



GOVERNMENT OF UGANDA

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH AND INNOVATIONS FUND (MAK-RIF)



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

Mak-RIF Monthly

NewsLetter

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WORD FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the latest issue of the Mak-RIF Monthly Newsletter.

In October 2025, the Mak-RIF Secretariat visited the University of Warwick, which is renowned for seeking out and addressing complex global challenges with era-defining innovative thinking. We aim to establish a collaboration with the University of Warwick, encourage learning, benchmarking, and capacity strengthening for both institutions.

Makerere researchers have called for urgent preservation of medicinal plants following the climate-changing environment in Uganda. Further, researchers are exploring the option for coexistence of Mabira Forest and the booming economic activity to encourage both sustainable livelihoods and forest conservation. These research projects and more are highlighted in this newsletter and affirm the need to continue generating actionable results that speak to Uganda's priorities.

Nice reading!

Prof. Fred Masagazi-Masaazi,
Chairperson Mak-RIF Grants Management Committee (GMC).



PROJECT OF THE MONTH

INTEGRATING KISWAHILI LITERACY IN VOCATIONAL SKILLING AMONG VULNERABLE YOUTHS IN UGANDA

By New Vision

Ugandan youth missing out on regional trade over failure to speak Kiswahili

A study by Makerere University’s College of Education and External Studies, presented at a recent meeting in Kampala city, reveals that language barriers are stifling economic opportunities for skilled youth, even as programmes like Presidential Industrial Hubs and YES Empowerment Services equip them with technical expertise.

Despite significant investments in vocational training, Ugandan youth are being sidelined in East Africa’s booming regional trade markets due to a critical shortfall: The inability to speak Kiswahili.

The gap in vocational training

While Uganda’s vocational initiatives have empowered thousands with skills in tailoring, mechanics, and agriculture, Kiswahili- the language of cross border commerce- is absent from vocational education curricula.

“Youth are trained but blocked at the border by language,” says Dr. Levi Masereka, the principal investigator of a three-year. Government- funded project: Integrating Kiswahili Literacy in Vocational Skilling among Vulnerable Youth.

The research, conducted in Kasese and other regions, uncovered systemic flaws:

- No standardized Kiswahili syllabus in vocational institutions.
- Inadequate teaching materials: 80% of learners lacked trade-specific resources.
- Poor instruction: Part-time teachers provided just two hours of weekly Kiswahili, often using outdated secondary school notes.

A benchmarking trip to Tanzania showcased contrasts. Institutions like BAKITA and the Institute of Kiswahili Research offered tailored materials fro trades like plumbing and hospitality, resources virtually non-existent in Uganda.

Kiswahili for the workplace

To bridge the gap, researchers developed: Kiswahili Halisi kwa Vituo na Vyuo vya Ufundi, an illustrated manual integrating technical vocabulary and real-world scenarios.



Photo: Integrating Kiswahili

Launching the manual on integrating Kiswahili in vocational skilling among vulnerable youth in Uganda, Mrs. Phoebe Lutaaya Kamyia (C), Mak-RIF’s Deputy Coordinator commended the project team for their output, and challenged them to champion the establishment of centres for the young people to learn the Kiswahili language.

Over 51 institutions now use the textbook which covers:

- Trade-specific terms for mechanics, hospitality, and agriculture.
- Role-play exercise for client negotiations and service delivery.
- Content validated by Tanzanian experts and Uganda’s education authorities.

Completing the manual, 50+ youth have undergone intensive training in “business Kiswahili,” mastering communication for sales, marketing, and cross border transactions. “We are not just teaching language-we are teaching economic empowerment,” instructor Edward Baluku said.

Calls for action

Despite Kiswahili’s status as an EAC official language, Uganda lags in institutionalising it in vocational facilities. Researchers have called for:

- Mandatory Kiswahili in vocational curricula.
- Recruitment of full-time, specialized instructors.
- Digital tools and apps to scale learning access.
- A national task force (MoES, NCDC, DIT) to align training with regional trade goals.

Professor Kiggundu Muhammad Musoke, head of Makerere’s humanities and languages education, said: “Kiswahili must be embedded in vocational studies to unlock economic participation.”

MAKERERE RESEARCHERS CALL FOR URGENT CONSERVATION OF MEDICINAL PLANTS IN EASTERN UGANDA

By Hasifa Kabejja



Dr. Patience Tugume (standing), the project's Principal Investigator addressing the workshop participants on the key research findings.

Researchers from the Department of Plant Sciences, Microbiology, and Biotechnology at the College of Natural Sciences (CoNAS), Makerere University have highlighted the urgent need to conserve medicinal plants in the face of increasing threats from climate change, overharvesting, and habitat destruction.

Despite Namutumba District's rich diversity of medicinal plants, conservation efforts are limited, and several species are already classified as globally and nationally threatened. This highlights the urgent need for focused conservation strategies to safeguard these vulnerable medicinal plants.

Under a project titled **"Knowledge, Attitudes, and Conservation of Commonly Traded Medicinal Plants in a Climate-Changing Environment in Eastern Uganda,"** a team of researchers led by Dr. Patience Tugume documented 174 medicinal plant species.

The goal was to assess the existential threats facing these plants due to unsustainable harvesting practices and the lack of effective conservation measures. These species are widely used to treat various health conditions, including malaria, syphilis, diabetes, hypertension, and certain cancers. The findings of the study are intended to guide the development of species-specific, evidence-based interventions to curb possible extinction and loss of medicinal plant resources. Read more [here](#).

PRIVATE TRANSPORTERS READY FOR PARTNERSHIP TO DECONGEST KAMPALA

By New Vision

Government says it is planning to introduce an electric metro rail system, while encouraging operators to adopt electric motorcycles and buses for both commercial and personal use.

Private transport operators have expressed willingness to work with the Government and development partners to decongest Kampala city and reduce pollution.

To tackle congestion, the Government says it is planning an electric metro rail system, while encouraging operators to adopt electric motorcycles and buses for both commercial and personal use. Moses Mawejje, the spokesperson of the Uganda Taxi Operators Federation (UTOF), which claims over 100,000 members nationwide, welcomed the shift towards electric transport.

The project team was led by Dr. Ismael Nkambwe, the Principal Investigator at Makerere University Business School (MUBS), alongside Ass. Prof. Saadat Kimuli Nakyejwe, Dr. Eng. Ismail K. Kiiza (Makerere CEDAT) and graduate researcher Nashua Nabaggala.

According to Nkambwe, Kampala lacks a unified urban transport policy to guide sustainable solutions. Prof. Kimuli explained that their research used a mixed-method design, combining commuter surveys with stakeholder interviews and quantitative modelling. Over 350 commuters and operators from the districts of Kampala, Mukono, Mpigi, and Luwero participated in the survey, while over 25 stakeholders including Safeboda, UTOF, KCCA, NEMA, and Uganda Railways Corporation, shared perspectives on readiness and integration. Read more [here](#).



Photo: Private Transporters

Mr. Moses Mawejje, the Spokesperson of the Uganda Taxi Operators Federation speaking during a project dissemination workshop at Makerere Business School.

PICTORIAL



Participants during the dissemination of a project titled, “Population, Health and Environment for Uganda’s refugee and host communities” at the Institute of Gender on 22nd August 2025. The research was led by Prof. Sarah Ssali.



At a dissemination of a project on “Developing a Sustainable Business Model for Organic Chicken Urban Farming,” researchers led by Dr. Samuel Kabbera demonstrated how they are transforming traditional chicken farming into commercial, organic businesses. The dissemination took place in Wakiso district on 23rd September 2025.



Makerere University School of Public Health held dissemination workshops in Mubende (15th October) and Kasanda District (16th October 2025) to share findings from the study titled “From COVID-19 to Ebola: Lessons on Maintenance of Essential Health Services and Implementation of Public Health and Social Measures.” This study, supported by Government of Uganda Mak-RIF, compared disruptions to essential health services (EHS) during the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent 2022 Ebola outbreak in the districts, drawing on HMIS data between 2018 and 2023 and insights from 30 key informant interviews and 10 focus group discussions.



At an inception workshop for a project titled, Exploring the option for coexistence of Mabira Forest and the booming economic activity, stakeholders including National Forestry Authority, National Agricultural Research Organization, National Environment Management Authority, Nature Uganda, Uganda Wildlife Authority, Buikwe & Wakiso district leaders, Makerere University, and others gathered to provide insights on the methodology of the study. The workshop, led by Principal Investigator, Prof. Ibrahim Okumu, took place in Makerere on 28th October 2025.



Participants during a dissemination of a project titled, “Impact of Salary Enhancement on Secondary School Teachers Motivation, Performance, and Retention in Uganda.” The study findings, led by Dr. Cyprian Misinde, were disseminated at the Ministry of Public Service on 21st October 2025.



In October 2025, the Mak-RIF Secretariat made a benchmarking visit to the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom.

Editorial

Compiled by: Winnie Kyamulabi
Mak-RIF Communications officer
winniekyamulabi@gmail.com



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

Address

P.O. Box 7062, Kampala Uganda
Quarry Road Flat No. 70, Makerere University
Telephone: +256 414 673932
Email: info.rif@mak.ac.ug
Website: rif.mak.ac.ug

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@RIFMakerere



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