

Time Travel to 1954 at the Freedom Tree, Entebbe

Goal

Make people reflect on the meaning of Independence and Freedom, compare today and the past

Emphasize the importance of the Freedom Tree as a heritage site in the independence struggle

Continue the tradition of the Freedom Tree and facilitate creative reflections on the needs and solutions of challenges in the country

Several stakeholders working together, education, culture, officials, politicians etc, to develop a sustainable Time Travel program, to be used for many groups in the future

Facts

The United Kingdom placed Uganda under the charter of British East Africa Company in 1888 and ruled it as a protectorate from 1894. Entebbe was the capital city of Uganda and housed all the government houses and ministries. The population was classified Africans, Asians and Whites and each group had a particular place to stay in town. Africans lived in the least developed quarters. From 1945 Africans were recruited as civil servants in the British administration.

In the 1940s some Africans were dissatisfied with the economic injustice in the country and demanded economic independence and removal of the Asian and European monopoly on cotton and coffee export sales. They also requested representation in the local government. This gave rise to riots, the Buganda riots 1945 and 1949. One of the leaders was Ignatius Musasaazi, who was sent to prison charged for treason. But he continued fighting and had the chance to go to London for support. In the early 1950s he and some other businessmen, Miti Kabaazzi and Ssemakula Mulumba, formed an organization called Abataka Bbu, fighting for economic independence and fair trade. Musasaazi also became the leader of the first political party in Uganda, Uganda National Congress, UNC.

The struggle for economic independence and fair business policies brought about strikes. The protectorate soldiers, known as Keya, King's African Rifles KAR, hunted the Abataka Bbu, those persons who were on the list for funding meetings at the Freedom Tree.

In 1952 Andrew Cohen was appointed Governor of Uganda with the task of preparing the country for independence. He reorganized the Legislative Council to include African representatives. After negotiations with Kabaka Muteesa II, several constitutional reforms were proposed for Buganda as well as transferring a number of services such as education, health, and agriculture from the Protectorate Government to the Buganda Government. But in June 1953 the British leaders came up with new ideas of a federation for East Africa, including Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda. The Buganda Lukiiko immediately objected and instead demanded that Buganda would be separated from the rest of the country. There was strong agitation and in November Cohen ordered the deportation of Kabaka Muteesa and he was sent on exile to London.

This sent off a storm of protests in Uganda and the Bugandas started a vigorous campaign for the return of the Kabaka. After long negotiations in 1954 a new agreement was signed in 1955, the Buganda agreement, and Kabaka Muteesa made a triumphal return to Uganda. The agreement opened for independence for Uganda and sparked off the forming of political parties in mid 1950s.

Freedom Tree

The tree was the place for political meetings and rallies before independence, from early 1950s to 1962. Even after independence it continued to be a place where politicians could hold rallies, reminding about the independence experience. It has become a symbol for freedom and independence.

The tree is not planted but emerged from the grass jungle that filled the place. It was cleared for the set-up of a school. Close to it was a cinema hall and an Asian sports/play ground where Asian civil servants used to play various games: hockey, rugby and handball

It was a strategic place to meet, close to several residential areas and in between two major roads. It also offered shade.

Every Saturday afternoon, after work, people used to gather under the tree, to discuss and listen to speeches. When the bell rang, the meeting started. Later in the afternoon people went home for the weekend to different parts of Uganda spreading the news.

First it was called the Kirundu tree, then Freedom Tree and also Independence Tree
In Kampala they identified a mango tree for their political meetings

Scenario, Gathering at the Freedom Tree in 1954

Our way of freedom and independence?!

It is Saturday afternoon. The work has finished in the colonial offices. Many civil servants are on the way home to their villages to spend the weekend. But before that, there is meeting at the Kirundu tree, and a crucial meeting, a meeting to decide the future.

Mr Ignatious Musaaazi has called for the meeting at the big tree. Tyaba Alifunsi and Joseph Kasolo help him to organize the meeting. And they urge people to come. "Today will be a day to decide the future", they say. "Decide our way of freedom and independence".

Mr Musaaazi is a well-known person and has been fighting for fair trade and economic independence for several years. The British see him as a trouble-maker and has sent him to prison many times.

People come walking, riding on bicycles. They will spend a couple of hours by the tree before leaving for home. Many of them have a big interest in news and politics, like Abataka Bbu, Miti Kabazzi, Sseamkula Mulumba and more, who are fighting for economic empowerment. Others are just curious. Some hope for a little bit of singing and dancing.

Last year Kabaka Muteesa II was exiled and sent in custody to England. Many Bugandas fight for his return to Uganda. Some have even decided not to shave their hair and beards until the king is back.

There is a lot of talk and rumours about independence. Will it ever happen? Governor Cohen wants a unified East African protectorate, but not many in Uganda agree with him. Musaaazi and others agitate against colonial rule and for economic independence. Abataka Bbu argue that the money from what is produced in Uganda leaves the country. "And why a monopoly for Europeans and Asians on selling and exporting cotton and coffee?" "Get rid of the poor leadership", they say. "The colonialists take the benefits, we need it to make us rich and independent and elect our own leaders"

Musaazi and his friends want a new strategy: “It is the time to mobilize people to develop the way to freedom and independence”, they say. The negotiations between the British and the Buganda kingdom will come to an end. “We must prepare ourselves for independence.” And this is not only for the leaders, this is for everybody. “What are the challenges and problems in Uganda? How do we address it? What is my responsibility? Our common responsibility? Actions?” “Now is the time to be creative, form parties, groups and alliances, we can’t be independent without them.”

Today is the day. Mr Musaazi has called for the meeting and hope for many creative ideas. Our way of freedom and independence?

A lot of curious people are coming to the Kirundu tree; men are always at front, women and children behind. But at least one woman, Ms Mukasa, will not be silent and probably talk about the rights for the women. Some say that even Governor Cohen is coming to the meeting? Is that true? The Bear, the man with the big face and large hands?

Today the path to the future will be outlined in the shade of the tree, the way of freedom and independence. If it works out well, maybe it would be a good idea to call the tree, the Freedom Tree in the future?

Roles

Civil servants, curious women, children and men from Entebbe. Everybody keep their age and sex

Musicians

Ignatius Musaazi, Tyaba Alifunsi, Joseph Kasolo, Miti Kabazzi, Sseamkula Mulumba

Ms Mukasa

Governor Andrew Cohen

Apostolic Group and Golden Production develop characters that discuss the key questions

Key Questions, Freedom and Independence

- What are the problems/ challenges in Uganda today? Can we make a list of important items for the political and social agenda? Our way of freedom and independence
- What will we do about it? What is my responsibility? Our responsibility? Actions?
- What are my dreams for Uganda? What will it look like ten years from now? What will become better? What will still be big problems?

Activities

- Handicraft, make mats, baskets, dolls...
- Children games and board games (mweso); make the equipment: skipping rope, ball, make toys, ssekitulegge...
- Make placards and illustrations
- Prepare a speech/ poem/ song/ slogan, a list of desires

Intervening characters, songs

Time Plan

07:30 Prepare the site

09:00/ 13:00 Pupils arrive, dress up, welcome, background, scenario, rules

09:30/ 13:30 Initiation, bell, Musaazi is coming, drums

Group formation, Activities and discussions, prepare for the meeting,
Intervening characters

10:30/ 14:30 Meeting, Music, drums

First speech

Cohen arrives

Speeches (Musaazi, Mukasa, pupils...)

Performances by Golden Production and Apostolic group, Common songs and dances

11:20/ 15:20 Time Travel ends

Meal and Reflection

11:45/ 15:45 End, clean up

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Bridging Ages Uganda

Entebbe municipality

Ebbe Westergren, Kalmar County Museum and Anna Greta Larsson, the Regional Theatre,
Kalmar, Sweden