

By Agnes Nantambi
and Shamim Saad

Makerere University's department of immunology and molecular biology on Wednesday launched the rapid home-grown COVID-19 antibody test kits.

The kits are aimed at addressing challenges related to affordability in using imported items and promoting research and innovation in the medical field and Makerere University in general.

While officiating at the launch of the kit, the health minister, Dr Ruth Aceng, applauded Uganda's scientists for their efforts in innovation, saying this has made them competitive globally.

"The rapid test kits have come at the right time. This proves that our scientists are good, with enough knowledge and very competitive.

When COVID-19 came to Uganda, it was a new virus which we had little knowledge about, but our scientists have done a lot to contain the pandemic," Aceng said.

She appealed to scientists to do more innovations and expand the survey so that we can get a holistic picture of what is transpiring in other parts of the country.

The French Ambassador to Uganda, Jules-Armand Aniambossou, congratulated the scientists, saying they are not only doing good in Uganda, but also in Europe.

He pledged commitment towards the project in order to make it successful.

"When you compare the COVID-19 situation in my own country and other African countries, I can tell you that it is us who need to learn from Uganda. I am so proud of the team that worked on this project because it was a strong one," he said.

The Minister for Science Technology and Innovations, Dr Elioda Tumwesigye, said the project, which was conducted with support from the Innovation Fund, will benefit many Ugandans by giving them instant results regarding COVID-19.

"These kits can detect whether the person has ever suffered from COVID-19 and, to us as the funders of the project, we feel this is a great milestone in as far as research and innovation is concerned," he said.

Tumwesigye said his ministry was committed to supporting increased research and innovation to ensure that society's problems are solved.

MAKERERE LAUNCHES HOME-GROWN COVID-19 ANTIBODY TEST KITS

PHOTO BY MPALANYI SSENTONGO



Dr Damalie Nakanjako (left), Tumwesigye, Aniambossou, Aceng and Wayengera during the launch of the Makerere University-made COVID-19 antibody test kits at Makerere School of Public Health in Mulago, Kampala on Wednesday (Scan this picture using New Vision Digital Experience to watch video)

"We are committed to supporting different prototypes up to commercialisation and we believe this is the only way this country will achieve its intended goals," he stressed.

According to Dr Misaki Wayengera, the principal investigator on the project, the efforts are directed towards enhancing the fight against the spread of the coronavirus, not only at Makerere University, but the entire country.

"The kits developed are affordable — less than one dollar — they are easy to use, they are rapid, meaning they can yield results within 2-5 minutes

and are suited for use within the remote equatorial African settings," he explained.

Wayengera said they will lower the cost of testing currently standing at \$65 (about sh180,000), which is prohibitive for developing countries like Uganda.

HOW KIT WORKS

Wayengera said the test kit involves using a swab-tube dipstick to do an antigen test on a nasal swab.

"Once the nasopharyngeal sample is obtained, it is placed back into its tube, which contains reagents that

detect the virus surface protein," he said.

Wayengera said the kit will be used to carry out antibody tests and also to detect COVID-19 cases early. It will also be used in screening travellers for COVID-19, detecting symptoms, as well as aiding in sero-prevalence studies to determine previous exposure to COVID-19.

"Makerere University is hopeful that this will enable Uganda and other African countries to cost-effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic," Wayengera said.

The Uganda Bankers Association



When you compare the COVID-19 situation in my own country and other African countries, it is us who need to learn from Uganda.

(UBA) executive director, Wilbrod Owor, revealed that the association contributed about sh200m under the project partnership, which also included the Deposits Protection Fund of Uganda.

He applauded Makerere University for the research efforts as an academic institution and the quick turnaround invention.

"The pandemic has had diverse effects on the economy and the most affected sectors are education, tourism and hospitality, as well as real estate, which ultimately have affected the banking sector by way of increasing non-performing loans," UBA's executive director said.

He added that with the association's support, affordability of the intervention is particularly welcome in order to address cost issues that would otherwise have to be quite high for the average Ugandan.

By Vision Reporter

Two male students have lost their lives while another is fighting for his in Gulu Hospital, following a shooting incident at a girls' school in Gulu district.

The deceased were identified as Brian Lubanga Kene and Emmanuel Okeny. The injured student was identified as Kenneth Lubanga Kene. All the three are students of St Joseph's College Layibi in Gulu district.

According to a statement released yesterday by the education ministry, the incident happened on the night of Wednesday and involved 10 male students of the school.

Three students die in Gulu shooting incident

The students had escaped from the school dormitories and were attempting to sneak into a neighbouring girls' school when the shooting occurred.

The school has been identified as Bright Valley Girls' Secondary School. It is located two-and-a-half kilometres from St Joseph's College Layibi.

The statement said shortly after 10:00pm, the students' resident warden reportedly received a call informing the school that some students from

BETWEEN THE LINES

• The students had escaped from the school dormitories and were attempting to sneak into a neighbouring girls' school when the shooting occurred.

the school had been shot while trying to gain entry into a girls' school.

"The resident warden

immediately called the headteacher, who immediately instituted a roll call for all students and established that 10 students had escaped from school and were not in the dormitories as expected," the statement said.

The headteacher then reportedly called the resident district commissioner regarding the incident.

According to the statement, Brian Lubanga Kene, a S4 student, died at the scene,

while Kenneth Lubanga Kene, also in S4, was rushed to Gulu Referral Hospital, where he is undergoing treatment after being shot in the leg.

The statement said three students had been arrested and taken to Gulu Central Police Station. "They were identified as Okello Sam (S4), Daniel Ogenrwoth (S4) and Brian Okello Obol (S4).

The statement said the five students who had been unaccounted for sneaked back

into the school yesterday as the headteacher addressed the students at an assembly convened at 6:00am. They were identified as Jasper Ogenrwoth, Gerald Ocakachon, Arnold Opwonya (all in Senior Four) and Herbert Kakaum, S3.

According to the statement, it is during this incident that the school discovered that Okeny, a Senior Four student, was badly injured.

"He was found near the teachers' quarters, where he had collapsed and was bleeding profusely. He was immediately rushed to Gulu Referral Hospital, where he passed on at 7:30am," the statement said.