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Speech by Prof D. Dipio (Principal Investigator) at the Dissemination Event for the project, Transforming Ugandan Folktales into Digital (Animation) Films for Educational and Leisure Purposes

Date: 15th October 2020

Venue: Makerere University: Central Teaching Facility I, Rm 1.2

Salutations and acknowledgements

The VC, Makerere University (Prof Barnabas Nawangwe)

The DVCF&A and Chairperson Mak-**RIF** Grants Management Committee

The Principal, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Our Partners on this Project: from government and private sectors, and scholars from Makerere

The Religious Leaders in Makerere University and around the world,

The Deans

The Heads of Departments

Members of staff and students

All the online participants from wherever you may be following this event,

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I warmly greet you and welcome you to this dissemination event, where we unveil our creative efforts of adapting African folktales from Uganda, into animation films as educational and leisure art for especially children and young adult audiences.

Introduction of the Team Members

I would like to start by introducing the Team that made the realization of this vision possible:

This is made possible with funding from the Government of the Republic of Uganda through Makerere University Research and Innovations Fund (Mak-RIF)



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I start with **Archt. Richard Musinguzi**, Director of Musinguzi Studios, who represents the industry, and leads a team of humble, self-effaced, but highly talented young men and women. This team has been able to push themselves to the best they could in these challenging days of COVID-19. We have progressively found creative ways of working despite the difficulties of the times. I want to acknowledge Arnold the chief animator and Leonard the storyboard artist. It has been such a pleasure to have you on our team.

I acknowledge **Dr Jimmy Spire Ssentongo**, from the Department of Philosophy, who practices animation and cartoon art as a serious hobby. Many of you must be familiar with his art because he is often in the media.

Dr **Susan Kiguli** is a poet and a senior colleague in the Department of Literature, whose distinct voice we are familiar with.

I have **Mr Isaac Tibasiima**, a colleague in the Department of Literature, who is also my mentee as a PhD student. He has worked closely with me in this project.

On the production team, someone who is not among the five team members, who must be acknowledged is Dr Lawrence Branco Sekalegga of the Department of Performing Arts and Film, together with the Talents who participated in the project to produce the audios for the animations. The Fruits of Talent Studio and the Director Julius Joseph. It has been fun working with this creative team!

I cannot miss to mention Assoc. Prof. Okaka Dokotum, the Deputy VC-AA of Lira University who helped launched this project with his fascinating lecture on the concept of film adaptation, in December 2019. We thank you profoundly, and we hope you are able to follow us from Lira.

And myself, **Prof Dominic Dipio**, the Team leader.

Background of this Project

The Department of Literature has been committed to documenting oral traditions and literature since the 1970s. However, in 2007, when the Department had an opportunity to engage in a bilateral collaboration with the University of Bergen under NUFU: The Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education from 2007-2012, titled: **The Role of Ugandan Folklore as Repository of Traditional Wisdom** (2007-2012), the oral literature in the Department was scaled up because this was the era of digital media effusion. Besides the



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conventional outputs of this project such as: books, human resource development in the department in terms of trained MAs and PhDs, we took the opportunity to document our folklore in multi-media format: documentary films, audio stories, and live audio-visual recording of storytelling performances in schools.

This current RIF project, in a way, sits on the previous one and scales it to a much higher level. In my view, it is unique at two levels:

1. It is locally sponsored: by the Government of Uganda, through Makerere University. This, in itself, is a big success story in changing the pattern of research funding, especially in the Humanities.
2. It scales up the degree of innovativeness by venturing into adapting our stories into animation films, giving it the kind of quality that can make it travel beyond the borders of Uganda.

In 2012, we had published a collection of folktales from Uganda, something that has been my passion for a while, titled: **Traditional Wisdom: Folktales from Uganda**, which has also travelled a bit. In this project, we had hoped to collect folktales with specifications that fit into our project objectives. However, it has not been possible to freely travel afield because of the lockdown that has been experienced globally this year. But thanks be to God! We had a bank of folktales already published in 2012. We were able to easily pick 4 fascinating stories from this collection.

Our method of choice, as far as possible, was to spread the 4 stories among the different regions and language groups in Uganda. We also considered diversity in themes and suitability for children and young adults. In this regional diversity, we see an opportunity to craft the nation, Uganda, through art, through our folk narratives.

Our overall vision is to produce 10 animation films, adapted from folktales in Uganda. Actually, it is often a misnomer to limit these tales by giving them national identities, because they are boundless in telling the human story. They are transcendental, borderless in the values they carry, and they have the capacity to unite all, in a shared experience. They are meant to resonate globally. This brings me to cite Leo Tolstoy, the Russian writer and art theorist explains that good art is “infectious” in its capacity to unite those who share the feelings transmitted to it. It is crucial for creating unity among the human family. He adds that,

“If human beings lacked the capacity of being infected by art, people might be almost more savage still, and above all, more separated from, and more hostile to, one another.” (*What is Art*)



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So, exposing our children to good art is to enhance their humanity, sensitivity and imagination.

Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, I would like to now turn to you. This project is a result of the vision you and your team initiated, and invited us to participate in. Our vision of adapting animation films would have remained locked in us, if it were not for the opportunity RIF has given us. We are, thus, delighted to have the opportunity to be part of this mosaic of researchers under RIF, contributing to the magnificence of your bigger vision of translating and implementing the vision of the Government of Uganda. We are also delighted to be part of the team of academics working towards a research-led university.

About our Envisioned Partners

I would like to give some brief information about the partners we have envisioned in this project. These come from government, private and NGO sectors. What unites us is our passion for the preservation and promotion of the positive values of our cultures: both the tangible and intangible heritages.

I start with the Cross-Culture Foundation Uganda (CCFU), a home-grown NGO that started in 2006. When we started the Folklore Project in 2007, I set out to look for partners, and everywhere I went, the reference I got was CCFU. That was how I met Ms. Emily Drani, whose office was at the National Theatre then. Since then, we have collaborated at many levels. We think in the same direction in matters of culture.

With Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), I have had a long history of collaboration too, especially from 2013 when the Uganda Film Festival annual series started. We have collaborated together to improve the quality and standards of Ugandan films, where I was privileged to serve in the jury for five years. It was this exposure that led to the realization that there is lack of wholesome cultural content, that both Uganda Communications Commission and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development are concerned about. We particularly realized that the animation film genre, which is often associated with children's genre, is lagging behind. This gap, then, has become the perfect opportunity for us to initiate a collaborate with UCC, to contribute towards the much-needed local content that is also culturally sensitive, as the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development would have it. It is in this respect that we see the two government sectors as our partners.

Because we are particularly interested in producing content that is suited for a healthy, culture-based education of our children, we hope the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC)



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that certifies good educational materials will take interest in what we are doing, so that our films will not only be screened through TV channels, but also go to classrooms; to engage the youth in discussions on culture and development, and become more culturally conscious as they traverse the globe.

About Interdisciplinary Collaborations

Finally, I want to say something about the synergy and interdisciplinary collaboration that has made this project possible. In 2009, I attempted making an animation film with a young animator who had just come out training. This was between 2006-2009 when I used to travel with film students to Nairobi for hands-on experience in film production. After 10 days, we would return to Uganda, with our short films, all excited! I now think the animation film we made then would be too shy to stand next to the ones we are launching today. That was more of a solo disciplinary approach.

The current project has brought together an interdisciplinary resource from literature, philosophy, performing arts, and architecture to produce a new art that integrates other arts forms. Through it, we have lived the experience of film as the 7th art that builds on earlier arts like architecture, sculpture, painting, music, literature and dance. This has made the experience all the richer. Mr Vice Chancellor, this experience has shown us the benefits of interdisciplinarity: Technology (especially architecture) is art. We should not lock ourselves up in unproductive disciplinary silos.

Most of us, on the team, have not participated in a production of this scale before; and so, this was experimental, and quite exciting an experience. I will cite two out of several fascinating comments from the students from Performing Arts and Film, that illustrate that we have achieved our objective of developing young talents through this project:

1. Taking part in this project has opened my eyes when it comes to drama. The project has taught me a lot about production. Therefore, I would like to thank the funders of the project and everyone who took part in the project. May God bless you!
2. I appreciate the opportunity given me by Dr Branco, to participate in this project. I also take this opportunity to appreciate the Almighty Father for granting the spirit of knowledge and wisdom that has guided Sister Dipio in her fabulous and interesting writings that are excellent for radio dramas. Since it was my first time to do a radio drama, it was a very good experience for me. I felt so good working with the team which



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was cooperative, hospitable, disciplined and punctual in everything, which made us finish the project in time.

We feel our job as teachers, to inspire and open new horizons for the youth, has been achieved here. I join these students to thank the funders: The Government of Uganda and Makerere University, for giving us the opportunity and privilege to realise our dream and vision.

Conclusion

I now welcome you to the screening of our two accomplished films: *Njabala* from Central Uganda (Buganda), and *Hidden Riches* (from Western Uganda).

As we build for the future!