

MAK introduces science journalism courses

By Andrew Ssenyonga

Makerere University (MAK) department of journalism and communication has finalised the review of their curriculum to incorporate science journalism and communication studies.

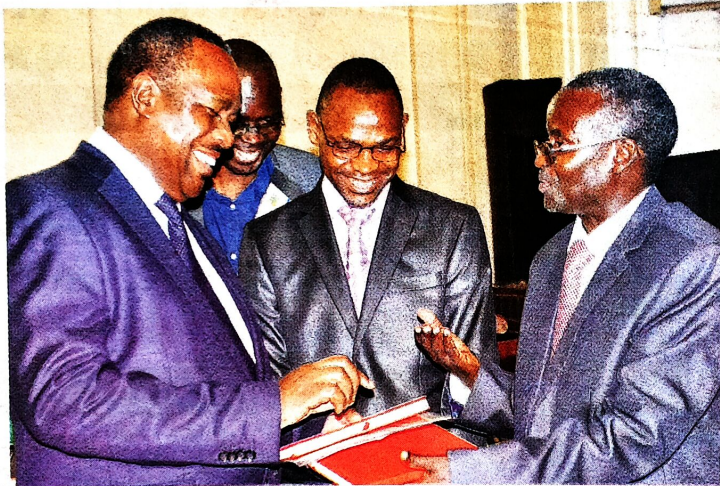
The new courses include media skills for scientists and science communication for journalists.

The head of department, Dr William Tayeabwa, said the courses have been introduced to influence the journalists' and scientists' ways of communicating scientific information.

"The courses prepare them by providing skills to break down scientific terms without losing meaning. Scientists also produce and disseminate a lot of information but most times they lack the knowledge of simplifying the scientific information they produce," Tayeabwa explained.

The don revealed this during the 2019 Annual Media Convention at Makerere University Main Hall yesterday. The convention was held under the theme: *Communicating science/research in the social media age: Sharing technical information from researchers with the public.*

The chief guest, Dr Elioda



(L-R) Dr Tumwesiqye, Dr Charles Wendo, Prof. Kakumba and Dr Tayeabwa during the annual media convention at Makerere University yesterday. Photo by Nancy Nanyonga

Tumwesiqye, the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, noted that there was a shortage of scientists who can explain their work in easily understandable language and journalists who can report about it accurately and effectively.

"I appreciate this pioneering initiative because such strategic enterprises will go a long way in popularising our research and innovations," he said.

Tumwesiqye called on scientists and journalists to take the 'communication skills for scientists' and 'science communication skills for journalists' online courses respectively in order to be better communicators of science.

"The new tools of communication will help us to demystify science, technology and innovation. By doing that, decisions on policy, business and personal matters

will increasingly be guided by evidence-based scientific advice," he explained.

The mandate of the ministry, Tumwesiqye said, is to provide overall policy guidance and co-ordination for science, research, technology and the whole national innovation system in the country.

"The ministry has developed a Sector Development Plan and is revising the Science, Technology and Innovation

The courses will enable scientists and journalists to communicate scientific information simply to the public

He advised scientists to get out of their laboratories and communicate science and scientific information in a format easy for the public to understand if they are to remain relevant to society.

Kakumba acknowledged the support from Scidev.net and Robert Boach Stiftung under the auspices of the Script Project, for funding training programmes in science communication at Makerere University department of journalism and communication.

Barbara Zawedde, the co-ordinator of Uganda Biosciences Information Centre (UBIC) noted that the move will simplify the work for scientists, especially agriculturists who are blamed of introducing Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).

"Since the introduction of GMOs, the public has blamed the scientists for planning to kill them with their innovations which were misrepresented in the media but this move will help scientists explain their ideas," she said.

The convention brought on board journalists, communication professionals, scholars and students in the field of journalism and communication, researchers from universities, civil society and policymakers among others.

(ST&I) Policy to identify universities as key players in ST&I advancement," he said.

The university deputy vice-chancellor in charge of academics, Prof. Umar Kakumba, said the media is key to creating the link between science and society as science not communicated is science lost.

He added that publishing findings in journals is good, but the information therein never reaches the public.

"By reporting about scientific developments, the media contribute to public understanding and engagement with science and technology," Kakumba noted.