



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH AND INNOVATIONS FUND (MAK-RIF)



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

Mak-RIF Monthly

April 2025

NEWSLETTER



WORD FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Reader,

Welcome to this special edition of the Mak-RIF Monthly Newsletter. In April 2025, Makerere University hosted a three-day research and innovations week from 08th April 2025 to 10th April 2025 at the Makerere University Freedom Square and the Main Administration Building. The event showcased cutting-edge research and innovations funded by the Government of Uganda, alongside other notable research outputs that reflect the university's commitment to being a research-led institution.

On 8th April 2025, His Excellency, General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, the President of the Republic of Uganda, officiated at the grand opening of the exhibition and delivered a keynote address. The First Lady and Minister for Education and Sports, Hon. Janet K. Museveni, was represented by Hon. Dr. Joyce Moriku Kaducu. Additionally, Hon. Dr. Monica Musenero, the Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation was the Chief Guest on 9th and 10th April 2025.

I extend my sincere appreciation to participants from different entities including Government MDAs, the private sector, civil society, and the university community among others. Your presence and active participation contributed towards a successful research and innovations week. This newsletter provides some of the highlights from the event.

Nice reading!

Prof. Fred Masagazi-Masaazi

Chairperson, Mak-RIF Grants Management Committee (GMC)

Endozo: President Museveni Launches Makerere University Research and Innovations Week, Commits to More Funding



Moments before his key note address and launch of the research and innovations week, President Museveni (L) inspected the projects displayed at the Makerere University Freedom Square.

On 8th April 2025, H.E President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni launched the three-day Research and Innovations Week at Makerere University. The event, which was held at the University's Freedom Square and Main Administration Building, offered a dynamic exploration of research breakthroughs and innovative projects in fields such as health care, critical infrastructure, behavioral science research and emerging technologies among others.

While inspecting the projects displayed, President Museveni was joined by Hon. Dr. Joyce Moriku Kaducu who was representing the Minister for Education

and Sports, Hon. Dr. Monica Musenero, Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation, Hon. Dr. Chrispus Kiyonga, Chancellor, Makerere University, Mrs. Lorna Magara, Chairperson Makerere University Council, Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe, Vice Chancellor Makerere University, Prof. Fred Masagazi-Masaazi, Chairperson Mak-RIF Grants Management Committee, and other dignitaries.

In his key note address, the President congratulated Makerere on achieving such a milestone, praising the University community for the impressive innovations showcased. Expressing his satisfaction with the multidisciplinary

research and innovations displayed, President Museveni also thanked the university administration for responding to societal needs and noted, “The money we are allocating for research and innovations is merely ‘endozo’ (jaribu, a sip, a taste); we shall provide more in the future.”

He emphasized that true independence and development depend on a society’s ability to produce its own necessities: vehicles, building materials, clothes, food and medicine. He pointed out that by the time the NRM took power, most of these essentials were not being produced locally, except for some foods.

The President commended Makerere University and its innovators for what he described as signs of waking up from the inherited inferiority complex. He recalled seeing young people engaged in innovative work, such as experimenting with ways to slow down banana ripening—a form of indigenous technology that had been long neglected.

Launch of Makerere University Research Agenda



President Museveni officially launched the Makerere University Research Agenda, which has been described as a cornerstone of Makerere’s commitment to advancing knowledge, fostering innovation, and driving societal transformation. Following the launch, the Chairperson of the Makerere University Council, Mrs. Lorna Magara, delivered a vote of thanks to the President, expressing deep appreciation for his continued support towards research and innovations. She also presented a gift to the President on behalf of Makerere University.

Mak-RIF: A Testament to the Government's Commitment to Research and Innovations



Hon. Dr. Joyce Moriku Kaducu delivering remarks by the First Lady and Minister for Education and Sports, Hon. Janet Kataaha Museveni on 8th April 2025.

While delivering remarks by the First Lady and Minister for Education and Sports, Hon. Janet Kataaha Museveni, Hon. Dr. Joyce Moriku Kaducu conveyed warm regards from the Minister to the Makerere University fraternity, and emphasized the Minister's unwavering commitment to advancing education and research in Uganda.

Hon. Kaducu also highlighted the establishment Mak-RIF as a testament to the government's commitment to research and innovations, adding that since 2019, the Fund has supported over 1,300 projects and has contributed immensely to industrial growth and livelihood improvement by fostering homegrown solutions across sectors such as agriculture, health, technology, and governance. She lauded the projects that are currently ready for commercialization and the policy recommendations generated, urging greater engagement from the private sector to leverage these outputs.

Hon. Kaducu extended appreciation to the university leadership, Mak-RIF Secretariat, and all researchers, and invited participants to engage meaningfully with the exhibition.

Hon. Musenero Calls for a Policy Shift to Prioritize Procurement of Domestically Developed Innovations



Hon. Dr. Monica Musenero Masanza addressing the audience at the launch of the Research and Innovations Week.

In her remarks, Hon. Dr. Monica Musenero Masanza, the Minister for Science, Technology, and Innovation, celebrated Makerere's achievements in commercialization, notably citing Kiira Motors, which has begun producing market-ready electric vehicles. She also called for a policy shift to prioritize procurement of domestically developed innovations, recommending that all government bodies—including Parliament—lead by example. Her suggestions included issuing vehicle vouchers for Kiira Motors and restricting smart meter purchases to local manufacturers.

Hon. Musenero also expressed profound appreciation for the visionary leadership of the President, particularly recognizing his steadfast commitment to advancing science and technology in Uganda.

She elaborated on six key milestones within the government's science and innovation framework: generating knowledge through research, applying science to develop technologies, converting technologies into usable products, transforming innovations into manufacturable goods, establishing competitive businesses, and ensuring these businesses contribute to economic development through environmentally sustainable practices.

Makerere's Research and Innovations Week is a significant milestone in the realization of the NRM's Ten-Point Programme – Dr. Kiyonga



The Chancellor of Makerere University, Hon. Dr. Chrispus Kiyonga, warmly welcomed the President back to Makerere University, noting with appreciation that this visit marked his return within a span of less than six months—an impressive show of commitment, particularly given his demanding schedule.

Dr. Kiyonga expressed deep gratitude for the President's continued dedication to supporting research and innovation at the university and across the country. The Chancellor emphasized that the event marked a significant milestone in the realization of the National Resistance Movement's original Ten-Point Programme, specifically referencing Point Five, which calls for the creation of an integrated and self-sustaining economy.

He noted that the research and innovations being showcased at the exhibition were clear demonstrations of progress towards this goal—developing homegrown solutions to address community needs and strengthening national self-reliance. In closing, Hon. Dr. Kiyonga commended the university community for their contribution to national development through research and innovation.

Chairperson of the Makerere University Council Calls for Collaboration Between Government, Academia, and Industry for Impactful Research Outcomes



In her remarks, Mrs. Lorna Magara, Chairperson of the Makerere University Council reiterated Makerere's resolve to foster sustainable, inclusive progress through deeper partnerships with government and industry, positioning the university as a key driver of national transformation.

Mrs. Lorna Magara, Chairperson of the Makerere University Council, emphasized that impactful research outcomes arise from strong collaboration between government, academia, and industry, particularly when addressing Uganda's critical challenges in sectors like health, agriculture, tourism, and mineral development. She noted that past research was often misaligned with national needs due to donor priorities, but highlighted the transformative role of Mak-RIF, which since its launch in 2019, has enabled the university to refocus its research agenda to align with Uganda's socio-economic goals.

Mrs. Magara also acknowledged the research and innovations week was more than a celebration, but also a showcase of creativity, innovation, and the university's strategic commitment to national development. She affirmed the university's dedication to research that uplifts lives and supports wealth creation, emphasizing the importance of transitioning Ugandans into the money economy through innovation-led development.

Makerere's Research Has Reached World Class Standard – Prof. Nawangwe



Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe, Makerere's Vice Chancellor addressing the audience during the Research and Innovations Week. He thanked the President for his consistent, constructive feedback during his visits and remarked that Makerere's research has reached a world-class standard.

In his remarks, Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe, the Vice Chancellor Makerere University, emphasized that Makerere is deeply committed to conducting research that addresses national development challenges. He highlighted the University's strong engagement with communities and its global impact, citing the Infectious Diseases Institute (IDI) as an example that provides care to a large number of people living with HIV.

The Vice Chancellor also acknowledged the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), especially in establishing a board that promotes youth employment through innovation. He noted that more impactful initiatives were in the pipeline, and expressed his heartfelt appreciation to the Government of Uganda, the University Council, the Ministry of Education and Sports, and the researchers for their outstanding dedication and contribution to the advancement of knowledge and innovation.

The Impact of Research and Innovations at Makerere University



Dr. Roy Mayega, the Mak-RIF Coordinator, making a presentation on the impact of research and innovations at Makerere University at the Main Administration Building on 9th April 2025.

In his presentation titled, The Impact of Research and Innovations at Makerere University, Dr. Roy Mayega, the Mak-RIF Coordinator, noted that over the past six years, since the inception of Mak-RIF, the fund has supported a total of 1,337 projects. “Of these, 1,251 were new research projects aligned with the National Research Agenda, while 86 were categorized as special needs projects, such as initiatives addressing the Parish Development Model (PDM), enhancing tax revenue collection, and promoting youth employment,” he said.

He also highlighted that two years ago, the fund launched a PhD Research Grant, through which the Government of Uganda has so far supported 235 PhD students, in addition to initiating support for 15 commercialization projects.

Approach to Achieving Impact

To ensure that funded research leads to meaningful impact, Dr. Mayega explained that Mak-RIF conducted consultative meetings with government ministries and civil society organizations to identify national priority needs. “These consultations informed the development of a comprehensive needs assessment, which in turn guided the research agenda,” He said, emphasizing that while impact typically takes several years to be fully realized, Mak-RIF assesses the impact potential of ongoing projects using a structured Impact Potential Framework. This framework helps track the trajectory of projects and identify those with the capacity to accelerate toward large-scale impact. He added that so far, 578 projects have undergone evaluation using this framework.

He noted that of these projects:

157 (26.6%)

had developed
tangible products,

363 (61%)

made actionable policy
recommendations, and

66

focused on
capacity
building across
sectors.

While some projects were considered ready for commercialization, Dr. Mayega acknowledged that commercialization posed unique challenges, and pointed out that the cost of commercialization is significantly higher than that of research development, citing an example of a winery project which would require approximately UGX 1 billion to establish. He estimated the cost to bring all mid-level and scale-ready products to market at about UGX 80 billion.

He highlighted the success of MAKSOY, one of the innovations already on the market, as an example of progress. However, he stressed that not all projects can be scaled by government alone. He cited the case of Kiira Motors, which benefitted from government intervention to advance from innovation to market-ready product, as an example of the kind of public sector support needed. He concluded by outlining the future strategy of the Mak-RIF.

“The fund is working to build an innovation ecosystem that includes the private sector and impact investors. Additionally, Mak-RIF is leading efforts to develop a central registry of all innovations to improve coordination and visibility,” said Dr. Mayega. He also emphasized the need for continued learning and capacity development among innovators and stakeholders.

Several Obstacles Hampering Commercialization of Research and Innovation Products, says UNIPOD Manager



Dr. Cathy Ikiror Mbidde, Acting Manager, Makerere University Innovation Pod, making a presentation on commercialization of research and innovation products at Makerere University at the Main Administration Building on 9th April 2025.

Dr. Cathy Ikiror Mbidde, Acting Manager, Makerere University Innovation Pod, emphasized the increasing relevance of commercialization of research outputs amidst shrinking employment opportunities. “Transforming academic research into marketable products not only addresses societal needs but also drives national economic development through tangible social impact,” she said, defining commercialization as the process of converting innovations into economically valuable products or services—an intersection between innovation and entrepreneurship.

Dr. Mbidde outlined a structured commercialization pathway beginning with disclosure and ownership of the innovation, followed by intellectual property (IP) assessment and filing. She clarified that innovators could still receive institutional support even if formal IP protection had not been attained. She added that after IP assessment, a commercialization evaluation is conducted, potentially leading to company formation, with innovators receiving continuous business development support throughout the process.

Dr. Mbidde noted that Makerere University’s Innovation Pod (UniPod), established in 2022 and officially launched in 2024 under the Timbuktoo initiative, is the university’s commercialization hub. “UniPod offers a range of services, including IP management, knowledge transfer, access to funding, business mentorship, and industry linkages,” she said. According to Dr. Mbidde, commercialization timelines depend on the nature and maturity of the innovation; for instance, health sciences innovations may take between two to ten years due to regulatory and developmental complexities.

Despite progress, Dr. Mbidde acknowledged several obstacles hampering commercialization at the university. These include limited awareness of commercialization processes, fragmented institutional policies, lack of venture capital, and the academic culture of prioritizing publication over practical application. She also mentioned that futuristic innovations often lack immediate commercial viability and that there is minimal documentation of university commercialization successes. To date, UniPod has registered 28 intellectual property assets and is processing 29 more.

Supported by the Makerere University Research and Innovations Fund (Mak-RIF), three innovations have successfully transitioned into fully registered companies with branded identities. Dr. Mbidde also noted UniPod’s collaboration with Kiira Motors Corporation in a one-year industrial program involving 25 STEM students. She concluded by reaffirming UniPod’s commitment to guiding researchers from innovation to market, thereby fostering socio-economic transformation and expanding career prospects for graduates.

Pictorial

Presidential Inspection of the projects displayed in the Freedom Square



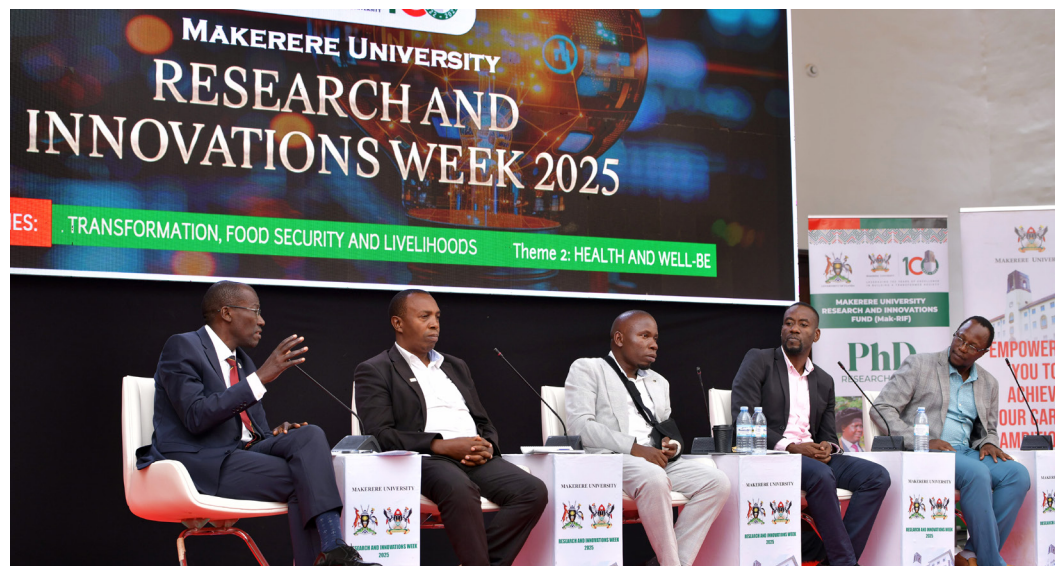
Scientific Presentations and Plenary Sessions in the Main Administration Building



Presentations by (L-R) Dr. Philip M. Nyenje, Prof. John Muyonga, and Dr. Nyeinga Karidewa focused on Reconstruction of an Extreme Flooding Event on River Katonga Bridge Crossing, Value Chain of Jackfruit, and Thermal Energy Storage for Institutional Cooking respectively. This session was moderated by Prof. Dorothy Okello (R).



Presentations by (2nd L-R) Mr. Michael Bamwesigye, Dr. Kamya Bazilio, Dr. Rose Nakibuule, and Mr. Wandiembe Symon Peter focused on ICT Policy and Leadership in Primary Education, Role of Artificial Intelligence in Innovation, and Building Resilient and Sustainable SMEs in Kampala. This session was moderated by Dr. Mercy Amiyo (L).



In this session moderated by Prof. Frank N. Mwiine, panelists were Prof. Clovis Kankya, Dr. Gabriel Tumwiine, Dr. Kabwama Steven, and Dr. Luke Nyakarahuka. Topics discussed were One Health Laboratory Network for Improved Human and Animal Diagnosis of Prioritised Zoonotic Diseases in Uganda, From COVID-19 to Ebola: How did lessons on Maintaining Essential Health Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic Inform the Ebola response in Uganda, and Are Domestic Animals Reservoirs for Emerging viral infections: Investigating the role of domestic Animals in the Transmission dynamics of Ebolaviruses, Marburg viruses and coronaviruses in Uganda.



In this session moderated by Dr. Mercy Amiyo (L), panelists were Dr. Patricia Atim, Counsel Abbas Luyombo, Dr. Julius Shopi Mbulankende, Dr. Nuluyati Nalwadda, and Dr. Leah N. Sikoyo. Topics discussed were Leaving no one behind: promoting disability rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities at Makerere University and strategic MDAs, Capacity Building of Teacher Educators in Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Selected Public Universities in Uganda, Analyzing the Impact of Differential Salary Increments on Secondary School Teachers in Uganda.

Editorial

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