

Project Title: Historicizing the Humanities at Makerere University since 1922 (Humanities@Mak100)

Research Focus: Historicizing and Rethinking Humanities and Humanistic Social Sciences Knowledge Production from a Ugandan Locus: Makerere University Since 1922

Project Preamble

The project underscores the significance of humanities, but also highlights the challenges (held in low esteem – underfunding; relying on western epistemic traditions for new knowledge, translating and disseminating this knowledge (theoretical and methodological approaches, reading lists).

The critical role of humanities and humanistic social sciences consists in comprehending, interpreting, and recognising societal commonalities and differences; fostering critical thought, social justice, equity and democratic practice. CHUSS has championed this role for a long time. Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s before the onslaught of neoliberalism and the emphasis on STEM, the humanities and humanistic social sciences were vibrant. Needless to say, the humanities have been at the heart of Makerere University since the introduction of History in 1946, the East African Institute of Social Research in 1948. The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences was reputed for eminent scholars and post-independent political leaders, including Julius Nyerere, Milton Obote, Mwai Kibaki, Benjamin Mkapa, Oginga Odinga, Okot p’Bitek, Ali Mazrui, David Rubadiri, Nuruddin Farah, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, John Ruganda, V. S. Naipul, Wole Soyinka, etc.

In spite of the rich history, no attempts have been made to critically historicize and interrogate the past and current positionality of the disciplines of Humanities and Humanistic Social Sciences at Makerere University as well as the legacy of colonialism on these disciplines in any systematic and meaningful manner. For example, some of the humanities disciplines, such as History, were introduced in the colonial moment and the curriculum was largely shaped by colonial thinking. Secondly, while the University is prized in scientific research, today’s complex global challenges such as ‘global warming, global poverty, global epidemics’ and gender inequality cannot be solely explained or resolved solely by natural scientific disciplines (Humanities World Report 2015). It is important to understand the human factor, which is central in most of the modern scientific glitches. Not only do the humanities and humanistic social sciences explicate our existence as human beings, but they also contribute to creating “tolerance and understanding between citizens”, which promote social cohesion, and challenge established positions, social norms and traditions through critical thinking, and preserve heritage, cultural memory and identity (World Humanities Report, 2015).

Project Goals

- Rethink and reshape the role of humanities in Uganda
- Re-examine the basis and significance of humanities and humanistic social sciences at Makerere University from a historical perspective to reflect critically on the role and significance of these disciplines to shape their future trends in Uganda and East Africa.

Project Objectives

- i) Re-examine the basis of the disciplines in the humanities and humanistic social sciences.
- ii) Establish how the disciplines have evolved overtime at Makerere University and what their existence has meant for Uganda.
- iii) Identify the core features that define humanities and humanistic social sciences at Makerere University and in the country.

- iv) Evaluate the contribution of humanities and humanistic social sciences at Makerere University to interdisciplinary research and to public local and global knowledge production.

Project Justification

Makerere University is one of the oldest universities in Africa and Uganda; it has influenced scholarship and research in most of the other public and private universities in Uganda that rely on it in terms of faculty and curriculum development. Therefore, as we prepare to commemorate a century of Makerere's existence (1922 – 2022), there is need to re-examine the role of humanities and humanistic social sciences and interrogate the theoretical and methodological approaches that have informed the scholarship thereof. The research project will highlight which knowledge systems have been privileged and those that appear to have been at the periphery. For instance, it will establish both the dominant and minor/neglected themes of research across the disciplines and the reason for this. It will also inform debates on post coloniality and what these disciplines entail and what they should be in terms of responding to societal needs in a broad sense. The project believes that such an endeavor would lead to a rethinking of the epistemological transformation of the disciplines and reexamine the general deceptive instrumentalist view about the humanities and humanistic social sciences scholarship and research. This research project will ultimately lead to a transformation of the current curriculum of humanities and humanistic social sciences at Makerere University.

Therefore, the project congregates academics; public intellectuals; and other stakeholders into an effective platform to examine the existing curriculum to establish its potential to respond to novel learning and teaching environments as well as addressing 'human' challenges in a dynamic and multi-dimensional regional and global context. This transformation debate will not only challenge the intellectual development of the faculty to generate new knowledge to address societal challenges and needs but it will also aim at innovative strategies that can produce a generation of graduates who will thrive in a rapidly changing society.

Process and Project activities

The Project started in September 2019 and is expected to wind up at the end of September 2022. It involves research; workshops; public dialogues and consultative meetings with various stakeholders (ministries, NCHE, local authorities, public intellectuals, professional bodies and alumni); local and international conferences; publications (journals and edited book); and preparation for curriculum transformation.

Thematic Areas

The project crystallizes around teams of academics in Philosophy; History and Archeology; Creative Arts including music, dance and drama; Languages and Linguistics; Literature; Social Psychology; Political Theory; and Feminist scholarship. It comprises three thematic areas.

- i) *The Basis of Humanities and Humanistic Social Sciences*, which reflects on the theoretical basis of the disciplines, their classifications, what they do and they how do it and their significance in terms of epistemological and ontological values. The research team will ultimately articulate, explain and justify the role and significance of humanities and humanistic social sciences.
- ii) *Patterns and trends of Humanities and Humanistic Social Sciences knowledge production* – reflects on the forms of knowledge' and epistemic traditions across times, construing the kinds of knowledge that have been produced and their political, social and ideological impact on society.
- iii) *The Disciplines and the Public* – addresses the public engagement aspect, seeking audience with public intellectuals and professionals to establish the kind of impact that scholarship and knowledge production emerging from the humanities and humanistic social sciences has had on society.

The table below indicates the members of research team involved in the implementation of Humanities@Mak100 Project.

S/N	Name of Faculty	Sex	Disciplinary Location	Thematic Area	Role
1.	Associate Prof. Josephine Ahikire	F	Feminist studies		PI
2.	Prof. Archangel B. Rukooko	M	Philosophy	The Basis of Humanities and Humanistic Social Sciences	Theme Leader
3.	Dr. Levis Mugumya	M	Linguistics		Co-theme Leader
4.	Dr. Sylvester Edward Kaweesi	M	Political Theory		Researcher
5.	Prof. Edward Wamala	M	Philosophy		Researcher
6.	Prof. Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo	F	Feminist Social Anthropology	Patterns and trends of Humanities knowledge production	Theme Leader
7.	Dr. Pamela Khanakwa	F	History		Co-theme Leader
8.	Assoc. Prof. Julius Kikooma	M	Social Psychology		Co-theme Leader
9.	Dr. Christine Mpyangu	F	Religion		Researcher
10.	Dr. Elizabeth Kyazike	F	Archeology		Researcher
11.	Prof. Dominic Dipio	F	Literature	The Discipline and the Public	Theme Leader
12.	Prof. Peter R. Atekyereza	M	Social Anthropology		Co-theme Leader
13.	Dr. Edgar Nabutanyi	M	Literature		Co-theme Leader
14.	Dr. Nicholas Ssempijja	M	Performing Arts		Researcher