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of Bergen in Norway last week launched a book on folktales of Uganda. Co-edited by Dr Sr Dominic Dipio, an Associate Professor of Literature at Makerere University, and Prof. Stuart Sillars of the University of Bergen and published by ComMattersKenya of Nairobi, the 276-page book entitled *Traditional Wisdom: Folktales from Uganda*, is a collection of 100 folktales from diverse cultures in the country and a 'gem for enthusiasts of cultural studies, scholars of orature and folklore as well as lovers of stories.

The book is the result of research carried out on the folklores of the people of Uganda in a project that started in 2007. According Dr. Sr. Dipio, the main objective of the project was to document and disseminate the richly imaginative cultural forms of Ugandan people, using a multi-media approach.

The themes in the stories in the book could ring a bell on contemporary issues. There are stories touching on themes such as treachery, greed, betrayal and the price one pays for each of these almost universal vice.

Some stories explain how and why things are the way they are today. For instance, the origin of beer, water masses, forests, and mountains is explained.

The importance of patience, wisdom, diligence, discipline, and hard work is also stressed in some stories.

Speaking at the launch of the book at the Makerere University Guest House, Dr Sr Dipio said the 100 folktales in the book are just a sample from the many cultures noting that there are many folktales in fragmentation that need to be collected.

At the same function, Mwalimu Austin Bukenya, a former don in the Department of Literature, praised the book as the latest fruit from Makerere's long and passionate engagement with oral art, noting that it gives valuable insights into other forms of orature. He also applauded the staff in the Department of Literature for continuously uplifting the image of the department especially

in the area of orature. He, however, urged them to enhance the teaching of orature, noting that a good speech is a product that should be taught. “The skill of public speaking is necessary yet sadly lacking in our society. Lack of that skill causes a number of problems like violence and corruption,” he further noted.

In a speech read for her by Uganda’s State Minister for Ethics and Integrity, the Rt. Rev. Fr. Simon Lokodo, the Guest of Honour, also Uganda’s Minister of Information and National Guidance, Hon. Mary Karoro Okurut, commended the writers of the book. She said the book will be very instrumental in promoting the Ugandan cultures that are being infiltrated by those of the western countries. She retaliated her efforts in fighting the western cultures and called for support in her endeavors.

The Ag. Vice Chancellor of Makerere University, Prof Venansius Baryamureeba, said the book is so appealing and would go a long way sensitizing many generations about Ugandan cultures. He urged all those who were engaged in the research that resulted into the book to undertake continuous research aimed at producing more books in different languages. Prof. Baryamureeba appealed to the Government to invest heavily in research noting that continuity of productive research may be curtailed by limited funding yet it is key to any country’s development.

He cautioned staff in the Department of Literature to actively involve Hon. Karoro Okurut in advocating and seeking partnerships geared at boosting research into African literature. Hon. Karoro Okurut has made tremendous contributions to Ugandan literature both as a writer and as the founder of FEMRITE - Uganda Women Writers Association, an organization which has since received international attention and has to date produced two winners of the Caine Prize. She has written books like *“The Official Wife”* and *“The Invisible Weevil”* and is a columnist in the New Vision newspaper.