

UCU VC Urges Mak Staff to Leverage University's Reputation and Network

Uganda Christian University (UCU) Vice-Chancellor (VC) Prof. Aaron Mushengyezi has called on Makerere University staff to take full advantage of the institution's global network and academic reputation.

In a digital keynote address on November 14, 2024, during the CHUSS CERTL International Conference at the Fairway Hotel in Kampala, Prof. Mushengyezi shared his own experiences at Makerere University, where he began his academic career. He emphasized that Makerere's global standing should be utilized by scholars to enhance their research and teaching profiles.

"Makerere shaped me not only as a student but also as a faculty and into leadership as head of department. I encourage those still at Makerere to leverage the good network and reputation it offers, This global network is a resource that academic staff must actively use. If you don't, you're missing out on tremendous opportunities for growth" Prof. Mushengyezi said.

He also spoke of the significant role Makerere played in providing him with opportunities to build global research connections, which were instrumental in his career development. Prof. Mushyengezi previously worked with Makerere University as an Assoc. Professor and Dean of School of Languages, Literature and Communication in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

He continued, highlighting that Makerere's international recognition has allowed Ugandan scholars to build academic reputations and connect globally. "Staff must leverage this reputation to build networks that can propel their academic careers forward," he added.

Delivering a key note address on Improving Research, Teaching and Learning with insights from UCU, Mushengyezi highlighted that UCU, although a relatively young university compared to Makerere, is committed to becoming a research-led institution, with efforts underway to strengthen its research capacity through various partnerships and innovations.

UCU's Research and Innovation Progress

Prof. Mushengyezi detailed the university's significant strides in research and innovation under his leadership since 2020. He described UCU's journey from a small theological college to a comprehensive university with over 14,000 students.

"UCU's transformation has been nothing short of remarkable," Prof. Mushengyezi said. "We started with a strong focus on teaching, but over the last few years, we've worked hard to build a robust research environment."

To boost research output, UCU established two separate directorates: the Directorate of Postgraduate Training (DPS) and the Directorate of Research, Partnerships, and Innovation (DRPI). "This restructuring has allowed us to focus on expanding research capacity and forging stronger partnerships," Prof. Mushengyezi explained.

Under his leadership, UCU has secured over \$5.3 million in external funding for 14 major projects, a record for the institution. "Research funding has been key in expanding our

capabilities and attracting international recognition," said Prof. Mushengyezi. "Through the UCU Research Fund, we have allocated over shs.1.4 billion (about USD 400) in grants to 27 projects to support research and innovation across various academic disciplines."

The Vice-Chancellor further explained UCU's commitment to supporting its scholars with financial assistance from internally generated funds. "For professors and associate professors, we provide up to shs.150 million over 24 months for research projects. For PhD holders, we allocate up to shs.50 million, while master's degree holders can receive grants of up to shs.15 million to support their research and skill development for 12 months," he revealed.

These grants are designed not only to advance research but also to encourage mentorship. "As part of these grants, senior scholars are expected to mentor younger researchers, helping to cultivate the next generation of academics," Prof. Mushengyezi added.

Prof. Mushengyezi also emphasized the need for universities to contribute to industrialization through innovation. He outlined the transition from the traditional Education 3.0 model—which focuses on research, teaching, and community service—to the more contemporary Education 5.0 model. The latter adds innovation and industrialization as core components.

"Universities must not only prepare students for employment but also for entrepreneurship and innovation," he argued. "At UCU, we have developed energy-efficient stoves, bamboo-based charcoal, and several student-led innovations that are market-ready."

Prof. Mushengyezi shared how UCU's innovation challenge has supported student ventures, with 10 teams receiving grants for their projects. "Our students are solving real-world problems with solutions that have the potential to scale," he said.

In his address, Prof. Mushengyezi also spoke about UCU's growing network of global partnerships. "We currently have 38 active partnerships with universities around the world," he revealed. "These collaborations enhance our research capacity and create opportunities for knowledge exchange."

One such collaboration includes a partnership with Matoke Foods Ltd., aimed at addressing food security issues in Uganda. "Partnerships like these are vital for both academic and industrial growth," Prof. Mushengyezi noted.

Prof. Mushengyezi stressed that the connection between research and teaching is essential for creating an enriching academic environment. "Active research enriches teaching," he said. "Our faculty are now presenting their work at international conferences and bringing new knowledge back to the classroom."

Moreover, UCU's community outreach initiatives have been bolstered by research-driven services. The university has partnered with organizations such as the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre and the Association of Surgeons of Uganda to offer dental and surgical services to underserved communities.

"Research is not just about publishing papers; it's about using that knowledge to benefit society," Prof. Mushengyezi said.

International exchange and faculty development were also central to Prof. Mushengyezi's remarks. He revealed that UCU hosts approximately 40 study-abroad students each year, fostering cross-cultural learning and academic exchange.

"These international engagements are helping raise UCU's global profile while enhancing the professional development of our faculty," he added. "It's a mutually beneficial relationship that strengthens both our teaching and research capacity."

Prof. Mushengyezi concluded his address by affirming UCU's commitment to advancing higher education in Uganda through continued research, innovation, and global collaborations. He called on universities across the country to embrace the Education 5.0 model, which focuses on the integration of research, teaching, innovation, and industrialization.

"Our role as universities is to shape the future," he said. "By focusing on innovation and collaboration, we can drive sustainable development and contribute to industrialization in Uganda and beyond."

As UCU continues to build on its research and innovation achievements, Prof. Mushengyezi's vision is clear: universities must evolve to meet the changing demands of the modern world, preparing students not just for jobs, but for the challenges of a rapidly changing global economy.

The presentation is attached

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