

Roads to Reading COLAU
Community Libraries Association Of Uganda

COLLABORATION IN ACTION: STRENGTHENING UGANDA'S PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY LIBRARIES

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About COLAU

The Community Libraries Association of Uganda (COLAU) is a networking organization for community libraries in Uganda that started work as Uganda Community Libraries Association (UgCLA).

It changed name to the former and 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 and Vision

Mission

To complement the education system of Uganda and promote the development of productive literacy practices by encouraging and supporting the growth of community libraries.

Vision

A library in every village of Uganda.

Uganda's library landscape faces structural challenges:

- Books are expensive, making library establishment costly
- Library distribution is uneven, with rural communities particularly underserved.
- Tracking existing libraries and their services is difficult, limiting effective resource allocation.
- Internet & Technological challenges.

The response: Collaborative partnerships that leverage external resources, local knowledge, and promote visibility among others.

Collaboration with the National Library of Uganda & Public Libraries

1. UCC Support — Digital Infrastructure for Public Libraries & Community Libraries

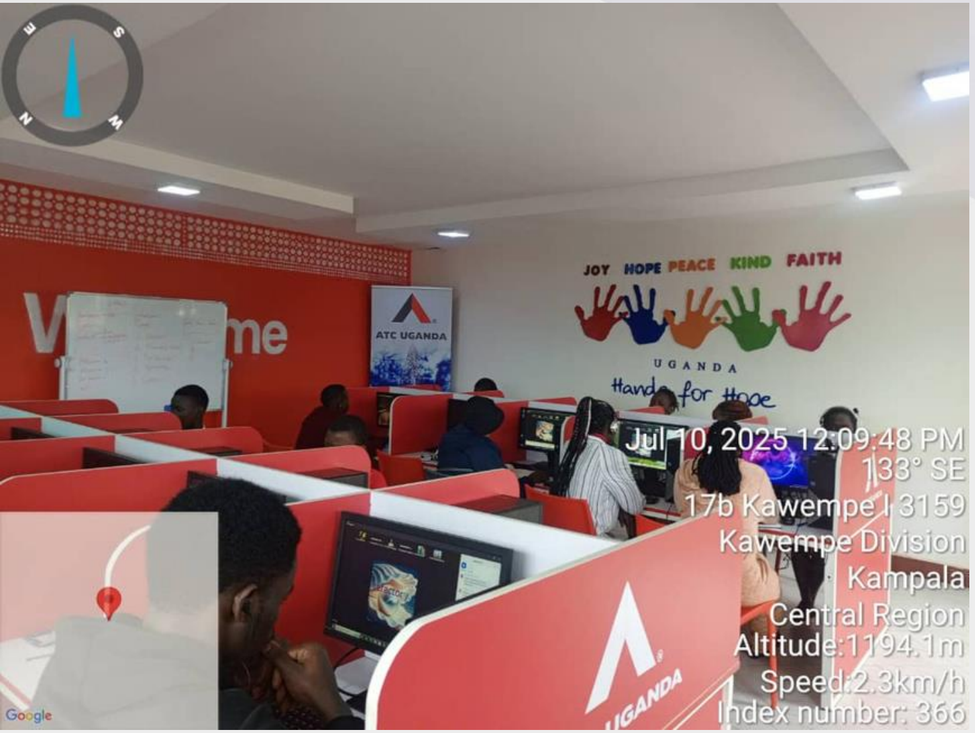
- The infrastructure gap: Public & Community libraries often lack computers, internet connectivity, and digital skills training, limiting their capacity to serve modern information needs.



- The partnership model: The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) has supported digital community initiatives at public libraries, working alongside the National Library of Uganda (NLU) and private sector partners. A total of 31 libraries have so far received these computers; 11 are public libraries, 20 are community libraries.



Collaboration with the National Library of Uganda & Public Libraries



2 Community libraries, namely;
Kawempe Youth Centre & Nyarushanje Community library are ATC centres.
Other ATC centre include; Nakaseke Commuity Library and Jinja Public Library among others.

1.American Tower Coorporation in Public & Community Libraries.

Established through a partnership between American Tower Corporation (ATC) Uganda and NLU, with UCC's broader digital inclusion framework, this facility provides:

- Free access to computers and internet connectivity
- Structured digital literacy training (one-month certificate courses)
- Services reaching over 3,000 beneficiaries since operations began in 2024

Who benefits: Primary and secondary students, university learners, and community members — including a 60-year-old resident who acquired computer skills and was subsequently selected as a secretary under the Parish Development Model .

3. The Open Library Map — A Wikimedia, National Library of Uganda & COLAU Collaboration

The problem: Uganda lacked a comprehensive, accessible record of where libraries are located and what services they offer.

- The partnership: Wikimedia Community User Group Uganda (WCUGU), under its GLAM initiative, partnered with the NLU & COLAU.

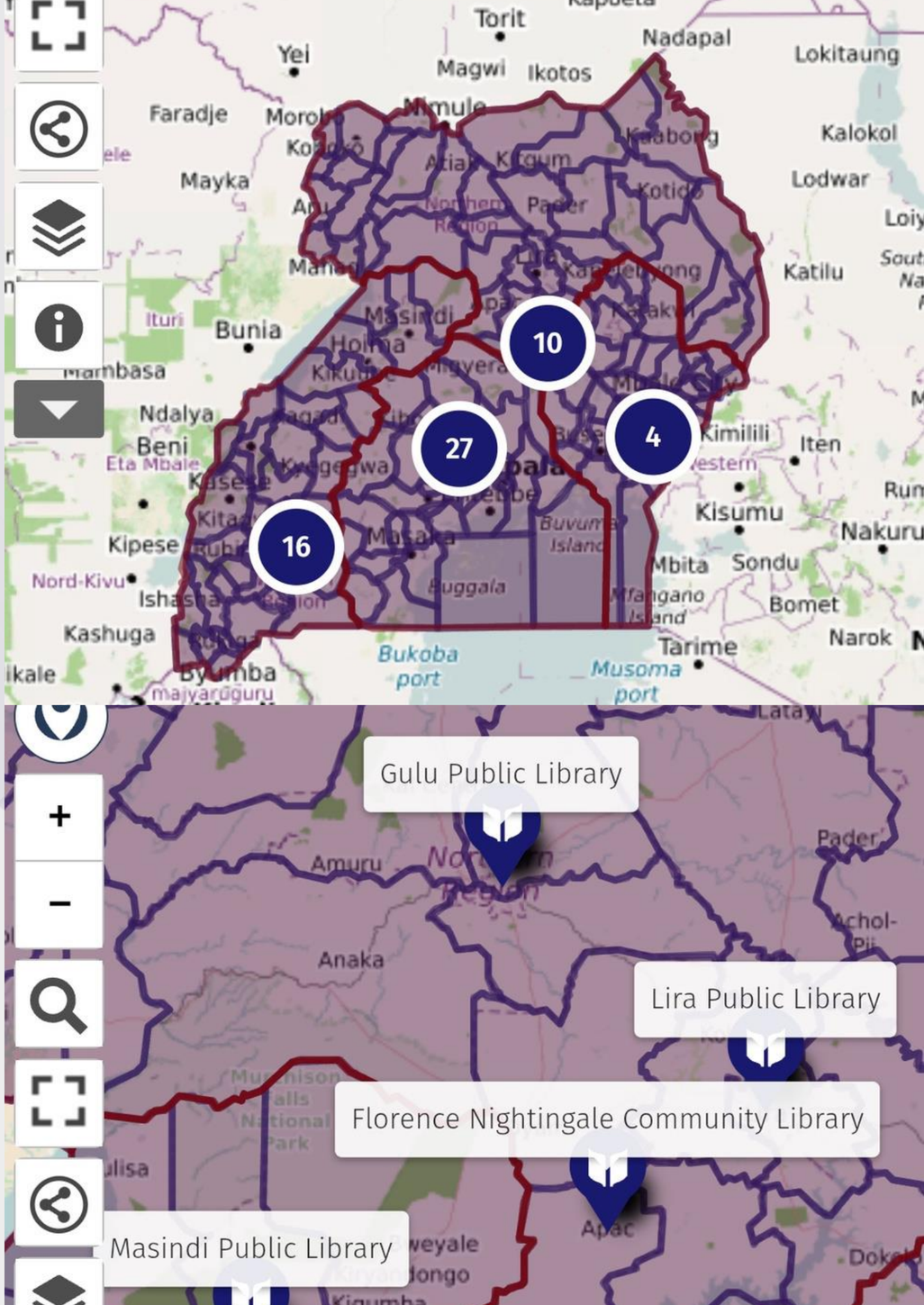
Project name: Ugandan Libraries Geo Quest
What was built:

- A comprehensive interactive map showing both community and public libraries across Uganda.

- The map is powered by Open Street Map Uganda

What it shows: Library locations, services offered, and other attributes collected through fieldwork and partner records.

- Access to records from the National Library of Uganda (NLU) and COLAU, which made planning efficient



Other Collaborative Models Worth Noting

Book shipment









Conclusion

From the pattern across all examples: No single actor can solve the library access challenge alone.

- Book Aid International supplies the content
- Community libraries provide the trust and local presence
- COLAU provides coordination and sector representation
- UCC and technology partners provide connectivity and hardware
- And NLU provides a comfortable work environment for all this to happen.

The result is a library ecosystem that is better mapped, better stocked, better connected, and more deeply embedded in the communities it serves.

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