

MAK GETS SH90B FOR RESEARCH, INNOVATION



The *New Vision* has since May been highlighting innovations, inventions and discoveries made in Uganda and by Ugandans to commemorate the 60th Independence on October 9. Today, we conclude the project with Makerere University, which has transformed some of its research projects into products. **CAROL KASUJJA ADII** writes about the new government grant in the wake of its centenary celebrations this week

According to *Times Higher Education World Universities Rankings* report 2020, Makerere is the fifth best university in Africa. These rankings are partly based on the university's ability to improve society, through its research and products.

According to its website, Makerere University gets its funds for research from government, 1% of its internally generated income, contributions from graduate and undergraduate students and bilateral funds from development partners, such as Sida/SAREC of Sweden, Carnegie Corporation of New York and NORAD from Norway.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, government realised the need for homegrown solutions. Consequently, in the financial year 2019/2020, Makerere received a special research fund worth sh30b under the Research and Innovations Fund (RIF). The RIF was to support high-impact research and innovations.

Makerere University Council then approved the new Strategic Plan 2020-2030, which focuses on transforming the institution into a research-led university.

The goal of the strategic plan is to have all the research output align with the National Development Plan III (NDP3) and Vision 2040, thus establishing a link between Makerere University and the development needs of the nation.

This strategic plan is built on previous studies, including the Rwendeire Visitation Committee Report of 2016, which emphasised the need for Makerere University to focus on research.

President Yoweri Museveni has on many occasions encouraged the university to research Africa's development challenges to come up with homegrown solutions.

"Makerere University will influence existing capacities of the knowledge



Some of Mak-RIF committee members. The committee provides strategic guidance for the grant

Who is eligible?

Any Master's or PhD student with a research project should apply for a grant through Mak-Rif. The committee looks out for quality and transparency purposes. PhD students who are interested and eligible are required to apply before October 21.

The proposal should have actionable results and potential for wider impact. Projects are required to have a multidisciplinary team. "Each proposal is reviewed by three independent reviewers, who award marks and comment on the overall quality. The highest scored proposal is considered for funding," Prof. Masagazi noted.

generated and engage the public and the private sector to create a research and innovations eco-system that is multi-disciplinary and multi-institution. This research eco-system will provide demonstrable economic, environmental, health and social impact," Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe, the Makerere University Vice-Chancellor, said while launching the Makerere University Research and Innovations fund round 4.

This year, government has given the university sh90b to facilitate research by students to impact development in the country. The money was channelled through the Makerere Research and Innovation Fund (Mak-RIF).

Nawangwe said the goal is to move from just knowledge creation to knowledge that will spur social transformation and economic development.

"We were also able to contribute to the fight against the further spread of COVID-19 in the country using government funds. It is now

important that we all support the ongoing work to complete, test, launch and engage partners to join efforts to scale our work, including the low-cost medical ventilator currently undergoing animal tests at the College of Veterinary Medicine, Animal Resources and Biosecurity," Nawangwe said.

In the last financial year, from the Government's fund of sh30b towards research, there were over 775 multidisciplinary research and innovation projects from diverse disciplines.

To manage the funds, the university management set up a 15-member Grants Management Committee to provide strategic guidance for the grant. The committee is headed by Prof. Fred Masagazi-Masaazi, the chairperson of Mak-RIF.

Speaking to *New Vision*, Prof. Masagazi-Masaazi said government recognises research and innovations as facilitators of Uganda's development efforts.

"Government appreciates research and innovations as contributors to addressing Uganda's community challenges. Solutions to community challenges for and by Ugandans themselves. The sh90b means that government is in support of Makerere University's efforts of becoming a research-led university," Prof. Masagazi-Masaazi said.

He urged the college leadership to interest the staff with projects in their colleges.

Some of the research areas that government is funding include health sciences, environmental sustainability, agriculture, energy and minerals, health promotions, culture, socio-economic development, education, library, governance and social justice.

Other areas of research include climate change, gender and women empowerment, science and technology, information communication and disaster management.

Dr Roy William Mayega, the



Nawangwe (left) with Masagazi

PROJECTS GOVT HAS FUNDED

- The solar-powered autoclaves for use in rural health centres.
- The pedal-operated seed cleaner.
- An electronic partograph for improved monitoring of labour to reduce maternal mortality.
- The organ and tissue biobanking project.
- During COVID-19, more than 120 research and innovation projects in the field of COVID-19 were funded by (Mak-RIF), such as the Makerere University De-contaminator for N95 face masks
- The touchless handwash device, automation of communal hand water pumps and shallow-well hand pump to reduce cross infections during handwashing.
- The low-cost medical ventilator currently undergoing animal tests at the university's college of veterinary medicine.
- Self-disinfecting gloves.
- Farm forestry intervention for increased crop productivity and livelihood resilience to climate variability in eastern Uganda. There were three objectives of this study. One was to develop and pilot an intervention that systematically integrates tree/shrub species into crops and fruit tree farming system. It was also to improve soil fertility, crop yields and wood supply. Thirdly, the study was also to conserve the environment through appropriate species and agro-forestry technologies that conform to smallholder farmers' socio-economic and cultural conditions.

coordinator of the Mak-RIF, urged female students to make use of the funds by applying for the grants.

In 2019, the inception call attracted 704 applicants and 224 projects were funded. A total of 805 of the projects have since closed out. In 2020, 2,386 responded to the call and 235 projects were funded. The round three calls attracted 532 applications and 191 projects were funded.