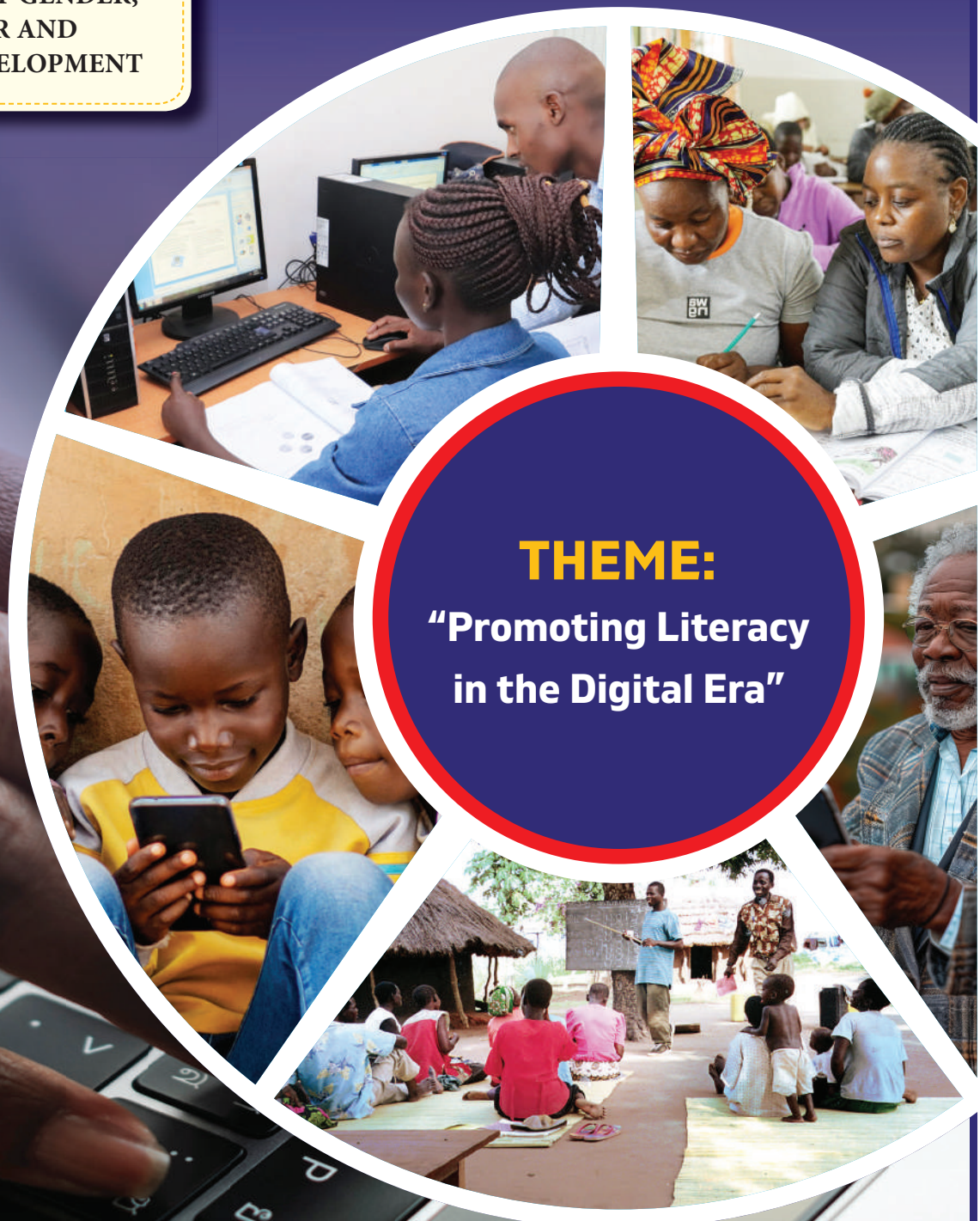


The Literacy Magazine

ISSUE 02,
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MINISTRY OF GENDER,
LABOUR AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



THEME:
"Promoting Literacy
in the Digital Era"



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Hon. Asamo Helen Grace
Minister of State for Disability Affairs

Appréciation!

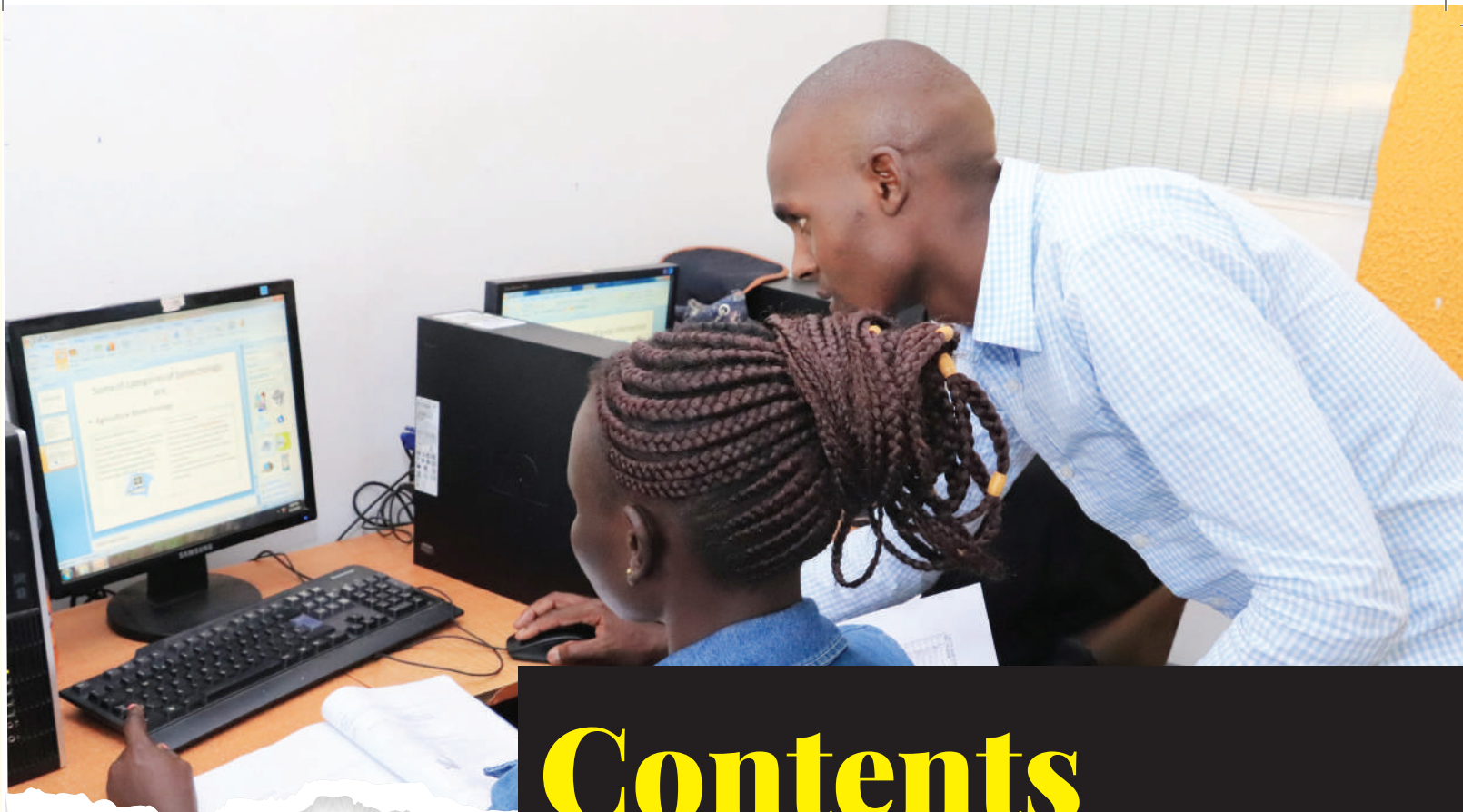
The People of Uganda appreciate H.E Yoweri Tibuhabwe Kaguta Museveni, the President of the Republic of Uganda for the exemplary leadership in promoting multilingual education and literacy for social cohesion and socio-economic transformation.



Aggrey David Kibenge
Permanent Secretary



Everest Tumwesige
Commissioner, Community Development and Literacy



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Message from the: Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development

**Amongi Ongom (MP),
Minister of Gender, Labour
and Social Development**

On this 8th day of September 2025, Uganda proudly joins the rest of the world in commemorating the International Literacy Day under the theme “Promoting Literacy in the Digital Era.” Since UNESCO declared this Day in 1967, it has been an enduring reminder that literacy is the cornerstone of human progress, a force that empowers individuals and transforms societies. In Uganda, we began marking this occasion in 2002, and over the years it has grown into a platform for advocacy, reflection, and renewed commitment to building a literate nation.

For us, literacy is not a luxury; it is a national priority. It is the foundation of education, the gateway to lifelong learning, and the passport to participation in the nation’s economic and political life. A literate citizen is better positioned to seize opportunities, engage in decent work, nurture healthy families, and contribute to community development. As Uganda journeys toward the aspirations of Vision 2040, the Parish Development Model, and the Sustainable Development Goals, we are reminded that literacy is a thread that ties these ambitions together. Without a literate population, our development goals remain incomplete.

This year’s theme resonates deeply with Uganda’s development agenda. The digital era has transformed how people learn, work, trade, and connect. For many, the smartphone has become the new classroom, and digital platforms the new marketplace. Yet this transformation also carries a risk: those without digital literacy are left behind, excluded from opportunities and trapped in cycles of poverty. To meet this challenge, Uganda must ensure that our approach to literacy



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is not confined to traditional reading and writing, but extends to equipping citizens with the skills to navigate digital tools and participate in an increasingly technology-driven economy.

Government is already taking bold steps in this direction. In line with this commemoration, I am honored to announce the launch of the *Support to the Implementation of Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (SUICOLEW) Programme*. This flagship initiative, beginning July 2025, is designed to expand and renovate 213 Community Learning Centres across the country over the next five years. With an investment of UGX 83 billion, SUICOLEW builds on the legacy of the Functional Adult Literacy programme and redefines the scope of adult and community learning to respond to today’s realities. It seeks not only to equip adults with foundational literacy, but also to integrate digital skills, entrepreneurship, and livelihood opportunities into learning. Literacy, in this context, is not just about decoding words but about unlocking wealth and dignity.



*I am honored to announce
the launch of the Support
to the Implementation of
Integrated Community
Learning for Wealth
Creation (SUICOLEW)
Programme.*

Our journey has not been without challenges. Despite commendable progress, Uganda still grapples with pockets of illiteracy, particularly among women, rural populations, and vulnerable groups. In the digital age, these gaps risk widening into deep inequalities. That is why this Day is not only a celebration but also a moment of accountability. It is a time to take stock, confront challenges, and design solutions that leave no one behind.

We cannot achieve this vision alone. Literacy is a shared responsibility. It requires the collective effort of Government, civil society, cultural institutions, development partners, the private sector, and communities themselves. I applaud the commitment of our partners such as UNESCO, DVV International, and many civil society organisations that have stood with us in advancing adult learning and community education. I also recognize the unsung heroes of literacy, the facilitators who dedicate their lives to

teaching in community spaces, often under difficult circumstances, and the learners who, against all odds, return to the classroom to reclaim their futures. Their stories remind us that literacy is not an abstract concept but a lived reality that changes lives.

Looking ahead, Uganda envisions a society where literacy is universal, inclusive, and dynamic, a literacy that empowers citizens to harness opportunities in agriculture, business, industry, governance, and digital innovation. The commemoration of International Literacy Day 2025

is a clarion call for us to redouble our efforts, align our strategies, and invest in the human capital that drives transformation.

As Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development, I reaffirm Government's unwavering commitment to literacy as a human right, a common good, and a lever for socio-economic transformation. Together, let us build a Uganda where every citizen, young or old, rural or urban, man or woman, has the opportunity to read, to learn, to create, and to thrive.

Message from the: Minister of State for Gender and Culture

Hon. Mutuuzo Regis Peace

Minister of State for Gender and
Culture

Literacy is more than reading and writing, it is the heartbeat of our communities, the bridge between tradition and modernity, and the pathway to empowerment for every Ugandan. Every day, across villages and towns, learners reclaim their potential, parents nurture their children's curiosity, and communities harness knowledge to solve local challenges. This is the power we celebrate on International Literacy Day 2025 under the theme "*Promoting Literacy in the Digital Era.*"

In today's rapidly evolving world, literacy extends beyond the written word. Digital skills, critical thinking, and the ability to engage with new technologies have become essential for social participation, economic opportunity, and cultural preservation. For Uganda, embracing this digital transformation while remaining grounded in our cultural heritage is essential for building inclusive, resilient, and prosperous communities. Literacy in the digital era is therefore a tool not only for personal growth but also for sustaining our values, heritage, and collective identity.

The Government's commitment to advancing literacy is evident in programmes such as the *Support to the Implementation of Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (SUICOLEW)*. This ambitious initiative will renovate and expand 213 Community Learning Centres across Uganda, providing spaces where adults, youth, and vulnerable groups can acquire literacy, digital skills, and livelihood knowledge. SUICOLEW is more than an educational programme; it is an avenue for empowerment, linking learning with wealth creation, entrepreneurship, and practical skills



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that transform lives. By integrating foundational and digital literacy with income-generating opportunities, this initiative ensures that knowledge is both meaningful and actionable.

Uganda's literacy journey has

witnessed remarkable milestones. Previous programmes, including Functional Adult Literacy, laid the foundation for adult education, while literacy competitions, community campaigns, and awareness initiatives have inspired learners to embrace lifelong learning. Yet, despite these achievements, significant gaps remain. Women, rural populations, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups still face barriers to accessing literacy services. In the digital era, these barriers risk widening inequalities, making it imperative that we adopt strategies that are inclusive, context-specific, and responsive to local needs.

As Minister of State for Gender and Culture, I emphasize that literacy cannot be divorced from culture and social cohesion. Literate communities are empowered to preserve and celebrate their heritage, engage meaningfully in governance, and resolve challenges collectively. In this sense, literacy is both a tool for individual growth and a catalyst for community resilience. Our



programmes must therefore harmonize technology and culture, ensuring that digital learning complements rather than replaces our traditions and values. By doing so, we prepare our citizens to thrive in a modern economy while remaining anchored in their cultural identity.

I would also like to acknowledge the dedication and resilience of literacy facilitators, community leaders, local governments, and civil society organisations who have tirelessly supported the advancement of adult learning. These individuals are the backbone of Uganda's literacy movement, ensuring that learning opportunities reach those who need them most. Equally commendable are our learners, adults and youth who return to classrooms with courage and determination, demonstrating that the pursuit of knowledge knows no age limit. Their stories of transformation inspire us all and remind us that literacy is a journey of empowerment, self-

discovery, and societal contribution.

Looking ahead, the digital era presents opportunities to expand access, improve teaching methods, and create learning materials that are flexible, engaging, and contextually relevant. By leveraging digital platforms alongside traditional pedagogical approaches, we can ensure that literacy reaches every corner of the country, empowering citizens with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to participate fully in society. Partnerships among Government, civil society, cultural institutions, development partners, and communities are critical to achieving

this vision.

As we celebrate International Literacy Day 2025, let us reaffirm our commitment to a Uganda where literacy is a right, not a privilege. A Uganda where every citizen, young or old, urban or rural, woman or man, has the opportunity to learn, grow, and shape their destiny. Together, through innovation, collaboration, and unwavering resolve, we can build communities that are informed, inclusive, and empowered; communities where literacy bridges divides, nurtures culture, and drives sustainable development.

I would also like to acknowledge the dedication and resilience of literacy facilitators, community leaders, local governments, and civil society organisations who have tirelessly supported the advancement of adult learning.

Word from the: Editor-in-Chief

Aggrey David Kibenge

Permanent Secretary

– Ministry of Gender, Labour
and Social Development.

International Literacy Day 2025 offers a critical moment to reflect on the role of literacy as a driver of national development, social inclusion, and economic growth. In today's digital era, literacy is no longer confined to the ability to read and write; it encompasses digital competencies, critical thinking, and the capacity to access, analyze, and apply information effectively. For Uganda, advancing literacy is central to achieving national development goals, fostering inclusive communities, and preparing citizens to participate meaningfully in a knowledge-driven global economy.

Over the years, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has emphasized the strategic integration of literacy with broader national development objectives. Literacy interventions are designed not only to provide foundational skills but also to equip learners with the tools to participate in economic, social, and civic life. This approach is critical in ensuring that literacy becomes a lever for empowerment, wealth creation, and social transformation. While programmes such as the recently launched ICOLEW initiative provide structured opportunities for adult learning, digital skills acquisition, and community engagement, the broader strategy encompasses multiple programmes, partnerships, and platforms aimed at ensuring that literacy is accessible, inclusive, and sustainable.

A cornerstone of this strategy is the alignment of literacy interventions with the realities of the digital era. Technology has transformed the way people access knowledge, communicate, and engage with services. Yet, digital literacy remains



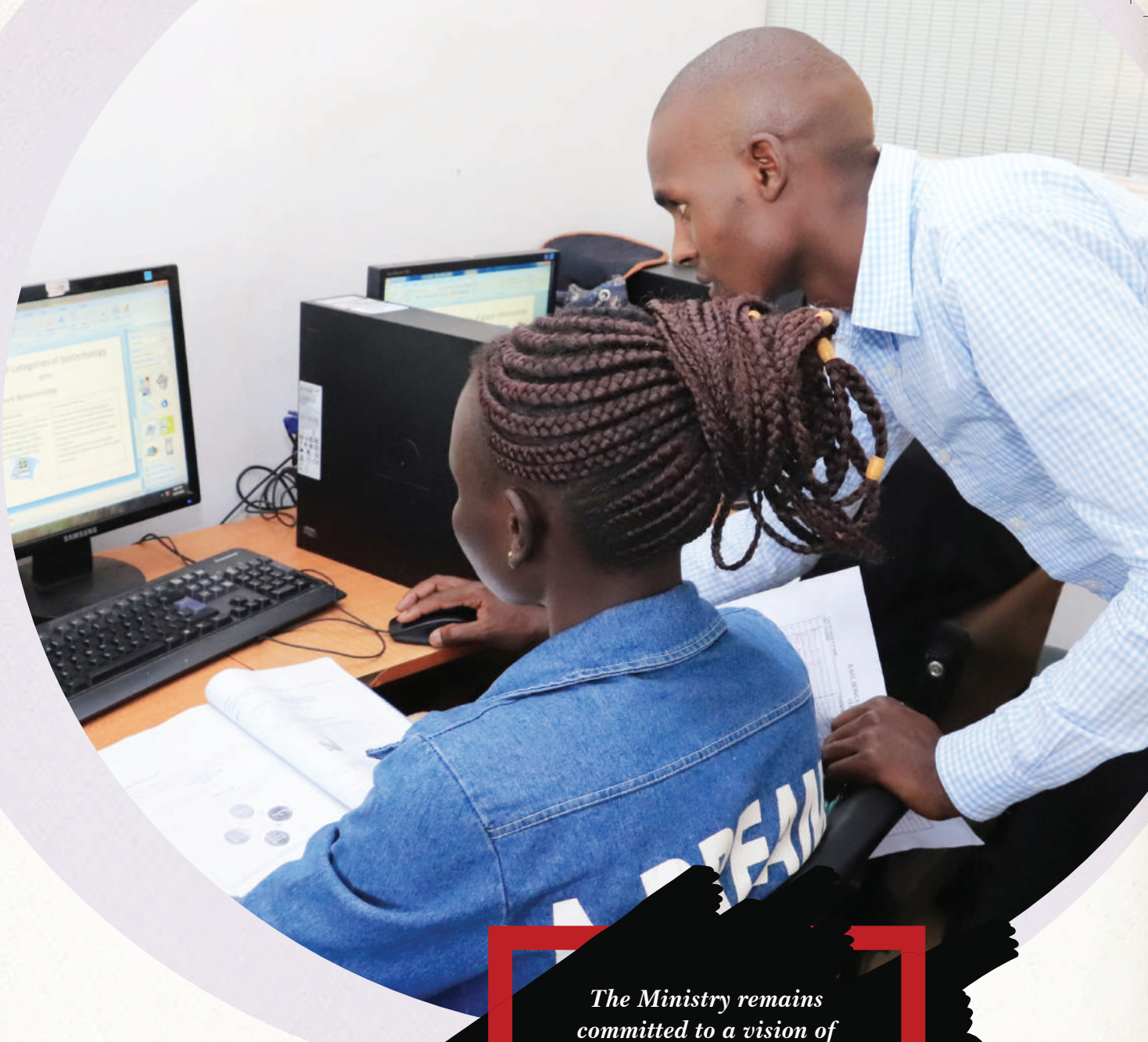
unevenly distributed, with rural populations, women, and vulnerable groups often left behind. Addressing these disparities requires an integrated approach that combines traditional learning methods with innovative digital solutions. The Ministry is committed to expanding access to learning platforms, promoting the use of digital tools in literacy instruction, and ensuring that content is relevant, contextually appropriate, and responsive to learner needs.

Partnerships remain a key driver of literacy advancement. Collaboration with UNESCO, development partners, civil society organisations, local governments, and community-based structures has enabled the scaling of literacy initiatives across Uganda. These partnerships facilitate capacity building for facilitators, development of teaching and learning materials, digital innovation in literacy delivery, and community mobilization. They also ensure that programmes are monitored, evaluated, and refined based on evidence and lessons learned.

By fostering multi-stakeholder engagement, Uganda continues to strengthen the quality, reach, and impact of literacy initiatives nationwide.

Monitoring and evaluation are integral to sustaining progress. The Ministry continues to develop robust systems for tracking literacy outcomes, assessing programme effectiveness, and identifying gaps that require targeted interventions. This evidence-driven approach ensures that resources are deployed strategically, interventions are adapted to emerging needs, and the impact of literacy initiatives is maximized. By combining data analysis with participatory planning, we can make informed decisions that enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of literacy programming.

While notable progress has been made, challenges persist. Adult illiteracy, particularly among women and marginalized groups, remains a barrier to equitable development. Unequal access to digital tools, limited



learning resources, and geographic disparities continue to hinder literacy advancement in certain regions. Addressing these challenges requires continuous innovation, strategic investment, and strong coordination among stakeholders to ensure that every citizen, regardless of age, gender, or location, has the opportunity to acquire literacy and digital skills.

As we commemorate International Literacy Day 2025, it is important to recognize the contributions of facilitators, community leaders, civil society actors, and development partners who ensure that literacy interventions reach learners effectively. Their dedication, professionalism, and resilience underpin Uganda's literacy achievements. Equally commendable are the learners themselves, whose determination to engage with knowledge transforms not only their lives but also the communities in which they live.

The Ministry remains committed to a vision of Uganda where literacy is universal, inclusive, and dynamic, a foundation for sustainable development, economic empowerment, and social cohesion.

Looking forward, the Ministry remains committed to a vision of Uganda where literacy is universal, inclusive, and dynamic, a foundation for sustainable development, economic empowerment, and social cohesion. Through evidence-based strategies, innovative approaches, and strong partnerships, we aim to equip citizens with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to navigate the opportunities of the digital era. Literacy must remain a priority at all levels, empowering individuals,

strengthening communities, and contributing to the nation's progress.

I therefore invite you, dear reader, to join us in this transformative journey. Whether as a learner, a facilitator, a community leader, or a partner, your engagement is vital. Together, we can build a literate, skilled, and empowered Uganda, ready to thrive in a digitally connected world. Let us make literacy a shared mission, ensuring that no citizen is left behind.

International Literacy Day 2025

Promoting Literacy
in the Digital Era



Uganda has been commemorating this day since 2002, using it as a platform to champion adult literacy and recognize its role in socio-economic transformation.

Every year on 8th September, the world pauses to celebrate the International Literacy Day (ILD). This day is dedicated to highlighting the transformative power of literacy in building inclusive, just, and sustainable societies. First proclaimed by UNESCO in 1967, ILD has grown into a global call for action, reminding leaders, educators, and communities that literacy is not just a skill but a fundamental human right.

Uganda has been commemorating this day since 2002, using it as a platform to champion adult literacy and recognize its role in socio-economic transformation. This year, the country once again joins the global community in celebrating ILD under the theme: "Promoting Literacy in the Digital Era."

The world has entered an era where digital tools shape how we live, work, and learn. Literacy today is no longer confined to reading and writing; it extends to navigating digital spaces, accessing online information, and using technology for growth. For Uganda, this theme resonates deeply because it provides a moment to reflect on the country's efforts in redefining literacy under the digital age and its ongoing determinations to expand the use of digital tools in the Adult Learning and Community Education (ALCE).



This year's national celebrations in Kampala, graced by the Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Hon. Betty Amongi Ogom, will spotlight the launch of the Support to the Implementation of Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (SUICOLEW) project.

Over the years, Uganda has marked ILD in different regions with diverse themes aiming to not only spread awareness but also inspired policies and community-driven efforts to make literacy a foundation for national development and these are:

- 2024:** Promoting multilingual education and literacy for socio-economic transformation (Kampala)
- 2022:** Transforming Literacy Learning Spaces (Namayingo District)
- 2019:** The role of Adult Literacy

in the Socio-economic Transformation of Uganda (Nwoya District)

This year's national celebrations in Kampala, graced by the Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Hon. Betty Amongi Ogom, will spotlight the launch of the Support to the Implementation of Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (SUICOLEW) project. Valued at UGX 83 billion, this ambitious five-year initiative will renovate and expand 213 Community Learning Centers (CLCs) across Uganda. As the successor

to the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) programme, SUICOLEW promises to keep literacy at the heart of wealth creation and community empowerment.

As Uganda celebrates ILD while embracing this year's theme, the nation recommits itself to equipping citizens with not just the ability to read and write, but also the skills to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital world. In doing so, ILD becomes not just an event, but a milestone on Uganda's journey toward an empowered, literate, and digitally inclusive society.



Uganda's Journey Towards A Digitally Literate Society

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Government commitment is equally evident in the integration of ICT into the national curriculum. Secondary schools are being equipped with ICT laboratories, digital boards, and projectors, preparing learners for a knowledge-driven economy.

Uganda's progress in embracing technology as a tool for education and empowerment is steadily shaping a new literacy landscape. The country has expanded traditional literacy into the digital realm, where access to knowledge and skills is increasingly aligned with technology.

The shift became most visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, when radio and television lessons served as lifelines for learners cut off from classrooms. Beyond broadcast media, platforms like Google Classroom, Zoom, and Moodle enabled educators to stay connected with students. Even after the lockdowns, these digital tools have remained central to teaching, gaining

momentum alongside homegrown innovations such as Sharebility, Kolibri, and Passuneb.com. These platforms, characterized as open educational resources (OERs), have provided teachers and learners with wider, more inclusive access to content.

The digitization of knowledge has also been championed by institutions like the National Library of Uganda, Makerere University Library, and the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC). By digitizing academic materials, literature, and government publications, they are bridging geographical and financial gaps, making resources accessible from Kampala to Karamoja.



Government commitment is equally evident in the integration of ICT into the national curriculum. Secondary schools are being equipped with ICT laboratories, digital boards, and projectors, preparing learners for a knowledge-driven economy. By embedding computer studies into education, Uganda is signaling its recognition that literacy today must prepare citizens for global competitiveness.

Yet, true progress requires addressing gender and social

inequalities. Organizations such as FAWE Uganda, Uwezo, and Literacy and Adult Basic Education (LAFE) are running community programs that empower young mothers, out-of-school girls, and refugee learners with digital literacy skills. Initiatives like Digitalization for Women Empowerment prove that ICT knowledge restores educational opportunities while also unlocking pathways to self-employment and independence. Uganda's journey towards a digitally transformed literate society is marked by resilience

and innovation. While challenges remain, such as the high cost of internet, limited rural infrastructure, and uneven digital skills, the ecosystem being built reflects a future where literacy and technology go hand in hand. From community learning centres to digital libraries, and from mobile money to inclusive e-learning, Uganda is showing that literacy in the digital age is about more than letters on a page — it is about access, empowerment, and readiness for the future.

For Uganda to gauge its progress and avoid leaving anyone behind, it is useful to draw inspiration from other countries' approaches to digital literacy:

1. Rwanda's Digital Leap: Tablets for Learning

Rwanda's One Laptop per Child Programme and e-learning platforms are equipping pupils with digital tools early, even in rural areas. Local language storybooks on tablets highlight the importance of integrating culture with technology.

2. Kenya's EdTech Revolution: Reaching the Remote

Platforms like eLimu and M-Shule deliver lessons via basic mobile phones. With Uganda's high mobile penetration, such models could reach out-of-school youth and adult learners.

3. Bangladesh: Literacy on the Airwaves

Radio-based literacy programs target rural women and girls while addressing social issues like early marriage. Uganda, with its vast radio listenership, could adapt this to reach vulnerable groups such as teenage mothers.

4. Finland: A Culture of Reading for Life

Beyond technology, Finland's global literacy success rests on a strong reading culture. Uganda's upcoming Community Learning Centres under SUICOLEW can mirror this by fostering libraries as vibrant community hubs.

5. India: Mobile Apps for Mass Literacy

Apps like Read Along (formerly Bolo) make literacy accessible offline, crucial for low-connectivity areas. Uganda could replicate this by creating localized apps in Luganda, Luo, Runyankore, Ateso, and other languages.

Uganda's digital literacy journey is still unfolding, but it is clear: literacy today defines participation in the modern economy. By learning from global best practices while addressing local realities, Uganda is laying a foundation where every citizen — child, youth, or adult — can thrive in a digitally connected world.



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Literacy is not merely the ability to read and write; it is a fundamental human right, a gateway to opportunity, and a cornerstone of national development.

Adult Literacy in Uganda

– Transforming Lives, Communities, and the Nation

In Uganda, adult literacy remains a critical area of focus as the country strives to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. According to UNESCO, Uganda's adult literacy rate is estimated at 74 percent, highlighting that a significant portion of the population still requires basic literacy skills. Adult literacy is crucial not only for individual empowerment but also for socio-economic transformation, reducing poverty, and promoting

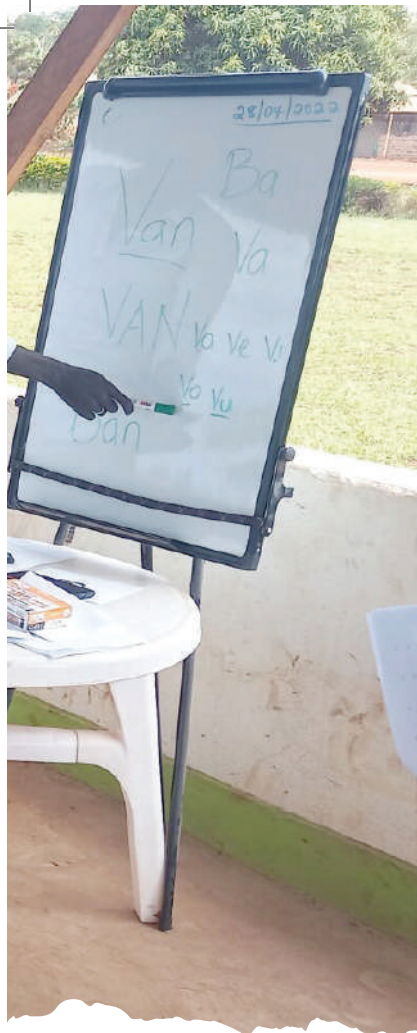
social cohesion.

Recognizing this, the Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD), has implemented a variety of programs aimed at enhancing adult literacy and numeracy, targeting both marginalized and underserved communities. Complementing these government efforts are numerous initiatives by non-governmental

organizations, civil society, and community-based organizations, all working collaboratively to transform lives through literacy.

Government Initiatives

The Government of Uganda has long recognized the centrality of adult literacy in national development. One of the key programs was the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) program, which targeted adults who did not complete formal



schooling, including women, youth, and vulnerable groups. FAL focused on functional reading, writing, numeracy, and life skills relevant to everyday situations, such as managing family finances, understanding health information, and engaging in local governance. Although FAL has now been phased out, it was a landmark initiative that reached thousands of learners across all regions of Uganda, equipping them with skills to improve personal livelihoods and participate actively in community life. Its legacy continues to inspire current literacy programs.

In line with these efforts, Uganda has also developed the National Adult Literacy Policy (2020) and the Non-Formal Adult Learning and Community Education Strategy (2023/24–2028/29). These frameworks provide clear guidance for literacy initiatives, emphasizing inclusivity, gender sensitivity, and alignment with national development priorities. Furthermore, under the umbrella of the Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (ICOLEW) project, the government is scaling up literacy programs, establishing

over 220 community learning centers (CLCs) nationwide, which will reach more than 224,000 adults and youth. These centers serve as hubs for literacy, numeracy, vocational skills, and digital learning, integrating education with economic empowerment.

Non-Governmental and Community-Based Literacy Programs

Non-governmental organizations have played a complementary role in expanding literacy opportunities. For example, the World Peace Foundation, through its Functional Adult Literacy program at the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, has provided literacy training to 350 beneficiaries, including 291 women and 59 men. Participants gain practical literacy skills, enhance their economic capabilities, and improve social cohesion within their communities. Lessons include reading, writing, numeracy, and basic business skills, enabling adults to participate in income-generating activities and community

governance.

Similarly, the Asante Africa Foundation has implemented digital literacy initiatives targeting both youth and adults. At St. Gorreti Manyogasekka Primary School, the foundation introduced a digital start-up kit and provided training to both learners and teachers. Community engagement, including the installation of electricity, enabled full utilization of digital tools, allowing participants to acquire computer skills, access online resources, and learn coding and ICT fundamentals. These initiatives reflect the evolving definition of literacy in Uganda, incorporating digital skills alongside traditional reading and writing.

Impact of Adult Literacy Programs

Adult literacy initiatives have had transformative effects at both individual and community levels. Improved literacy enables adults to manage businesses more effectively, participate in governance, access healthcare information, and support their children's education. For

instance, women participating in FAL programs report increased confidence, better financial decision-making, and greater community participation. Communities with active literacy programs experience reduced conflict, enhanced social cohesion, and stronger civic engagement, particularly in refugee settlements like Kiryandongo.

Moreover, adult literacy contributes to economic empowerment. Learners often leverage literacy and numeracy skills to start small businesses, access microfinance, and participate in cooperative ventures, improving household incomes and overall community resilience.

Despite notable progress, adult literacy programs face several persistent challenges. Limited funding remains a significant constraint, with the Poverty Action Fund (PAF) allocating approximately

UGX 3 billion annually, insufficient for the scale of need. Infrastructure gaps, including lack of electricity, internet connectivity, and accessible learning spaces, hinder program implementation, particularly in remote rural areas. Cultural and gender-based barriers also impede participation, as societal expectations and traditional norms often limit opportunities for women and older adults.

To further strengthen adult literacy in Uganda, increased investment from both government and development partners is critical. Expanding infrastructure, particularly community learning centers with digital access, will help bridge urban-rural disparities. Policies should prioritize gender inclusion and culturally sensitive approaches, ensuring marginalized groups benefit equitably. Additionally, fostering

community ownership through engagement and participatory approaches will enhance the sustainability and relevance of literacy programs.

Adult literacy is a transformative force, empowering individuals, strengthening communities, and driving national development. Uganda has made significant strides through government initiatives like FAL, whose legacy endures, and ICOLEW, complemented by NGO and community-based programs. However, challenges persist, requiring continued investment, policy implementation, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. By prioritizing adult literacy, Uganda can build a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous society, ensuring no citizen is left behind in the journey toward sustainable development.



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The Government of Uganda has long recognized the centrality of adult literacy in national development. One of the key programs was the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) program, which targeted adults who did not complete formal schooling, including women, youth, and vulnerable groups.

Promoting Literacy in a Digital Era:

Community Learning Centers as Gateways to Inclusive Digital Transformation

Every year on 8th September, the world commemorates the International Literacy Day (ILD), established by UNESCO since 1967 to highlight literacy as a cornerstone of dignity and development. This year's theme, **"Promoting literacy in a digital era"**, is particularly relevant for Uganda, where progress in basic literacy coexists with challenges of digital exclusion.

Although Uganda's literacy rate has improved to 74% as per the 2024 National Population and Housing Census Main Report, millions still lack foundational skills, and even more remain unable to benefit from the dividends of a digital revolution due to limited access, cost barriers, and inadequate training.

For DVV International, which has long championed adult learning and education across the globe, Community Learning Centres (CLCs) represent a powerful solution as they are embedded within communities, provide flexible, locally relevant learning opportunities for adults and young people to build literacy, vocational, and increasingly, digital skills.



Caesar Kyebakola,
Country Director, Institute for International
Cooperation of the German Adult Education
Association (DVV International)

Community Learning Centers in a digital Era

Traditionally, CLCs have focused on literacy, numeracy, vocational skills, livelihood skills and community development initiatives. But as government services, business platforms, and civic spaces move online, CLCs should now becoming gateways to digital literacy.

This shift aligns well with Uganda's Digital Transformation Roadmap (2023–2027), which prioritises digital skills as a foundation for economic inclusion. At CLCs, learners are introduced to computers, smartphones, and online services through post literacy education, equipping them with tools to engage with the digital world. Rural as many are, these centres are normally the first point of contact for many adult learners with technology, making them essential for bridging the digital divide.

As the Government of Uganda is focusing on rolling out our Community Learning Centers across the country through the Support to Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (SUICOLEW) Project, DVV International is joining hands with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development by supporting the established Regional Model CLCs in Nwoya, Namayingo, Mityana and Rukungiri Districts and these are already making an impact:

In Namayingo District, Madowa CLCs partners with NUWOGU, a local CBO to impart digital skills among the disabled persons and women groups who graduated under the Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (ICOLEW) Programme and can now use smartphones to coordinate with the wider community.

In Rukungiri District, Nyakagyeme CLC offers youths an opportunity to access computer

training and digital services, resulting into connectivity with friends and families abroad. These stories illustrate how CLCs extend the meaning of literacy beyond reading and writing to include digital participation and empowerment.

Challenges to Overcome

Despite progress made, whereby 13 CLCs in 6 Districts of Nwoya, Iganga, Namayingo, Mpigi, Mityana and Rukungiri, have been established, equipped and furnished, challenges still remain and these include: many rural centres lack electricity and are associated with poor internet connectivity; computers and smartphones are limited, with large groups sharing few devices; facilitators often need more training in digital pedagogy; learners struggle with affordability of devices and data; and community-based education still receives less policy and funding attention than formal schooling.

Without addressing these barriers, digital literacy risks reinforcing, rather than reducing, inequalities.

DVV International's Commitment

Community Learning Centers provide flexible, community-owned spaces where individuals gain not only literacy but also the confidence to engage in markets, governance, and social life through digital means. Through our partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development as well as the implementing District Local Governments of Nwoya, Namayingo, Mityana and Rukungiri, our response has been and will still focus on: Training facilitators to deliver digital skills confidently; advocating for investment in ICT resources and solar-powered solutions for rural CLCs; partnering with local governments, NGOs, and the private sector to bring innovative and affordable digital tools to communities; and, engaging national policymakers to prioritise and broaden adult learning and community education and digital literacy into Uganda's education and development strategies.

This commitment echos UNESCO's call to build inclusive, technology-enabled lifelong learning systems, and also in line with Uganda's **Vision 2040** which identifies human capital as central to national transformation. Achieving these milestones requires literacy that is both traditional and digital. By strengthening CLCs, Uganda can ensure that rural populations, women, and youth are not left behind in the digital era.

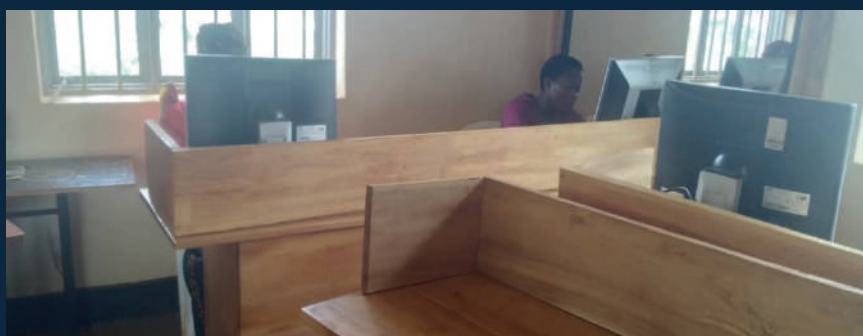
On this International Literacy Day, DVV International reaffirms its commitment to strengthening **Community Learning Centres as hubs for digital inclusion**. Literacy in a digital era must be accessible to all not a privilege of the few. By investing in CLCs, Uganda can turn digitalisation into a pathway for empowerment, equality, and sustainable development.



Computer Training at Nyakagyeme CLC in Rukungiri District.



Computer Training at Buwama CLC



Computer Training at Madowa CLC in Namayingo District.



Madowa CLC in Namayingo District

Some of the participants at the YASI Student Leadership Conference held recently at Makerere University.



Youth After School Initiative - (YASI)



By Musa Kasozi
Team Leader
Youth After School Initiative (YASI)



Volunteerism, when supported by a National Volunteer Policy, offers a sustainable, people-powered way to bridge education gaps, advance technology use, and strengthen civic life.

Volunteerism and the National Volunteer Policy:

Unlocking Literacy, Skills, and Civic Engagement in the Digital Era

Introduction – Literacy, Digital Transformation, and the Power of Service:

In an age where knowledge is the currency of progress, literacy has evolved far beyond the ability to read and write—it now encompasses the capacity to access, understand, and create information in both traditional and digital forms. Uganda, with its youthful population and growing technological infrastructure, stands at a crossroads. The 2025

International Literacy Day theme, “**Promoting Literacy in the Digital Era,**” calls us to harness the transformative potential of technology for learning, skills acquisition, and civic participation.

Yet, while technology offers unprecedented opportunities, the digital divide, inadequate practical skills, and limited community engagement remain barriers—especially for youth in rural, underserved, or marginalized communities. This is where **volunteerism**, supported by a robust **National Volunteer Policy**, becomes a game-changer.



A heartfelt THANK YOU to all our partners, mentors, and participants for making the YASI Student Leadership Conference held recently at Makerere University a resounding success! Together, we're empowering youth for leadership, innovation & sustainable impact.

Volunteerism: A Bridge to Literacy and Opportunity:

Volunteerism has deep roots in Uganda's cultural heritage—from bulungi bwansi (community self-help) to peer-led learning circles. In today's digital age, volunteering is not only about giving time; it is about transferring knowledge, mentoring peers, and bridging gaps in access to education, especially digital literacy.

A **National Volunteer Policy** would recognize and structure these contributions, enabling volunteers to:

- **Promote digital literacy** through community ICT hubs, online safety training, and digital skills workshops.
- **Mentor learners** in schools, refugee settlements, and community libraries, combining traditional literacy with 21st-century skills.
- **Foster inclusive learning environments** where girls, persons with disabilities, and rural youth access technology-driven education without discrimination.
- **Encourage intergenerational learning**, where older volunteers share cultural knowledge while young digital natives introduce new tech tools.

Through the Youth After School Initiative (YASI), over **365,000 young people** have already benefited from initiatives that blend skills training, leadership development, and volunteer-driven learning support. Many of these programmes—like the YASI Learning & Development Centre—combine face-to-face mentorship with digital platforms, helping young people prepare for a future where literacy and technology are inseparable.

The Missing Framework: Why Uganda Needs a National Volunteer Policy:

Despite its proven impact, volunteerism in Uganda remains largely unstructured. The absence of a National Volunteer Policy means:

- Volunteers' contributions often go **unrecognized** or **unsupported**.
- **Opportunities for scaling digital literacy** through structured programmes are lost.
- **Ethical and safety standards** for volunteers and beneficiaries are inconsistently applied.
- **Linkages between volunteer work and employability** are weak, leaving youth without recognition for their service in formal employment pathways.

A well-designed National Volunteer Policy could:

- **Institutionalize volunteer-driven digital literacy initiatives** at national and local levels.
- Provide **legal protections, training, and recognition** for volunteers.
- Integrate volunteerism into **education and skills development frameworks**, ensuring every Ugandan benefits from community-led learning.
- Mobilize a **nationwide network of literacy and digital skills champions** to reach even the most remote areas.

Volunteerism as a Catalyst for Digital-Era Literacy:

In the digital era, literacy is a moving target—it involves navigating online platforms, discerning credible information, using productivity tools, and even basic coding. Volunteerism can address this by:

- **Deploying “Digital Literacy Volunteers”** in schools, community centres, and vocational institutions.

- Organizing **community hackathons and reading marathons** that combine digital tools with literacy games.
- Supporting **digitization of local content** to preserve culture while increasing access.
- Training parents and caregivers on **safe and productive technology use**, ensuring learning continues at home.

Through partnerships with government, NGOs, and international agencies, YASI has demonstrated that youth volunteers can dramatically expand access to both traditional and digital literacy resources—especially when backed by structured programmes and strong institutional support.

A Call to Action – Building “The Uganda We Want”:

To fully realize the potential of literacy in the digital era, Uganda must **prioritize volunteerism as a strategic national resource**. This requires collaboration across sectors:

- **Government of Uganda:** Fast-track and adopt the National Volunteer Policy; integrate volunteer-driven digital literacy programmes into national education and community development plans.
- **United Nations Agencies and International Partners:** Support capacity building for digital literacy volunteers; share global best practices adapted to Uganda's realities.
- **Private Sector:** Provide technology resources, mentorship opportunities, and pathways from volunteer service to employment.
- **Civil Society and Academia:** Mobilize volunteers to support literacy programmes in underserved communities; ensure inclusivity in programme design.

- **Communities and Youth:** Embrace volunteerism as a way to give back, learn, and grow—both online and offline.

Conclusion – Literacy, Service, and a Shared Future:

As Uganda embraces the **digital era**, literacy must be seen not just as an individual skill but as a shared societal responsibility. Volunteerism, when supported by a **National Volunteer Policy**, offers a sustainable, people-powered way to bridge education gaps, advance technology use, and strengthen civic life.

With structured support, Uganda's youth can be **digital literacy ambassadors**, turning classrooms, community halls, and even mobile phones into gateways for learning. Together, we can build “**the Uganda We Want**”—a nation where every young person can read, learn, code, create, and contribute to a future defined by inclusion, innovation, and shared prosperity.

Youth After School Initiative (YASI) – Empowering Youth for Sustainable Development and Global Impact.

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Play leader facilitating a learning session in a Play Lab, Rhino refugee settlement



BRAC Uganda:

Advancing Literacy through play in Refugee Communities



BRAC Uganda is implementing a two-generation model that integrates Early Childhood Development (ECD) with the Ultra-Poor Graduation (UPG) programme. This approach recognizes that children's learning is inseparable from the wellbeing of their caregivers.

Uganda hosts over 1.9 million refugees, making it the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa. Among them are thousands of children under six whose early development has been disrupted by displacement, trauma, and limited access to safe learning environments. In settlements such as Rhino Camp and Imvepi in the West Nile region, families face deep economic vulnerability and fractured support systems conditions that put early childhood development and long-term literacy at risk.

To respond to these challenges, BRAC Uganda is implementing a two-generation model that integrates

Early Childhood Development (ECD) with the Ultra-Poor Graduation (UPG) programme. This approach recognizes that children's learning is inseparable from the wellbeing of their caregivers. By simultaneously supporting children's education and strengthening household resilience, the programme seeks to transform outcomes in fragile humanitarian settings.

The education pathway begins with Humanitarian Play Labs (HPLs); community-based centers for children aged three to six. These spaces provide structured, play-based learning that develops literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills. Each Play Lab is



led by a trained community Play Leader, many of whom are refugees themselves. Learning materials are co-created with parents and children, ensuring cultural relevance and community ownership.

Since its launch in 2022, the model has reached over 4,200 learners across 84 Play Labs, with more than 1,200 children successfully transitioning to formal primary education. Beyond academic skills, the Play Labs nurture healing and inclusion. Through storytelling, role play, and peer interaction, children build empathy, confidence, and communication skills. Activities such as “news-telling” encourage them to share experiences from home, bridging school and family life. Parents actively participate by decorating centers and crafting play materials, strengthening the link between home and learning spaces.

The model extends far beyond classrooms. Through the Ultra-Poor Graduation approach, BRAC Uganda equips families with financial literacy training, livelihood coaching,

savings groups, mental health support, and responsive parenting sessions. More than 3,700 caregivers have participated in parenting programmes that improve children’s safety, emotional wellbeing, and learning environments at home.

This integrated approach reflects a growing global understanding: literacy is more than reading and writing; it is the ability to engage, express, and thrive. Evidence shows that early investment in children and families yields lifelong benefits. By starting at birth, centering families, and embedding interventions within communities, BRAC Uganda addresses systemic barriers while laying the foundation for future learning and resilience.

The impact is visible in daily life. In Rhino Camp, Play Leaders like Hakim Patrick guide children through activities that help them recover from trauma and build social bonds. Under his care, children learn the host community’s language, form friendships across ethnic lines, and develop a sense of belonging. These

outcomes are especially critical in refugee contexts, where identity and inclusion are often contested.

As we celebrate International Literacy Day, BRAC Uganda believes that literacy is more than reading and writing; it is the ability for children to engage, express, and thrive, even in humanitarian contexts.



*Written by Barbra Ampaire,
Communications Officer,
BRAC Uganda*



Article written by
Martin Turibamwe

Digital era and the future of Lifelong Learning at DCI

Lifelong learning is becoming a concept of global interest, with the main focus on promoting a world of independent, self-directed, life-wide, life-deep, and lifetime learners; a community of people who embrace continuous learning from the day they are born until they die. The rise in the digital era has a great impact in achieving this focus. Works of several technological engineers, communication experts and Application developers have led to an irreversible blend between technology and learning in a digital

space, unlike in the past where every learning was restricted to physical classrooms and/or interactions.

One of the global promoters of virtual learning was COVID19 that not only accelerated adoption of remote and blended learning but also highlighted and widened the home access digital divide (devices, data affordability, electricity, digital skills). Platforms such as TikTok, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and X (which, usually, initially start as entertainment avenues at the onset) have eventually

formed a vast platform through which the public receives content (information and literacy) in much simpler and summarized packages. Other professional platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, Teams, and Skype have come up, uniting the technical staff (ALE providers and planners) with the field teams (implementers, primary/direct and secondary/indirect beneficiaries). While the literate category is usually capable of searching for this content on its own (given their reading, writing, computer, and ICT abilities), non-literate citizens instead benefit



Some of the adult literacy classes conducted by DCI in different regions of Uganda.



greatly from the content that is digitally created and spread.

To tap into such a digital opportunity, ALE providers such as DCI Uganda are currently investing in digital infrastructure by buying and providing tools such as smartphones to the ALE facilitators, even to those in the most remote and hard-to-reach villages. With this kind of infrastructure, avenues and platforms such as WhatsApp video calls and Google Meet gatherings have greatly become resourceful in not only technically supporting but also practically running ALE classes. Activities like monitoring and supervision, emergency/abrupt facilitator training, teacher and learner mentorship, roll calling and class registers, requests and supply of literacy requirements, and self-reporting updates from the field have all become easy and possible, even with the increasing merger budgets and scarcity of time.

The onset of the digital era has enhanced creativity on how ALE providers and implementers can improve and increase the learning achievements, ranging from

ALE providers such as DCI Uganda are currently investing in digital infrastructure by buying and providing tools such as smartphones to the ALE facilitators, even to those in the most remote and hard-to-reach villages.

technical support to the day-to-day teaching-learning activities. This era has, for instance, not only stimulated but also supported the creation of audio visual content in forms of skits, drama, plays, educative fun, folks, and inspiration talks among others. At DCI Uganda, for example, such content is developed and packaged by learners themselves under the guidance of the respective teachers and staff. This kind of content has been pushed even beyond the borders of the session/classrooms courtesy of digital platforms such as

YouTube, X, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc., through which the learners from other centers as well as the general public can virtually access it.

With the existence of the digital era at DCI Uganda, adult learners can now stop craving for physically seeing or meeting the monitors, even in times when schedules and financial resources may not make it possible for us to physically visit their classes on a timely schedule. Even when our priority is to always have physical visits conducted, we at least visit these ALE classes virtually,

especially in times of scarcity of time and budgets. This has introduced our learners to the new technological advancement, making them to gradually adopt it to the extent that they can now interact with us freely during our virtual visits as if it was physical. With the use of the digital platforms like YouTube, teachers have provided real-life content as part of learning through which learners have been equipped with the new knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and understanding that they need in life as individuals, citizens and workers. This is something that they were not aware of and/or familiar with at the time they enrolled.

Teachers no longer have to wait until we physically visit their classes in case they need any support; they can ask for and receive technical support as and whenever a need arises, without us solely meeting physically; they can update us from any location at any time. They can reach out to us from anywhere at any time, both via auditory or visual means; in no way do they feel lonely or unsupported unlike a time before the introduction of digital avenues during which facilitators would feel like “sheep without a shepherd” in case physical visits to their centers delayed. Amidst other ALE-related challenges such as limited funding, this has made our ALE activities feel easy, flexible, and impactful than when everything was still limited to physical monitoring & supervision visits, trainings, roll calls, meetings and catchups in the analog era.

It is widely known that the main challenge facing the learning from the digital platforms remains on quality control and authenticity concerns of the shared content and the digital skills gap. With continuous efforts in promoting digital and information literacy, we believe that accessing and utilizing the digital content will eventually become a habit to the non-literates as it is addictively being adopted by the elites, that both learners and facilitators will embrace it for independent and self-paced discoveries that can finally promote the culture of lifelong learning.



DCI- WOW - Jinja (Women of the Way) Literacy Centre! This class is focused on helping displaced Karamojong women who are living far from their homeland.



Some of the adult education graduands from DCI recently.

Written by; Martin Turibamwe
ALE Program Manager – DCI Uganda
Student – Master of Community Development and Lifelong Learning



How Community Libraries are enhancing literacy in their communities

COLAU aims to establish and maintain a network of such libraries throughout the country and cooperates for the purpose with other national organizations with similar interests as well as with international organizations that are concerned with the promotion of literacy for development.

The Community Libraries Association of Uganda (COLAU) is the umbrella organization for community libraries in Uganda. It was registered as a national NGO in 2007 and has since then been joined by over 100 member libraries. The organization is overseen by a Board of Directors and operates a Secretariat managed by a National Coordinator. Our Mission is "To complement the education system of Uganda and promote the development of productive literacy practices by encouraging and supporting the growth of community

libraries."

Our vision is "A library in every village." COLAU aims to establish and maintain a network of such libraries throughout the country and cooperates for the purpose with other national organizations with similar interests as well as with international organizations that are concerned with the promotion of literacy for development.

Apart from offering space for reading activities and ICT services, COLAU's member libraries open up their space to the community for a number of

literacy related activities such as Read Alouds, silent reading, spelling competitions, writing contests and many others.

Currently, Read to Learn Foundation, one of our members, is hosting the Literacy Champions fellowship. This program is being implemented in about 10 libraries. In this young people are empowered with literacy skills to be advocates in their communities by organizing literacy activities in their communities. Each libraries received a donation of 5 bicycles and a box of books to implement reading activities. The libraries include Ammuno Rural Hub, Namanya Memorial Community Library, Kitengesa Community Library and Kiwangala Community Library among others. Other community libraries like Kawempe Youth Centre use their computer facilities to enhance digital literacy in their communities through digital skills trainings in basic ICT, web design, digital marketing and entrepreneurship skills among others.

Further still, 5 libraries are participating in the Uganda Community Knowledge Project. In this, the libraries were give 10 tabs each and a Remote access to information gadget called RACHEL. This device gives off a WiFi signal and when connected to, students and teachers have access numerous resources such as eBooks, educational videos and audio books. These digital tools are used during outreach activities in schools and the community.

Here is a link to the Uganda libraries map created for us in partnership with the Wikimedia Community User Group Uganda.

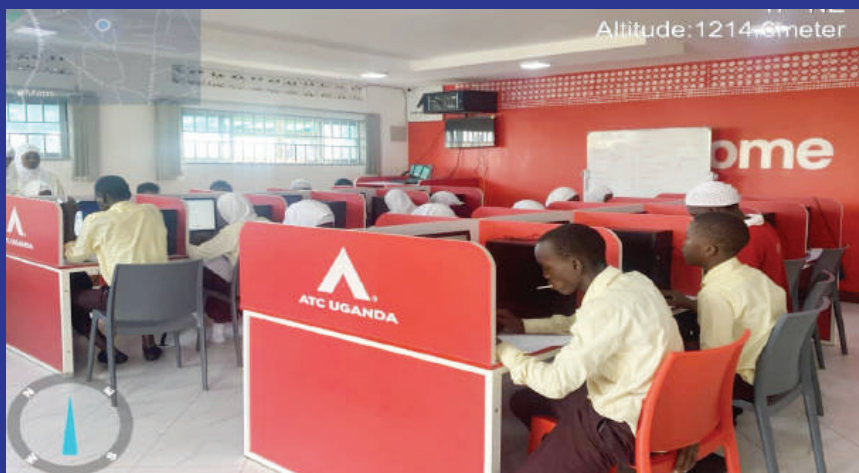
https://umap.openstreetmap.fr/en/map/community-public-libraries-in-uganda-ugandan-libra_1147102#6/-1.919/31.917

By Catherine Amia, the National Coordinator, Community Libraries Association of Uganda.

Below is a pictorial of some of the literacy activities at some of our community libraries.



Silent Reading at Nyarushanje Community Resource Centre



Digital skills training at Kawempe Youth Centre



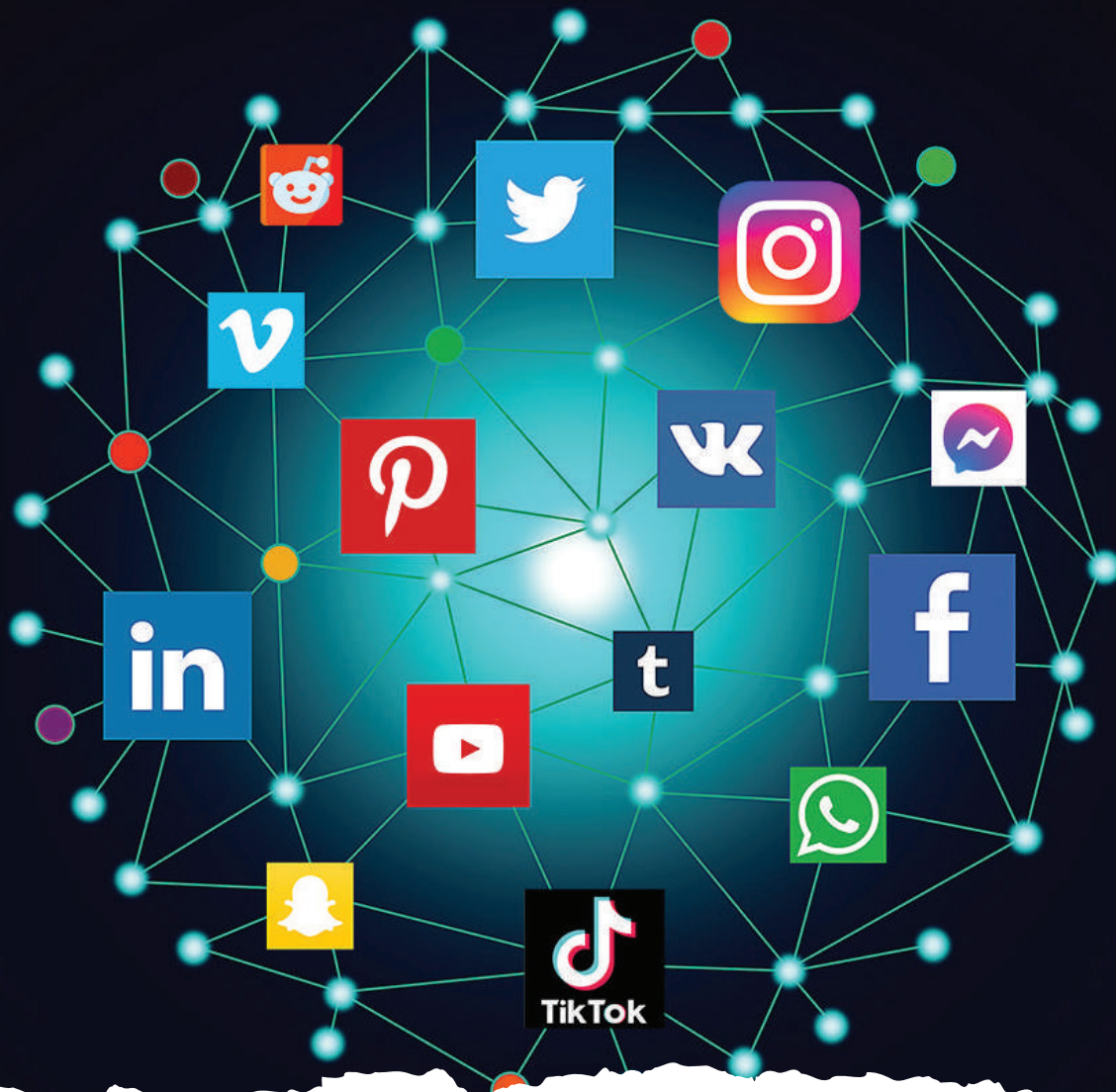
Children reading at Turning Point Resolutions Library.



Digital skills at Nambi Seppuya Community Resource Centre



Pupils from one of the community schools pose for a photo with their certificates after a spelling competition organized by MANSUETO Library



Harnessing digital tools to advance literacy in Uganda

A few literacy campaigns, such as book clubs on WhatsApp and reading challenges shared on TikTok, show potential but they remain scattered. Harnessing these platforms for large-scale literacy programs is still a work in progress.

This year's International Literacy Day theme "Promoting Literacy in the Digital Era," should be a catalyst to reflect on how far Ugandans have embraced the tools that make this possible. The conversation is no longer about whether technology exists it is about how aware Ugandans are of these tools, and to what extent they are using them to advance literacy.

With millions of Ugandans logging onto Facebook, X (Twitter), WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram daily, social media has become a familiar space. However, while awareness is nearly universal among

young people, its use leans more towards entertainment and social networking than education. A few literacy campaigns, such as book clubs on WhatsApp and reading challenges shared on TikTok, show potential but they remain scattered. Harnessing these platforms for large-scale literacy programs is still a work in progress.

Platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom, and Moodle are widely known among university students and professionals, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated online learning. Mobile-friendly literacy apps, however, have not reached the same level of awareness

among the general population. While mobile phone penetration is high, many Ugandans remain unaware of localized apps for numeracy or reading in local languages. This gap shows a missed opportunity to transform everyday phone use into learning experiences.

Digital libraries such as Uganda's National E-Library and global open-access platforms exist, but their reach is largely confined to academic institutions and urban centers. Among rural communities, awareness is minimal, often due to limited internet access or lack of digital literacy. Projects digitizing Ugandan literature and government reports are commendable, but their impact is muted unless people know how and where to access them.

Podcasts and audiobooks are slowly gaining traction, especially among urban youth who consume content via Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or YouTube. Yet, for literacy purposes, uptake is still low. Few Ugandan creators produce literacy-focused podcasts or children's audiobooks in local languages. Awareness exists, but the connection to literacy development has not been strongly made.

AI-driven learning tools, like apps that customize lessons or provide instant translations, are largely unknown to the average Ugandan learner. Awareness is limited to small circles of tech enthusiasts and institutions experimenting with AI. On a national scale, Ugandans are yet to fully discover how AI could support literacy tracking, personalized learning, and inclusive education.

Radio and TV remain the most accessible and widely recognized literacy tools, especially in rural Uganda. Unlike digital libraries or AI, their awareness is universal. What is changing is the hybrid use of these platforms programs are increasingly being streamed online, making them more interactive. While the public is comfortable with radio and TV, few are yet aware of the opportunities in blending

traditional broadcasts with digital learning spaces.

Ugandans are aware of many digital tools, but using them effectively for literacy remains uneven. Social media is popular, but not widely educational. E-learning platforms are growing, but not inclusive enough. Digital libraries exist, but only a few know how to access them. Podcasts and audiobooks are trendy, but not yet mainstream for

learning. AI is almost invisible. Only radio and television cut across every demographic.

For Uganda to fully live up to ILD 2025's call, the task is two-fold: raising awareness of these tools and guiding their practical use for literacy. The future of literacy will depend not just on the availability of technology, but on how Ugandans consciously use it to read, learn, and thrive in the digital age.



Mobile-friendly literacy apps, however, have not reached the same level of awareness among the general population. While mobile phone penetration is high, many Ugandans remain unaware of localized apps for numeracy or reading in local languages.





Asante
AFRICA FOUNDATION
Educating Children | Transforming Worlds

From Offline to Online:

Fahimah's Journey to Digital Empowerment

Driven by a desire to uplift her community, Fahimah began training students and teachers in digital skills across Kassanda schools Under Asante Africa Foundation partnership.



Fahimah, a 23-year-old from Kassanda District, Uganda, has become a beacon of transformation through A's Digital Employability and Enterpremiership Program. Raised by a single mother in a polygamous household, she grew up believing technology was reserved for the rich and educated especially not for girls. Her mother, too, held this belief, until Fahima's journey challenged it. Starting as a digital novice, she completed the Digital Employability and Entrepreneurship Program's nine

foundational modules, mastering digital literacy, communication, financial skills and problem solving. She earned Google IT support Cybersecurity Certifications, proving that determination can rewrite any narrative.

Her growth sparked a powerful shift not only in her own mindset but in her mother's, who now proudly supports her ambitions. Fahima began volunteering with Asante Africa's marketing team, applying her new skills in real world contexts. She later secured a paid IT support role at a local school, earning 250,000 UGX monthly. But her impact did not stop there.

Driven by a desire to uplift her community, Fahimah began training students and teachers in digital skills across Kassanda schools Under Asante Africa Foundation partnership. Looking at the challenges in her area of connecting to the internet and accessing internet related services, launched a digital internet and printing hub to provide these services and is at the take off stage. Her initiative is helping schools access educational resources and empowering youth to embrace technology.

"I used to think the internet was only for the rich and educated. Now I use it to solve problems." she says.

Fahima's story embodies DEEP's mission: empowering youth to become skills, confident, and capable of change in their communities.



By embedding computer studies into education, Uganda is signaling its recognition that literacy today must prepare citizens for global competitiveness.

Bridging the Gap:

Uganda's Progress and Challenges in Adult Literacy



The primary beneficiaries of the ICOLEW program are low-literate, neo-literate, and semi-literate youth and adults, particularly women and marginalized groups.

Uganda has made significant strides in improving adult literacy rates, with the national average reaching 80.59% in 2022, up from 76.53% in 2018.

This progress reflects the government's commitment to enhancing education and empowering its citizens. However, challenges persist, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized groups.

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, in collaboration with DVV International, has implemented the Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (ICOLEW) program. ICOLEW integrates literacy with livelihoods and life skills, targeting low-literate youth and adults. The program operates through Community Learning Centres (CLCs), which serve as hubs for education, skills training, and community development. These centres are designed to stimulate demand for and sustain continuous and lifelong learning in communities.

The ICOLEW program was piloted in 2016 in Namayingo district, covering two sub-counties: Buyinja and Banda. The pilot phase targeted two parishes in each sub-county: Gondohera, Syanyonja, Buwoya, and Lutolo. Following the success of the pilot, the program has been expanded to other districts, with plans for nationwide rollout. The government is investing approximately 22 million euros by 2030 to strengthen literacy, skills training, and community empowerment in rural areas.

The primary beneficiaries of the ICOLEW program are low-literate, neo-literate, and semi-literate youth and adults, particularly women and marginalized groups. These individuals often face barriers to education due to cultural norms, economic constraints, and limited access to formal education.

By providing community-based learning opportunities, ICOLEW aims to empower these individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to improve their livelihoods and contribute to community development.

The curriculum of the ICOLEW program is designed to be flexible and context-specific, addressing the unique needs of each community. It includes modules on functional literacy, numeracy, life skills, and vocational training. Facilitators are trained to deliver these modules using participatory and learner-centred approaches, ensuring that the learning process is inclusive and engaging. Additionally, the program incorporates elements of financial literacy and entrepreneurship, equipping learners with the tools to start and manage small businesses.

Despite the successes of the ICOLEW program, several challenges hinder its effectiveness. Limited infrastructure and resources in rural areas pose significant obstacles to the establishment and operation of Community Learning Centres.

Additionally, there is a shortage of trained facilitators, which affects the quality of instruction. Cultural attitudes towards adult education, particularly for women, can also limit participation. Economic constraints further exacerbate these challenges, as many potential learners are unable to afford the costs associated with education.

The ICOLEW program has had a positive impact on the communities it serves. Learners have reported improvements in literacy and numeracy skills, increased confidence, and enhanced economic opportunities. For instance, in Namayingo district, participants have started small businesses, leading to improved household incomes and greater community cohesion. These success stories highlight the transformative potential of adult education programs like ICOLEW.

The Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (ICOLEW) program represents a significant effort by the Ugandan government to address adult illiteracy and empower communities through



ICOLEW integrates literacy with livelihoods and life skills, targeting low-literate youth and adults. The program operates through Community Learning Centres (CLCs), which serve as hubs for education, skills training, and community development.

education. While challenges remain, the program's focus on functional literacy, skills development, and community engagement offers a promising model for adult education in Uganda. Continued investment and support are essential to ensure the program's sustainability and to expand its reach to underserved populations.



The ICOLEW program has had a positive impact on the communities it serves. Learners have reported improvements in literacy and numeracy skills, increased confidence, and enhanced economic opportunities.



Building Tomorrow:

Empowering Communities, Transforming Education

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One of Building Tomorrow's flagship programs is "Roots to Rise," a foundational learning initiative that focuses on improving literacy and numeracy skills among young learners.

In the heart of Uganda, where educational resources are scarce and infrastructure is limited, Building Tomorrow stands as a beacon of hope. Founded in 2006, this nonprofit organization is committed to providing inclusive, quality education to children in underserved communities across the country.

A Vision for Education

Building Tomorrow envisions a world where every child has access to a safe, permanent, and local place to learn. Their mission is to mobilize communities to support thriving schools that are effectively managed, accessible to all children, and committed to producing positive student outcomes. This

vision is brought to life through a holistic approach that combines infrastructure development, community engagement, and educational innovation.

One of Building Tomorrow's flagship programs is "Roots to Rise," a foundational learning initiative that focuses on improving literacy and numeracy skills among young learners. This program groups students according to their learning levels, allowing for targeted instruction that meets each child's unique needs. By employing interactive teaching methods and community-based learning, Roots to Rise has significantly enhanced educational outcomes in the regions it serves.

Recognizing the potential of Uganda's youth, Building Tomorrow recruits and trains university graduates to become Fellows. These Fellows are deployed to rural and underserved schools, where they work alongside teachers, students, and community members to improve learning outcomes, build school leadership capacity, and enroll out-of-school children. Through their two-year term, Fellows play a pivotal role in transforming schools into thriving educational hubs.

Central to Building Tomorrow's success is the involvement of Community Education Volunteers (CEVs). These local residents are trained to support learning efforts, recruit out-of-school children, and mobilize community support for education. By empowering community members to take an active role in education, Building Tomorrow ensures that its programs are sustainable and deeply rooted in local contexts.

Tomorrow is Now: Scaling Impact through Policy Engagement

In its commitment to creating systemic change, Building Tomorrow launched the "Tomorrow is Now" program. This initiative collaborates with government officials and local leaders to scale successful educational models, such as Roots to Rise and Community Education Volunteers, across districts. By building the capacity of local governments to support inclusive education, Building Tomorrow aims to create lasting educational reforms that extend beyond its direct interventions.

Since its inception, Building Tomorrow has made significant strides in improving education in Uganda:

Schools Built: 87 primary schools constructed in underserved communities.

Learners Enrolled: Over 650,000 learners enrolled in Roots to Rise literacy and numeracy programs.



Despite its successes, Building Tomorrow faces challenges such as limited funding, infrastructural constraints, and the need for continuous community engagement.



Community Education

Volunteers: 17,638 CEVs recruited to support learning efforts.

Fellows Trained: 650 recent university graduates trained as Building Tomorrow Fellows.

These achievements underscore the organization's commitment to transforming education through community-powered initiatives.

Despite its successes, Building Tomorrow faces challenges such as limited funding, infrastructural constraints, and the need for continuous community engagement. To address these challenges, the organization is focusing on strengthening partnerships with

local governments, expanding its programs to reach more communities, and advocating for policies that support inclusive education.

Building Tomorrow exemplifies the power of community-driven change in transforming education. By empowering local communities, investing in youth leadership, and advocating for systemic reforms, the organization is paving the way for a brighter future for Uganda's children. As they continue their work, Building Tomorrow remains steadfast in its belief that education is not just a right but a powerful tool for social change.



Promoting Literacy in the Digital Age

Uganda's ICT Clubs and Innovation Hubs leading the way

As the world commemorates International Literacy Day (ILD) 2025 under the theme “Promoting Literacy for a World in Transition: Building the Foundation for Sustainable and Peaceful Societies”, Uganda is already demonstrating practical ways of aligning with this call. Through the rise of ICT Clubs in schools and the establishment of ICT Innovation Hubs across the country,



The National ICT Innovation Hub in Nakawa is an ideal place of opportunity for individuals and businesses in the ICT sector.

young Ugandans are gaining the digital literacy, creativity, and collaborative skills needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

In Uganda, literacy is no longer confined to the ability to read and write. With technology reshaping

every sector, digital literacy has become a core component of education and empowerment. ICT Clubs in secondary schools, supported by partners such as the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) and the Kisubi Associated Writers' Agency (KAWA)

are pioneering this transformation.

At Nyangahya Community Secondary School in Masindi, for example, the launch of an ICT Club in June 2025 opened doors for students to explore coding, responsible internet use, and digital problem-solving. As one student put it, “Now we know ICT is not just about typing it’s about creating, solving problems, and even starting projects that can serve our communities.”

These clubs are fostering functional literacy in the digital era, nurturing a generation of critical thinkers and innovators who can apply knowledge to real-world challenges.

Beyond schools, Uganda’s growing ecosystem of ICT Innovation Hubs has emerged as a key driver of inclusive digital transformation. The National ICT Innovation Hub in Nakawa, for instance, has trained over 6,500 youth in digital skills and entrepreneurship since its revamp in 2024. Regional hubs at Soroti, Kabale, and Muni universities are extending similar opportunities to young innovators outside Kampala.

Private-sector spaces like Innovation Village, Outbox Hub, Hive Colab, and TechBuzz Hub are also connecting youth with global networks, mentors, and investors. These hubs demonstrate how technology and partnerships can bridge gaps in employment, empower young people, and embed innovation into Uganda’s development journey.

The impact of these initiatives goes beyond digital skills—they are equipping youth to create livelihoods, contribute to national service delivery, and innovate for community resilience. Systems like the Parish Development Management Information System (PDMIS) and ePosta have already shown how youth-led solutions can improve government efficiency and accessibility.

By combining traditional literacy with digital fluency, Uganda is preparing its youth to navigate transitions in education, employment, and civic participation.

International Literacy Day emphasizes that literacy is the foundation for sustainable and empowered societies. Uganda’s ICT Clubs and Innovation Hubs embody this message by: Expanding the meaning of literacy to include digital knowledge and responsible technology use, Building partnerships between government, schools, universities, and the private sector, Empowering young people not only as consumers of knowledge

but as creators and solution builders.

Uganda’s experience offers a powerful lesson: promoting literacy in today’s world means embracing digital tools, fostering innovation, and building partnerships that put youth at the center of transformation. With ICT Clubs and Innovation Hubs lighting the path, the country is proving that literacy in the digital age is not just about learning, it’s about evolving with the times.



Amugu Secondary School Launches ICT Club with Hands-On Training in Digital Skills

Beyond schools, Uganda’s growing ecosystem of ICT Innovation Hubs has emerged as a key driver of inclusive digital transformation. The National ICT Innovation Hub in Nakawa, for instance, has trained over 6,500 youth in digital skills and entrepreneurship since its revamp in 2024.



ICT club - St Kizito High School Namugongo



Harnessing Digital Tools for Social-Emotional Learning in Yumbe and Obongi

This year's International Literacy Day theme, "Promoting Literacy in the Digital Era," reminds us that literacy today goes beyond reading and writing; it is about equipping learners with the skills to thrive in an increasingly digital, interconnected world. At Literacy and Adult Basic Education (LBE), we are putting this into practice through our implementation, one of the most notable being our partnership with Sesame Workshop under the Welcome Sesame initiative.

Welcome Sesame unites programs around the globe with a shared goal: delivering early learning and nurturing care to young children and caregivers affected by crisis. At 26 of LBE's Home Learning Centres (HLCs), 13 in Yumbe and 13 in Obongi, socio-emotional learning is seamlessly integrated into children's daily routines.

One of the most powerful tools is the use of Welcome Sesame videos, which help children learn to express emotions, build empathy, and strengthen resilience while also supporting numeracy and oral literacy skills. To ensure inclusivity, the videos are available in five languages: English, Kakwa Koboko (Uganda), Kakwa Kuku (South Sudan), Aringati, and Arabic, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the project areas. But videos are just one method. The Welcome Sesame curriculum also incorporates drawing feelings, self-regulation posters, interactive numeracy and oral literacy activities, providing multiple pathways for children to engage with age-appropriate, culturally relevant content.



LBE staff trained in Welcome Sesame content.

Between February 2024 and August 2025, attendance at our centres grew by over 42%, clear evidence that when learning is fun and supported with digital tools, children are eager to show up and stay engaged," states Derrick Kau, LBE's Welcome Sesame Project Coordinator.

The impact has been remarkable: children find the sessions more entertaining and less tiring than conventional methods, they better understand lessons delivered in their own language, and the cartoon format keeps them eager to attend regularly and retain what they learn.

"Between February 2024 and August 2025, attendance at our centres grew by over 42%, clear evidence that when learning is fun and supported with digital tools, children are eager to show up and stay engaged," states Derrick Kau, LBE's Welcome Sesame Project Coordinator.

Beyond Welcome Sesame, LBE is also steadily expanding its adoption of digital tools to enhance learning outcomes. We are empowering Young Facilitators (YFs) with access to computers and digital learning tools, including PhET simulations

that help them prepare for their examinations while strengthening their facilitation skills. In addition, financial literacy content packaged as videos is used to support Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), building caregivers' and parent-support groups' confidence to manage their resources and grow economically in an increasingly digital world.

By combining technology with hands-on, community-driven approaches, LBE is preparing children and caregivers in refugee-hosting and crisis-affected areas not only to read and count, but also to grow emotionally, socially, and economically. Together with Sesame Workshop, we are demonstrating that when literacy, creativity, and technology come together, learning becomes truly transformative for every child.

The Soroti University ICT Innovation Hub was launched in March 2024 and now provides students and the wider community with access to digital tools, innovation space, and mentorship.



Uganda's ICT Innovation Hubs:

Empowering Youth through Technology and Partnerships

Hubs are designed to create solutions aligned with Uganda's Digital Transformation Roadmap, directly addressing the challenges facing young people who are most affected by unemployment.

Uganda is steadily positioning itself as a hub for digital transformation in Africa, with a growing ecosystem of innovation spaces dedicated to nurturing young innovators, entrepreneurs, and developers. Supported by both government and private sector players, these hubs are more than just buildings with internet connections; they are centers of creativity, mentorship, and partnerships that place young people at the forefront of technological progress.

As the world marks International Youth Day under the theme of technology and partnerships, Uganda's network of ICT innovation hubs demonstrates how

collaboration between government, academia, and private stakeholders is creating opportunities for young people to build sustainable futures.

The National ICT Innovation Hub – Nakawa

The flagship **National ICT Innovation Hub** in Nakawa, Kampala, was established by the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance and is operated by the National Information Technology Authority-Uganda (NITA-U). Revamped in 2024, the hub now offers state-of-the-art facilities including training labs, a digital fabrication lab, meeting rooms, and co-working spaces.

According to official figures, since



Makerere University Business School - MUBS | Entrepreneurship Incubation and Innovation Centre

its relaunch the hub has hosted **2,825 events, 751 business meetings, and trained more than 6,500 individuals** in digital skills and entrepreneurship. Youth engagement has increased by over **190%**, reflecting its growing role as a launchpad for young innovators.

During the launch of the revamped hub, State Minister for ICT Joyce Nabbosa Ssebugwawo highlighted its importance in addressing youth unemployment, noting that Uganda has over 9.3 million young people currently disengaged from the workforce. By supporting innovation-driven entrepreneurship, the hub is providing young people with pathways into employment and enterprise creation.

Regional ICT Innovation Hubs

To ensure digital opportunities are not limited to the capital city, the Ministry of ICT through the National ICT Initiatives Support Program (NIISP) has supported the establishment of **regional ICT innovation hubs**. In the 2021/22 financial year, the government provided UGX 750 million to Soroti University, Kabale University, and



The Innovation Village - Jinja Chapter Located on Main Street, the Innovation Village is a destination entrepreneurs call home.

Muni University, each receiving UGX 250 million to set up innovation spaces.

The Soroti University ICT Innovation Hub was launched in March 2024 and now provides students and the wider community with access to digital tools, innovation space, and mentorship. The hubs are intended to increase ICT uptake not only in higher education but also in business and professional services, driving job creation at the local level.

Permanent Secretary Dr. Aminah

Zawedde explained that these hubs are designed to create solutions aligned with Uganda's Digital Transformation Roadmap, directly addressing the challenges facing young people who are most affected by unemployment.

Private Sector and University-Based Hubs

Alongside government-led initiatives, several private and university-based hubs play a vital role in Uganda's innovation ecosystem:

- **Innovation Village**, with branches in Kampala, Gulu, Jinja, and Mbarara, connects startups to global partners such as Google, Mastercard Foundation, and UNDP. It also manages MoTIV Creative Space and The 97 Fund, which invests in scalable technology solutions.
- **Makerere Innovation and Incubation Centre (MIIC)** provides a bridge between academia and industry, helping students commercialize research-based innovations.
- **Hive Colab**, Uganda's pioneer innovation hub founded in 2010, focuses on mobile app development, social innovation, and supporting women in technology.
- **Outbox Hub** supports startups in fintech, education, health, and agriculture while running coding bootcamps and partnering with Google Developer Groups.
- **TechBuzz Hub** in Ntinda targets young entrepreneurs and graduates, offering coaching, business model validation, and investor connections.
- The **Stanbic Business Incubator** also plays a role by supporting SMEs through digital financial literacy and e-commerce training.

From Ideas to Impact

Innovation hubs are not only about ideas — they are about tangible results. Several systems developed with government support through NIISP are now in use by public institutions. These include the **Parish Development Management Information System (PDMIS)**, which tracks data under the Parish Development Model; **ePosta**, which has digitized postal services; and the **Electronic Government Procurement (eGP) system**, which streamlines public procurement.

Such outcomes demonstrate how youth-led innovation can directly improve government service delivery and national development.



Why These Hubs Matter

Uganda's ICT hubs matter because they tackle some of the country's most pressing challenges: high youth unemployment, limited access to resources, and gaps in digital skills. By creating spaces for collaboration, they empower young people to become not just job seekers but job creators. They also strengthen partnerships between government, private companies, universities, and development partners.

As Uganda moves toward a knowledge-based economy, these hubs represent a blueprint for inclusive digital growth. They are spaces where creativity meets opportunity, where young Ugandans gain the tools and mentorship

to shape their future, and where technology becomes a driver of national transformation.

Conclusion

The story of Uganda's ICT innovation hubs is ultimately a story about the power of young people and the partnerships that support them. From the Nakawa hub to regional universities and private innovation spaces, a digital ecosystem is emerging that enables youth to lead the way in building solutions for local and global challenges.

As the world reflects on the role of youth in driving technology and partnerships, Uganda provides a clear example of how investing in young innovators today is investing in the country's future.



An aerial view of Malakal town in South Sudan

Literacy in the Digital Era:

Lessons from Malakal

In January 2020, I travelled to Malakal in Upper Nile State, South Sudan. What was meant to be a short work assignment unexpectedly became a long stay when the COVID-19 pandemic struck and the world went into lockdown. Stranded in one of the most remote places I had ever seen, I quickly came face-to-face with the fragility of education, how easily it can be disrupted when schools, teachers, and libraries are suddenly out of reach.

In Malakal, access to books was almost nonexistent. Children and youth were eager to learn, but the resources were painfully scarce. Classrooms stood still, and knowledge felt locked away behind closed borders. Yet, even in this desert of information, there was a thirst for learning that could not be extinguished.

The only tool I had was my smartphone. At first, it seemed insignificant compared to the needs around me. But soon, it transformed into a lifeline, a portable classroom, a library in my pocket, a bridge between isolation and opportunity. I began downloading offline reading

materials, children's stories, and simple guides that could be shared. In the evenings, I would gather small groups under the dim light and share what I had. Sometimes, I read aloud to them, bringing stories to life. Other times, I showed them how to use the device to discover new English words, practice basic math, or access simple health information.

What began as an improvised act of service became a profound lesson in what literacy means today. Literacy in the 21st century is no longer only about reading and writing, it is about connecting people to knowledge wherever they are, by whatever means are available. Digital tools have stretched the definition of literacy to include adaptability, creativity, and resilience.

Malakal showed me that even in the remotest corners of the world, digital literacy can break barriers. A single device, in the right hands, can carry an entire library and ignite curiosity. It can transform idle evenings into classrooms and replace despair with hope. For the young people I met, learning became not just an activity but a form of resilience in the face of crisis.

As we mark International Literacy Day, my experience in Malakal stands as a reminder that literacy is a living, evolving practice. It demands that we think beyond traditional classrooms and bookshelves and embrace the tools of our time. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed how vulnerable education systems can be, but it also revealed the power of innovation when communities refuse to give up on learning.

Literacy today must be about access and inclusion. It must bridge divides, whether they are caused by geography, poverty, or crisis. More importantly, it must nurture the courage to learn under any circumstances. My smartphone may have seemed small in the grand scheme of things, but in Malakal, it became proof that knowledge has no borders.

I carry that lesson with me still: that literacy in the digital era is not just a skill, but a lifeline, a tool for survival, growth, and hope in the most uncertain of times.

By Wadidi Geofrey



Investing in Literacy:

Why boosted Student Loans fuel Uganda's Digital Literacy Revolution

But as numbers rise, so do expectations. The demand for student loans has tripled, and government pledges to increase future funding are encouraging.

As Uganda gears up for International Literacy Day 2025, the recent New Vision report that over 2,000 students will benefit from government-backed student loans comes at an opportune moment. This expansion under the Higher Education Students Financing Scheme (HESFS) underscores that writing, coding, and critical thinking, and access to tertiary education go hand in hand in a digitally literate society.

According to the latest data from HESFS, this academic year marks a significant leap: 6,661 applications were received up from fewer than 2,000 last year with 1,838 students successfully awarded loans from a UGX 7.25 billion fund.

Notably, female representation among beneficiaries improved to 43%, exceeding the prior eligibility threshold of 30%

This move signals more than just financial support, it's a strategic investment in building digital literacy. Access to higher education equips youth with vital skills for the modern world including navigating information, using technology meaningfully, and innovating responsibly.

But as numbers rise, so do expectations. The demand for student loans has tripled, and government pledges to increase future funding are encouraging. Still, achieving comprehensive digital literacy means doing more. And below



are three Imperatives that could be monumental in closing the Literacy Gap

1. Broaden Digital Access and Not Just Enrollment

Loans must facilitate not just tuition but also access to technology: reliable internet, devices, and digital libraries. The learning gains of higher education go unrealized when students lack the tools to engage with digital resources.

2. Prioritize Gender and Regional Equity

Encouragingly, women now account for nearly half of the loan recipients. Sustaining that momentum requires outreach to underserved regions, female students, and students with disabilities especially in STEM fields, where representation lags

3. Sustainability through Repayment and Revolving Funds

The student loan scheme must remain sustainable. Encouraging timely repayments through flexible

plans or income-contingent structures ensures future generations can access the same opportunities.

International Literacy Day goes beyond celebrating the people's ability to writing and reading, it signals a commitment to lifelong learning, innovation, and equitable opportunity. By linking student loan access to digital literacy development, Uganda frames higher education as a pillar for national digital transformation.

Higher education should not be a privilege reserved for those who can

afford it. When tuition hurdles fall, we unlock the potential of young minds to code, create, and lead. But to fully honour ILD's digital literacy mandate, we must ensure that financial assistance reaches every motivated student.

As the nation reflects under this year's ILD banner, let's celebrate the loan scheme's expansion and advocate for even more support. Literacy in the digital age means university access is just the beginning. What follows must be innovation, inclusion, and a generation empowered to shape Uganda's digital future.

International Literacy Day goes beyond celebrating the people's ability to writing and reading, it signals a commitment to lifelong learning, innovation, and equitable opportunity.



Nsamizi Training Institute of Social Development:

Advancing Literacy and Social Transformation in Uganda

Since its establishment in 1953, Nsamizi Training Institute of Social Development (NTISD) has stood as a cornerstone of Uganda's pursuit for inclusive social progress. As the only public tertiary institution specialized in social development interventions, Nsamizi has consistently provided professional capacity building through training, education, research, and community outreach. Its mandate is rooted in advancing literacy and empowerment, building resilient communities, and shaping a workforce dedicated to Uganda's sustainable social and economic transformation.

Operating under the Department of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET-OM), Nsamizi continues to pioneer unique programmes that blend academic excellence with practical interventions. The Institute is deeply committed to producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also socially conscious and grounded in community service. This student-community centred approach is what sets NTISD apart: every learning experience is designed with a deliberate connection to the realities of Ugandan communities.

Over the decades, the Institute has evolved into a hub of innovation, research, and outreach, responding

to pressing challenges such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, displacement, and illiteracy. Its work has gone beyond the classroom, extending into vulnerable communities across the country. Whether through social development initiatives, livelihood programmes, or adult literacy efforts, NTISD has remained a trusted partner in government and community-driven interventions.

The institution's reach is also a testimony to its growth. While the main campus is based in Mpigi Town Council, Nsamizi has established satellite training centres in Kampala, Gulu, Lira, Adjumani, and Kasese. This geographical spread allows the Institute to serve diverse populations, including urban and rural communities as well as refugees and displaced persons in settlements. By decentralising training and outreach, NTISD ensures that access to social development education and literacy opportunities is not limited to a few but extended nationwide.

On International Literacy Day, Nsamizi's role takes on even greater significance. Literacy is more than the ability to read and write; it is the foundation for lifelong learning, participation in society, and access to opportunities. In Uganda, where many still struggle with low literacy levels, particularly among women, youth, and marginalised groups, Nsamizi's

interventions provide a lifeline. The Institute's training and outreach programmes do not simply transfer knowledge; they empower individuals to transform their lives, families, and communities.

In embracing innovation, NTISD also recognises the importance of linking literacy with technology and modern approaches. The world is rapidly changing, and social development workers must be equipped with 21st-century skills to address complex issues. Nsamizi has therefore integrated digital literacy, research skills, and participatory methodologies into its curriculum, ensuring that its graduates are not only locally relevant but also globally competitive.

Looking ahead, Nsamizi Training Institute of Social Development remains steadfast in its vision: to be a premier institution that drives social and economic transformation through training, research, and outreach. As Uganda and the world commemorate International Literacy Day, Nsamizi's journey serves as a reminder that true development is people-centred and literacy-driven. The Institute's legacy, rooted in decades of commitment to education and community empowerment, continues to illuminate pathways toward a more inclusive, literate, and socially just Uganda.

Urban Refugee:

Code of Hope

Forget not the refugee woman, in the endlessly changing world.

Displaced with limited resources, no communication, she remains with nothing but hope.

For knowledge, independence and stronger connections to her new urban home, she struggles silently.

She yearns for learning the strange language to fit in the “new normal” world home.

A new story unfolds through digital learning, as a technological tool for hope and transformation.

An awakening dream in a new and changed world opens;

Swift and quick, the strange language learned beneath the sun, a skill acquired through a window of light in a tap, a swipe, and click.

Digital learning can empower a refugee woman through online classes, inspiring programs including global news to mention a few.

Today our voices rise, to break the silent wall and let her become the master weaver of her fate, with digital learning wisdom for her personal transformation.

Let every screen import an opportunity to lift a refugee woman’s spirit.

With joined hands literacy can be promoted in this digital era, as a right to the refugee woman, and a route to world integration.

MaryClare Nyirenda Katusabe

YMCA Kampala



Unlocking Development Pathways for **Uganda's Girls** through Digital Literacy and Higher Education

COLAU aims to establish and maintain a network of such libraries throughout the country and cooperates for the purpose with other national organizations with similar interests as well as with international organizations that are concerned with the promotion of literacy for development.

As Uganda commemorates International Literacy Day (ILD) 2025 under the theme “**Promoting Literacy in the Digital Era,**” the message is clear: literacy today is more than the ability to read and write. It is the power to access information, leverage technology, and create opportunities that transform lives. In Uganda, where teenage pregnancy continues to derail futures and poverty limits educational access, digital literacy combined with inclusive education financing offers a real chance to rewrite the story.

Teenage pregnancy remains a national crisis. The Uganda Demographic and Health Survey shows that nearly one in five girls aged 15–19 is already a mother. Behind this sobering statistic lie complex realities:

- **Poverty:** Many families under economic strain push girls into early marriages or transactional relationships for survival.
- **Limited reproductive health knowledge:** Lack of accurate, accessible information leaves adolescents vulnerable to unplanned pregnancies.
- **Cultural norms and gender inequality:** In some communities, marriage is still prioritized over education for girls.
- **Weak support systems:** Limited parental guidance and mentorship reduce the chances for young girls to make informed, empowered choices.

The result? Thousands of girls are forced out of classrooms each year, narrowing their prospects and deepening cycles of poverty.

Education is one of the most effective tools to disrupt this cycle. Research consistently shows that girls who stay in school are less likely to become teenage mothers and more likely to contribute productively to the economy. Completing secondary or higher education delays early marriage,



reduces poverty risks, and equips young women with the skills to lead independent lives.

This is where digital literacy becomes a lifeline. Online platforms, mobile apps, and social media can deliver vital reproductive health information, provide peer mentorship, and inspire girls to continue learning even outside traditional classrooms. Organizations such as **Reach A Hand Uganda** already use digital campaigns to engage youth on life skills, while initiatives like the **UNFPA HackLab** build innovative solutions to address teenage pregnancy at community level.

The government has also taken steps to expand higher education opportunities. This year, more than **2,000 students** are expected to benefit from the Higher Education Students' Financing Scheme (HESFS), a support for many who would otherwise struggle to raise tuition fees. With online applications and broader outreach, the scheme is increasingly accessible to disadvantaged learners.

For girls, especially young mothers, this kind of financial support is crucial. It means that motherhood does not have to mark the end of

their educational journey. With tuition covered, they can return to school, pursue careers, and rebuild their futures.

Combining digital literacy with expanded student financing creates a powerful safety net:

- **Prevention and support:** Digital tools can educate girls before pregnancy, while also offering support and reintegration resources for young mothers.
- **Continuity and opportunity:** Student loan schemes ensure that financial barriers do not permanently derail ambitions.

However, to meet the growing demand, **Uganda must invest more**. Student financing should be scaled up to reach more learners, while digital initiatives need to be extended beyond urban centers into rural communities where the need is greatest.

The way forward is clear:

1. **Expand student loan coverage** to ensure every capable learner—especially girls—has a chance at higher education.

2. **Strengthen community learning centres (CLCs)** as digital hubs where girls and women can access educational resources and vocational training.

3. **Localize digital content** by developing apps, videos, and resources in local languages for inclusivity.

4. **Build mentorship networks** that connect girls with role models both physically and digitally, guiding them through critical life stages.

Literacy in the Digital Age

As the country joins the rest of the world in commemorating the ILD, Uganda must embrace literacy not only as the ability to read and write but as a comprehensive skill set: digital fluency, educational access, and economic empowerment. By keeping girls in classrooms, financing their higher education, and equipping them with digital tools, Uganda can reduce teenage pregnancies, break poverty cycles, and prepare its youth for a future where knowledge is the true foundation of development.

Uganda Literacy and Adult Learners Association (ULALA): Advocating for Adult Education

In the bustling heart of Kampala, where the hum of daily life often drowns out the voices of the underserved, the Uganda Literacy and Adult Learners Association (ULALA) stands as a steadfast advocate for adult education. Established in 2000, ULALA is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting literacy and lifelong learning among adults across Uganda. With its headquarters situated on Kyadondo Road in Bakesa, Kampala, ULALA has become a pivotal force in the country's educational landscape.

ULALA's mission is clear: to empower adults through literacy, enabling them to improve their livelihoods, participate fully in society, and contribute to national development. The organization's vision aligns with the global commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. ULALA recognizes that adult education is not merely about reading and writing; it's about equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of modern life.

At the core of ULALA's approach is the belief that literacy is a fundamental human right. The organization works tirelessly to dismantle the barriers that prevent adults, particularly women and marginalized groups, from accessing education. Through community-based programs, ULALA provides flexible learning opportunities that cater to the diverse needs of adult



learners. These programs encompass functional literacy, numeracy, vocational skills training, and civic education, all designed to enhance the personal and professional development of participants.

One of ULALA's notable initiatives is its advocacy for adult education policy reform. The organization has been instrumental in lobbying for the recognition of adult education within national development frameworks. ULALA's efforts contributed to the development of the National Adult Literacy Strategic Investment Plan (NALSIP), which outlines the government's commitment to improving adult literacy rates. By engaging with policymakers, civil society organizations, and

development partners, ULALA ensures that adult education remains a priority on the national agenda.

In addition to policy advocacy, ULALA plays a crucial role in capacity building for adult educators. The organization offers training programs that enhance the skills of literacy instructors, enabling them to deliver effective and learner-centered education. ULALA also provides resources and support to community-based learning centers, ensuring that they are equipped to meet the needs of adult learners. Through these initiatives, ULALA fosters a network of dedicated educators who are committed to lifelong learning.

ULALA's impact extends beyond



the classroom. The organization actively engages in public awareness campaigns to promote the importance of adult education. Through events such as the International Adult Literacy Learners and Tutors Conference, ULALA brings together stakeholders from various sectors to discuss challenges and share best practices in adult education. These platforms facilitate dialogue and collaboration, leading to innovative solutions that address the barriers to adult learning.

Despite its achievements, ULALA faces challenges in its mission to promote adult education. Limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-cultural factors continue to hinder the expansion of adult

literacy programs. However, ULALA remains undeterred, continually seeking partnerships and innovative approaches to overcome these obstacles. The organization's resilience and commitment to its cause serve as an inspiration to all who believe in the transformative power of education.

Looking ahead, ULALA envisions a Uganda where every adult has the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to lead a fulfilling life. The organization is dedicated to expanding its reach, enhancing the quality of its programs, and advocating for policies that support adult education. ULALA's work underscores the belief that literacy is not just about reading

and writing; it's about unlocking the potential within individuals and communities to drive sustainable development.

In conclusion, the Uganda Literacy and Adult Learners Association stands as a testament to the power of education in transforming lives. Through its unwavering commitment to adult education, ULALA continues to empower individuals, strengthen communities, and contribute to the realization of a more literate and equitable society. As Uganda strives to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, organizations like ULALA play a pivotal role in ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of education and lifelong learning.

Uganda Approves SUICOLEW Project:

Advancing Literacy, Skills and Wealth Creation



By Imelda Kyaringabira Engabi, Principal Literacy Officer/ National Programme Coordinator, Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation.

The Government of Uganda has taken another bold step in advancing inclusive education and community development. Through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, government has approved the Support to the Implementation of the Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (SUICOLEW) Project 2025–2030. This milestone reaffirms Government's commitment to empowering citizens through literacy, lifelong learning, and practical

skills development as a foundation for sustainable livelihoods.

The Support to the Implementation of Community Learning for Wealth Creation (SUICOLEW) project is a flagship project under Fourth National Development Plan (NDP IV) for Human Capital Development, under the sub programme of Community Mobilization and mindset Change. By strengthening Community Learning Centres (CLCs) as hubs for literacy, skills training, and wealth creation,



Partners from DVV international paying a visit to the ICOLEW learners at their Community Learning Centre in Namayingo District.

the project directly addresses the challenge of low adult literacy while promoting employability, entrepreneurship, and inclusive community development. Its innovative approach of integrating literacy, numeracy, with vocational, financial literacy under Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) as well as digital skills; the project will equip women, youth, and all vulnerable groups with the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to participate in a modern, knowledge-driven economy. Through this, SUICOLEW not only improves individual livelihoods but also contributes to community development, increased productivity, social transformation, and the realization of Uganda's vision for sustainable human development.

Building on Success

Since its launch in 2016, the

Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (SUICOLEW) programme has transformed the lives of thousands of Ugandans—particularly women and young people—in the pilot districts of Namayingo, Nwoya, Mpigi, Iganga, Mityana, and Rukungiri. The initiative combines literacy with practical vocational, entrepreneurial, and livelihood skills, enabling learners not only to read, write, and count, but also to improve their economic prospects. Supported by the German Adult Education Association (DVV International), the pilot phase saw 5,051 learners graduate, including 3,838 women and 1,213 men.

Unlike traditional literacy programmes, ICOLEW is uniquely focused on linking learning to wealth creation, equipping communities to turn knowledge into better household incomes and sustainable

development. The 2025–2030 phase will roll out the SUICOLEW programme to more districts across Uganda. The aim is to reach more communities, strengthen integrated service delivery at Community Learning Centres (CLCs), and ensure that every Ugandan, regardless of age or background, has access to quality literacy and skills training in a “one stop hub”.

An Integrated Approach

ICOLEW is unique because it combines three essential components:

1. **Functional Adult Literacy:** enabling learners to gain reading, writing, and numeracy skills for everyday life and work.
2. **Livelihood Skills:** offering practical training in agriculture both crop and animal, vocational skills such as tailoring, saloon, computer, and other trades that support household incomes.
3. **Income Generating Activities (IGAs) and Financial Literacy:** equipping learners with IGA skills, savings culture, and knowledge to start and manage small Income Generating Activities.
4. **Establishing Community Learning Centres** as “one stop hubs” within the reach of the community members to access integrated services across all sectors.
5. **Integrating digital literacy** to help learners harness and leverage technology for Income Generating Activities (IGAs), farming, and over all access to information on different aspects of life.

Partnerships for Greater Impact

The Government recognizes that literacy and skills development require collective effort. Under



ICOLEW piloting, Government worked collaboratively with the German Adult Education Association (DVV International) and the Line Ministries of Education, Finance, Agriculture, Health, Local government, Water and Environment, Trade and Cooperatives.

The roll out Project will therefore continue to work hand in hand with line Ministries, Departments and Agencies, local governments, Academic Institutions, civil society/ Faith Based organisations, the private sector, development partners and learner's networks. These partnerships will make it possible to provide learners with high-quality training, link them to markets, and connect them to the government strategy of Parish Development Model (PDM) and other government programmes such as Emyooga, Joint Youth Livelihood Project/Uganda Women Enterprises Programme, SENTE, among others.

SUICOLEW will continue to work hand in hand with civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, faith-based institutions and community based organizations at all levels of governance. Partnerships will strengthen community ownership, expand outreach, and maximize the impact of lifelong learning and wealth creation initiatives.

Focus on Quality and Sustainability

To ensure long-term results, SUICOLEW 2025–2030 places strong emphasis on expansion of SUICOLEW programme quality assurance. The project will:

- Renovate and expand 228 Community Learning Centers in 77 Local Governments located in all the regions of Uganda.
- Build the capacity of 7,469 literacy facilitators and 1,232 Technical persons in the SUICOLEW methodology
- Mobilize and enroll 224,070 learners.
- Strengthen monitoring, evaluation, and support supervision systems at all levels of implementation.
- Promote sustainability by linking Community Learning Centres to local government planning, budgeting frameworks and development programmes.
- Encourage communities themselves to take ownership of the centres as vehicles for local development, improve lives and stronger communities.
- Ultimately contribute to the improved literacy rates of the beneficiaries

Alignment with National and Global Goals

The new SUICOLEW phase is fully aligned with Uganda's long-term aspirations as outlined in Vision 2040, the fourth National Development Plan (NDP IV), Parish Development Model and the National Resistance Movement NRM Manifesto 2021-2026. The project also reflects Uganda's international commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on quality education and lifelong learning, SDG 5 on Gender equality, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth and SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities.

Transforming Lives and Communities

As Uganda prepares to roll out the 2025–2030 SUICOLEW Project, its impact is expected to be far-reaching. Learners will not only gain literacy and numeracy skills but will also have the confidence and capacity to start businesses, adopt improved farming methods, manage household finances, embrace digital opportunities and access other development programmes.

The project is therefore more than a literacy programme it is a community transformation model. It unlocks potential, promotes self-reliance, and builds resilience. Ultimately, SUICOLEW is about ensuring that no Ugandan is left behind in the journey towards empowerment, prosperity, and sustainable national development.



Kitengesa Community Library:

Promoting Literacy in the Digital Era

The Kitengesa Community Library in Masaka District, Uganda, was founded in 1999 as a small school-based book collection for Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School. Over time, it has grown into a vibrant center for reading, learning, research, and computer use, now serving both students and the wider

rural community with thousands of books, newspapers, computers, and educational programs.

The library is recognized as a model rural library in Uganda, promoting literacy, education, social inclusion, and local development while also supporting international research. Its Inclusion Program me brought

deaf and hearing students together through sign language and ICT learning. Despite advances in technology, traditional initiatives like Learning Circles remain active. These groups continue to make useful items such as liquid and bar soap, notebooks, and tea-cosies, contributing to practical skills and self-reliance.



Computer training for youth and elders



Gift Day Share

Celebrating Togetherness

Each year, the Gift Day Share unites students, families, partners, and supporters to celebrate generosity and community spirit. The event features children's performances in reading, poetry, drama, and music. Outstanding library users and volunteers are recognized, and partners are appreciated for sustaining the vision.



Health Camps for Teenagers

Among its impactful programs is the Annual Health Camp for Teenagers. These camps address HIV/AIDS awareness, nutrition, adolescent reproductive health, and, more recently, cancer.





**Finnish
Refugee
Council**

Finnish Refugee Council

Helping refugees in Uganda rebuild their lives through basic adult education



Joan Rachael Apio
Communication Officer
Finnish Refugee Council

Uganda currently hosts 1.9 million refugees, mostly from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. While the country is praised for its progressive refugee policies, many refugees still cannot reach their full potential because of illiteracy, limited language skills and low educational level. Without basic literacy skills, many refugees struggle to navigate daily life, access services, or provide for their families.

This is where the Finnish Refugee Council (FRC) steps in. For the past 60 years, FRC has worked with

displaced communities worldwide. In Uganda, it provides basic adult education, among the courses is Functional Adult Literacy (FAL), which equips refugees and host communities with tools to rebuild their lives with dignity.

The FAL courses are using more than ten refugee-spoken local languages and apart from basic reading and writing skills, offer practical knowledge in health, farming, nutrition, life skills, financial matters. Each year, FRC supports roughly 8,000–12,000 learners in literacy.

As next step for learners, business, financial, digital and climate-smart agriculture skill training is offered by FRC so that learning translates into income, helping families reduce dependency on aid. As one learner shared: *“Before if I didn’t work for three days, we went hungry. Today, I know how to plan, save, and invest for tomorrow.”*

Literacy also builds peace. By learning together, refugees and host communities find common ground, while community leaders are trained in human rights, conflict resolution, and access to justice.

FRC’s impact reaches far beyond letters and numbers, transforming classrooms into pathways for dignity, self-reliance, and peace.



Being in the same classroom helped **refugees** in **Nakivale** learn to live together

“I had just crossed the river when a man raised his machete to split my head open,” recalls Mutabazi, a soft-spoken 62-year-old refugee. “His father stopped him and that’s how I survived.” Although Mutabazi survived, that incident birthed fear in him. Which stayed with him even after finding safety in Uganda.

Mutabazi fled Burundi in 2013, during a time when ethnic tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi communities had erupted into violence. It was during this period that he had a near death experience which he narrowly escaped, that left him shaken and mistrustful even in exile.

“I began to fear people. I feared going anywhere, even here in Uganda, I didn’t feel safe and anytime I saw a new face near my home I would be worried.”

It wasn’t until he joined a Functional Adult literacy (FAL) class organized by Finnish Refugee Council (FRC) in Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Western Uganda that things began to shift.



The class brought together people from different ethnic backgrounds including Hutus and Tutsi’s. Although there were tensions between them initially, the fact that they were all in the same class helped them find common ground and ultimately fostered peace between these two communities.

Mutabazi is just one of the more than **180,000 refugees across Uganda’s** refugee settlements who have been impacted by FRC’s adult literacy program. This program uses reading and writing not only

to empower individuals, but also to promote understanding, dialogue, and foster peaceful coexistence in refugee settlements.

He adds that “In this area, we are only two Tutsi families because all those other Tutsi’s who were here before, had to leave because of the tensions. But we have been able to stay here peacefully”

“If not for FRC I would have already left Uganda,” Mutabazi admits. “But sitting in the same classroom with the people I once feared, gave me the courage to stay and build a life with my family.”

Stories like Mutabazi’s are just one example of how learning can lead to lasting peace and why support for these programs remains critical.

To read more about FRC’s work in Uganda, visit:

www.refugeecouncil.fi

**Written By: Joan Rachael Apio-
Finnish Refugee Council**



Stories that Spark Change!

How **Read to Learn** is **Redefining Literacy** in **Uganda**

“When a child opens a book, they don’t just learn letters; they discover courage, compassion, and endless possibility.”

Our Literacy Journey

From playful book clubs to AI-powered apps, Read to Learn Foundation is proving that literacy can be fun, inclusive, and sustainable.

Book Clinics & Clubs – storytelling, debates, spelling bees, art, and creative writing in safe, playful spaces.

Literacy Champions Fellowship training youth to lead literacy at the grassroots.

Authorship Boot Camps nurturing the next generation of storytellers.

Digital Literacy Innovation

The SOMA App – AI-powered, multilingual, with e-books, audiobooks, and interactive games in both international and African languages. Accessible and inclusive for children with disabilities.



Inclusion at the Heart

We integrate Braille books, sign language charts, tactile kits, and disability-friendly storybooks into our programs. Teachers and mentors are trained to make classrooms truly inclusive.

“We don’t just teach literacy. We live it, create it, and share it—one child, one story, one future at a time.”

Sustainability that Inspires

Through the Book Drive Store, our social enterprise:

- Publishes African relatable storybooks aligned to SDGs.
- Runs solar-powered hubs recycling waste into literacy kits.
- Reinvests proceeds into community literacy programs.

This International Day of Literacy, we reaffirm our vision: a world where every child, regardless of background or ability, has the tools to read, learn, and lead.



International Literacy Day

Story Writing Competitions

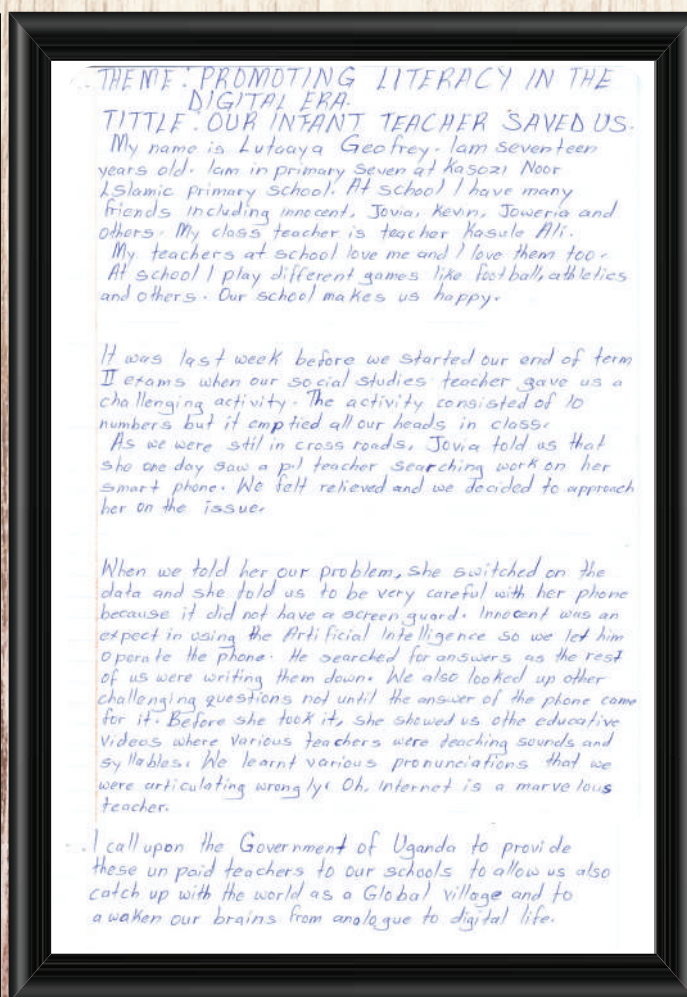
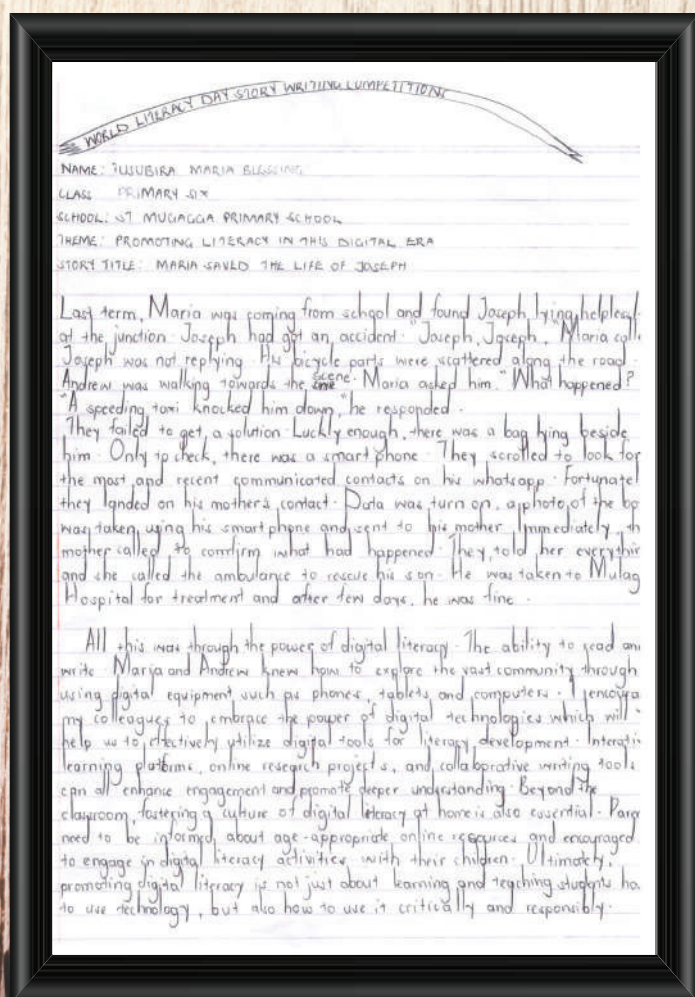
Unbound is a community development organization committed to promoting and safeguarding the rights of children by fostering self-sufficiency through community empowerment and access to quality education.

In its education programs, Unbound promotes the Child-Friendly School Model, a globally recognized approach that responds to children's educational needs. The model helps schools create safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments where children feel secure, valued, and motivated to learn. Such environments not only enhance literacy but also nurture responsibility, creativity, curiosity, and critical thinking—skills that

empower children to perform better academically and to actively contribute to their communities.

In line with this year's International Literacy Day theme, "Promoting Literacy in the Digital Era," Unbound, in collaboration with the Centre Coordinating Tutor, organized Story Writing Competitions. The activity encouraged children to express their creativity, imagination, and perspectives through writing, unlocking their potential and inspiring them to become confident learners and future leaders.

NB: Stories below



Thank you partners for your support towards this year's International Literacy Day



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA



Education for Everyone. Worldwide. Lifelong.





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