



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY



CITIZEN SCIENCE

The simple participating in complex matters of scientific research to better their health.

From my early days of scientific research, a supervisor or lead researcher would push you to ‘pull up your socks’ and publish your research findings in an internationally reputed journal. The aim would be, to create a public record of original contributions to knowledge and to encourage scientists to “speak” directly to one another. He or she would taunt you saying, ‘If you are unpublished, you do not exist! You must get into the hall of fame! Hall of fame meant the likes of the American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, or British Medical Journal or similar. If the journal is a prominent one, publication endows the author with an extra measure of prestige.

I spent sleepless nights working hard to get on the hall of fame. Thanks to my mentors, I finally did, not once and not twice. However, a question remained deep-seated in me; ‘so what?’ I had gained experience and expertise in packaging scientific data in a palatable format for other scientists to appreciate, but I was left wondering how my published work would influence positive change and development in my own environment?

It is until I joined the Infectious Diseases Institute (IDI), Makerere University, whose resume is rich with 750 international publications), that I learned about scientific research assimilation in non-scientific and non-researching audiences.

For example, much as IDI operates sophisticated centers of excellence in managing complicated HIV/AIDS amongst discordant couples, babies, adolescents, and aging persons, they engage museum curators and archivists, painters, graphic artists to bridge science and communities.

The interactive nature of the exhibition allowed them to give their opinions and add their voices to the content. The hope was that perceptions around HIV programming today would be recorded to assist in creating more deliberate programming to prevent the spread of the virus. Funding from the Wellcome Trust, UK will allow this exhibition to travel around Uganda where we will add local stories and languages to enhance the exhibition. We are also building capacity for citizen science with our Public Engagement for Science office Ruth Nalunga.

In Busukuma Division, Wakiso district, the Academy in collaboration with University of Cambridge, Margaret Trowel School of Fine Arts, Departments of Demography and Psychiatry at Makerere University, with the Academy for Health Innovation again ran, in multi-disciplinary study on aging that involved with the overseen by the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development oversaw a study on aging and the aim was to look at its effect on self-perception and cognition in older persons.

Such meaningful engagements, where complex research is scaled down to communities in a simple format, and married to the actual needs of a particular community or group, complete the equation. The ‘so what?’ after publishing research is answered through citizen science.



Welcome to Citizen Science - a new field of scientific research, where science is made responsive to community concerns and needs by engaging the public in research. It was my very first time to see ordinary citizens of Uganda actively engaged by professional scientists to achieve a common goal.

