

**REVISITING THE LIFE OF THE LATE KATIKKIRO MARTIN LUTHER
NSIBIRWA IN THE LENSES OF MAKERERE UNIVERSITY AT 100
YEARS: THE CONTRIBUTION OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE
ENGENDERING PUBLIC GOODS**

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[Protocol]

It's a great honor and privilege to be invited to deliver the inaugural Annual Nsibirwa Public Lecture in celebration of Makerere University's Centenary. It is befitting that in celebrating 100 years of its existence, the University should choose to remember and honor the life of the late Katikkiro Martin Luther Nsibirwa, a man who served his nation with distinction and who laid down his life in the pursuit of public service and the advancement of the people of Buganda, Uganda and East Africa at large.

I acknowledge the remarks by Hon. Rhoda Kalema and the Chairperson of the University Council.

When I received the invitation, I did not hesitate to reschedule all my other commitments to make the time to be here today. Madam Chairperson, as many people know, Makerere University is my alma mater and my studies and experiences on this hallowed Campus contributed greatly to making me who and what I am today. I was therefore pleased to be given the opportunity to give back, by contributing to the pursuit of knowledge, as well as to connect with the young people who are studying here today.

As I will elaborate later, there are a few points that I would like to invite scholars with greater qualification than myself to ponder, research into and act upon. However, I would also like to start by stating that I stand before you as a graduate of this great establishment! I think I am living proof of what Makerere University can produce. So, if there is a young man or woman in the audience today who has come to listen to this lecture with some uncertainty or self-doubt, I hope seeing me standing here will inspire them to set ambitious goals, as well as to have the dedication and tenacity to see them through! As the Oscar winning actress Lupita Nyong'o once said, *"No matter where you are from, your dreams are valid!"* I hasten to add that her father, Professor Peter Anyang Nyong'o who is the incumbent Governor of Kisumu County in Kenya is also a graduate of this great University.

Madam Chairperson, it would be very discourteous of me if I didn't start by thanking the organisers of this lecture for living up to their name – organisers – and preparing what is very obviously a well-organized event. It is quite obvious that plenty of thought and work have gone on in the background, to enable us have this platform and therefore I thank you.

I also wish to recognise the presence of members of the Nsibirwa Family led by Hon. Rhoda Kalema and the 2nd Deputy Katikkiro and Minister for Finance and Planning in the Kingdom of Buganda, Owekitiibwa Robert Waggwa Nsibirwa. I thank you all for keeping the legacy of Owekitiibwa Martin Luther Nsibirwa alive.

I was asked to speak under the theme of **“Revisiting the Life of the Late Katikkiro Nsibirwa in the Lenses of Makerere @ 100 Years”**, in general, but with particular focus on **“The Contribution of Cultural Institutions in Engendering Public Goods”**. I do not propose to narrate the detailed story of Martin Luther Nsibirwa's life – there isn't sufficient time for that and nor is this the ideal place for a detailed study of what was definitely a very rich and well lived life. However, I think it would be useful to outline some key dates in this great man's life, taken from a biographical essay penned by his daughter the Late Janet Nsibirwa Mdoe as a backdrop to the points that I wish to make today.

Nsibirwa's Life 1883 - 1945

Martin Luther Nsibirwa was born in Kirindi, Bugerere in 1883. This was during the reign of Ssekabaka Muteesa and I am told that Nsibirwa's father, Kiwana was in service of Muteesa I, making canoes for Buganda's naval fleet. For those who are students of history, these were rapidly changing times in this part of the world. Buganda was a native kingdom in expansion mode at this time. Buganda had acquired guns from the Zanzibari Arabs who had come to the court of Muteesa I's father, Ssekabaka Ssuuna II in the 1840's and 1850's. Expansion was occurring at the expense of native neighbors, most especially the Kingdom of Bunyoro. But even as Buganda was expanding, it was also at the centre of competing with Western European imperialist interests.

John Hanning Speke had opined that Nnalubaale, which he named Lake Victoria, was the source of the Nile in 1858. This aroused British interest in controlling Buganda so as to secure its imperial interests in Egypt. It is also worth noting that the Berlin Conference in which the Great European Powers, as they termed themselves, agreed to carve up Africa into different “spheres of influence” took place in 1884 just one year after Nsibirwa was born.

Nsibirwa's life spanned the reign of four Kabakas of Buganda: Mutesa I; Mwanga II; Chwa II and finally Muteesa II. If you look at the situation in Buganda and Africa as a whole, at the time Nsibirwa was born and compare it to the situation that pertained at the time of his death in 1945, you appreciate that he lived in times of drastic and very dramatic change. The kind of change that some of us born after the middle of the 20th Century can only imagine if we watch science fiction movies about Earth invasions by extraterrestrial beings. Yet, as I will discuss later, the leaders of Buganda at that time, including Nsibirwa, used native African knowledge as a compass to navigate the strange and often unsettled waters of this rapidly changing world with an amazing degree of success, and some understandable failures.

Nsibirwa was baptized in 1895 and although he learned to read and write, he did not obtain any formal missionary education. Rather, as was the tradition in those days, when he came of age he was sent to the household (*ekisaakate*) of Katikkiro Apolo Kagawa to serve as a page. Pages were like young apprentices in leadership. They were mentored by their master and learned by seeing and doing. It was practical, hands and eyes on education which echoed Confucius' words "***I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.***" It must not be forgotten that native administration fused the executive and judicial functions. So young men would watch their seniors dispense justice as well as execute and enforce the various programs of the state. The young men emerged from these *Bisakaate* ready for deployment as administrators and military leaders.

Nsibirwa was no exception to this general trend and after being mentored in Kagawa's *Kisakaate* and distinguishing himself by diligent learning and service he was deployed formally as a Gombolola (Sub- County) Chief in Kyaggwe in 1920. He must have done well because two years later, in 1922 he was promoted to the office of Mugerere - a Ssaza (County) Chief for Bugerere. Again, he made a good account of himself and between 1924 and 1925 he was acting Mukwenda, the Ssaza Chief of Ssinga, which was a much larger and more politically as well as economically, important County. He was to return to Bugerere in 1925 only to be appointed the substantive Mukwenda in 1927. Just one year later, in 1928, he was appointed Omuwanika (the Treasurer), one of only three ministerial positions at that time. He held that office for only one year before becoming Katikkiro in 1929. He was to serve as Katikkiro until 1941 when he was forced to resign because of his perceived less than enthusiastic handling of the Namasole Affair – i.e., permitting the marriage of Drusilla Namaganda, mother to Ssekabaka Mutesa II and widow of Ssekabaka Chwa II to a young man called Peter Kigozi.

Nsibirwa was replaced as Katikkiro by Owekitiibwa Samwiri Wamala, a member of the Buganda Lukiiko who was well known for his radical anti-colonial sentiment. Wamala's tenure was short and somewhat restless, owing largely to his difficult relationship with the British Colonial Government. Wamala was forced to resign in 1945 and exiled by the British.

In July 1945 Nsibirwa was re-appointed Katikkiro of Buganda. He was considered a safe pair of hands both by the British and the young Ssekabaka Muteesa II, who had ascended to the throne in 1939. He was to execute his duties for only a few months before being felled by an assassin's bullet at Namirembe Cathedral on the 5th September 1945.

Nsibirwa and Makerere College

Nsibirwa's assassination was shocking to the nation as you can imagine! There was a lot of speculation then about the identity of the assassin or assassins. There was also plenty of speculation about the likely motive. Some thought it might have been something to do with the Namasole Affair. Others speculated that it might be something to do with Nsibirwa's retrenchment of many officials upon his re-appointment as Katikkiro in 1945. But the predominant narrative was that Nsibirwa was killed for his role in acquiring land for the expansion of Makerere College, as it then was. Indeed, a one George William Senkatuka, an ex- King's African Rifles serviceman, was arrested, tried and convicted for Nsibirwa's murder on that basis.

Makerere College was being expanded by the Colonial Government and land was needed. This land was in private hands and when the Government failed to acquire more on a willing buyer – willing seller basis it invited the Buganda Kingdom to exercise compulsory acquisition of the land. Nsibirwa, an accomplished and foresighted administrator, who as you shall recall, had no formal missionary education himself, saw it fit to compulsorily acquire the land. He did this because it was the right and wise thing to do. He did it even though it was unpopular at the time. That was the result of his training and his vast experience as an administrator. He paid for it with his life.

Nsibirwa's name has therefore always been closely associated with the history of the establishment of the modern Makerere University. Indeed in 1996, a Hall of Residence was renamed after him, an action which resonates with the decolonization movement of the 21st Century.

We are here in large part because of the wisdom, determination and foresightedness of great men and women such as Martin Luther Nsibirwa and it is fitting that we should celebrate them!

The Lessons we Learn from Nsibirwa's Life: The Role of Native Institutions in Engendering Public Goods

Before I set about extracting some lessons from Nsibirwa's life which I believe are relevant to us today, I would like to define a couple of terms. You will forgive me, but I am a lawyer, after all, and we love defining terms to make sure that everyone is on the same page.

I prefer use of the terms "**Native Institutions**" or "**Traditional Institutions**" over the term "**Cultural Institutions**", which was chosen by the organisers. Although the latter is in popular use today but the word "culture" has come to have a very restrictive meaning associated with language, the arts, music, dance and drama. The Institution that Nsibirwa served in and eventually presided over, was a functional native government with administrative, executive and judicial powers. Although Buganda was under the imperial watch of Great Britain and therefore had her native sovereignty curbed, it wasn't the largely emasculated institution that exists in the 1995 Constitution. It was and remains a Native or Traditional Institution with roots going back to the 11th or 12th Centuries BCE.

Secondly the economists amongst you might already know that "**public goods**" are a basic service or commodity made available to all members of society on what economists call a non-excludable and non-rivalrous basis. A good is non-excludable if it is free – i.e., available to everyone without a charge being made for it. A good is said to be non-rivalrous if it can be enjoyed by many consumers at once without any one consumer's enjoyment of it affecting the enjoyment of another. Roads are a good example of public goods; once constructed everyone and any one can use it free of charge (although tolls are payable upon use of some roads) and my proper use of that road should not derogate from the enjoyment of the same road by another person. National Defence or law enforcement are also frequently given as examples of public goods.

It is highly debatable whether higher education, such as is offered at Makerere University is a public good. It is largely no longer free of charge. It is also not non-rivalrous in the sense that even though the University has been expanding there is a limit to the number of students that can be admitted before standards begin to drop perilously. So, if we are going to talk about education, then perhaps we should focus

on what the economists call the “positive externalities” of the consumption of education by a few. A positive externality is said to exist if the consumption of a good or service by one person benefits a third party who has not consumed the good or service himself. Education of a few individuals can have an incalculably beneficial effect on society as a whole and can even come to be perceived as a public good.

The Leaders of our Native Institutions, of whom Nsibirwa was an outstanding example, implicitly understood the value and positive externality of education. This trend started right from Ssekabaka Ssuna II who was the first Kabaka of Buganda to come into contact with distant and more technologically advanced foreigners but was perhaps best personified by Ssekabaka Muteesa I. In his famed letter to Queen Victoria, Muteesa I, written in the decade before Nsibirwa was born, Muteesa’s primary request was for Queen Victoria to send experts (“*abakugu mu byamagezi*”) who could teach him and the people of Buganda so that Buganda could achieve the same level of technological advancement as Britain. The primary thing that Muteesa wanted to obtain was education which could enable the people of Buganda to savour the amenities of technological advancement. Christian missionaries took advantage of Muteesa’s letter and came to Buganda. It is important to note that Muteesa I was able to distinguish between knowledge, enlightenment and technological advancement, on the one hand, and Christianity on the other. It is also important to note that he appreciated the risk of loss of sovereignty that these foreign instructors could pose to his Kingdom, hence his express request to Queen Victoria that whoever she sends should be honest and not inclined to treason.

The Buganda Kingdom maintained the open attitude to education. Several of the historical schools in Buganda, such as Mengo Senior Secondary School, King’s College Budo, St. Mary’s College Kisubi, Namilyango College, Gayaza High School and others were built on land donated by the Kingdom of Buganda. The understanding of the positive externalities that come from education run deep and we can see this clearly in the life of Nsibirwa. Nsibirwa, himself without formal education, championed the education of all his 25 children – both boys and girls. It was therefore quite natural and understandable for a man who was steeped in native education and in the understanding that came with serving in the Native Institution of the Kingdom of Buganda to advocate the use of eminent domain (compulsory acquisition of land) to expand Makerere College.

Nsibirwa’s achievements as a chief and later as Katikkiro in a rapidly changing world also speak to the value of the native education that would-be leaders had to undergo. As I said earlier, it was a hands and eyes on kind of training. It was immersive and practical. No one could ascend the ladder of the kingdom’s administration without it

and it produced many great leaders. This training produced leaders who were steeped in what the Germans call *Realpolitik* - realistic, practical politics. They were driven not by ideology or theology. They simply assessed the common good and found ways that worked, using what they had at their disposal. This is how a man like Nsibirwa could remain relevant and able to lead Buganda in 1945.

Some scholars, steeped in foreign ideologies that they had learned here in Makerere and elsewhere misunderstood this *realpolitik* and contemptuously labelled it collaboration. The Native Institution of the Kingdom of Buganda worked with the British during the times of the British Protectorate. But this was not out of a desire to expand or serve the interests of the British Empire as such, but they hardly had a way out when everything is considered. Nsibirwa and others like him were primarily interested in preserving and protecting the native interests of the people of Buganda in a rapidly changing world. They understood the fact that the technological advantage the British had over us at the time was such that physical and confrontational resistance was futile and could lead to negative intergenerational effects. It was better to preserve the little that we had and to skill up the population to be able to match and eventually free ourselves from British colonial rule. I strongly disagree with those who harshly judge the very brave, wise and industrious men of this age such as Martin Luther Nsibirwa. They did what they could, using what little they had and achieved far more in real terms than many of the people who dare to judge and criticise them.

I believe that it was a mistake for us to jettison all of this in favour of only requiring leaders to show academic certificates which are the equivalent of A 'Level and to engage in populist campaigns. I always say that leadership or politics is not a game. Politics is about the lives, livelihoods and wellbeing of the people. It is a mistake to think that people who have done nothing other than theoretical studies in schools and who have good rhetorical or debating skills make good administrators. The system that we have adopted today poses the danger of producing ideologues who try to bend situations to meet their ideological beliefs or populists who view political contests simply as a measure of their popularity. From what we know about the life and work of Nsibirwa, he was neither an ideologue nor a populist. If he had been a populist Makerere University would not exist – or perhaps would not exist as we know it.

From the life history of Nsibirwa we learn that Native Institutions were result oriented. Nsibirwa was never promoted from one station to another purely on the basis of what he promised to do. He was not promoted because of his potential. He was assessed and promoted based on actual results that he delivered. In his day, the key performance indicators were effective delivery of key public goods. As a

Gombolola Chief in Kasawo, Nsibirwa was tasked with increasing food security and household income by encouraging the growing of coffee and cotton. As a Ssaza Chief, both in Bugerere and Ssinga, Nsibirwa had to drive food security and stable household incomes as well as drive the smallpox vaccination effort. He was also in charge of tax collection. Nsibirwa and his colleagues administered vast territories – mostly on foot and bicycle. Nsibirwa delivered results and was promoted.

It was out of the proven efforts of Nsibirwa and others like him that Buganda achieved rapid and massively transformative social and economic growth in the early to mid-20th Century. Leadership in its proper form should concentrate on delivering results. Leaders who are properly oriented should seek to be judged on the things that they have done for the people and not simply on how many promises they can make.

I believe that it would be a timely contribution for the academics at Makerere University to engage in extensive research about the practical aspects of the various Native Institutions of Uganda. By studying the lives, work and times of people like Martin Luther Nsibirwa we may understand how to rectify the shortcomings of the leadership of today. Emphasis should be placed on the key selection criteria and training methods for leaders. Perhaps we can identify key components of the native methods and incorporate them into a practical course that can be rolled out for all leaders and would-be leaders in the public and corporate sphere. The Kingdom of Buganda would be very pleased to work with you in whatever way that we can realise this.

As the serving Kattikiro of the Kingdom of Buganda, I am proud to say that we are trying to emulate Nsibirwa and those that came before us in a number of ways. I strongly believe that actions speak louder than words and that our people will not be advanced by empty sloganeering but by the execution of tangible programs to improve their basic standard of living. We have concentrated on mobilising people to work hard to deliver themselves from biting jaws of poverty. With programs such as *Mwanyi Terimba* we have mobilised people to grow more coffee with tangible results; coffee production, for example, has gone up by more than 35% in Buganda; and Ugandan's coffee exports have gone up by more than 30% raking in more than US \$700 last year. We have also engaged in driving vaccination programs for infectious diseases such as COVID-19, polio etc. On the education front more than 25,000 students have benefited from the Kabaka Education Fund in the past twenty years or so. All in all, the Kingdom of Buganda remains focused on improving the lives of the people of Buganda and engendering public goods for the people Buganda, Uganda and East Africa.

If anyone thinks that I have contributed anything to the public good in Buganda and Uganda during my tenure as Katikkiro, it's because I am privileged to stand on the shoulders of heroes like Martin Luther Nsibirwa who clearly understood the meaning of serving the community.

I thank the Department of Performing Arts and I commend the restoration of Muteesa 11 Museum and the Ivory Tower.

Once again, I thank the organisers for inviting me here today and I hope that this is a sign of Makerere's continuing commitment to a strong, proactive and mutually beneficial relationship with the Kingdom of Buganda. We congratulate you on achieving 100 years and in keeping with the motto "**We Build for the Future**", the Kingdom looks forward to building the next 100 years with this great institution.

Awangaale Ayi Ssaabasajja!

Charles Peter Mayiga
KATIKKIRO