

Judges cautioned against overdependence on AI

Amid growing enthusiasm around the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the legal system, the acting chief registrar of Courts of Judicature, Pamela Lamunu Ocaya, has cautioned judicial officers and their research assistants against over-reliance on it when drafting judgments.

Ocaya argued that AI frequently generates non-existing court cases that could embarrass not only individuals, but also the entire Judiciary.

She sounded the warning during a one-day training for the over 80 research magistrates at the Judiciary headquarters in Kampala yesterday.

Research magistrates are judicial officers that assist judges in looking for previously decided cases that are relevant to the cases before them, in addition to aiding them in drafting judgments.

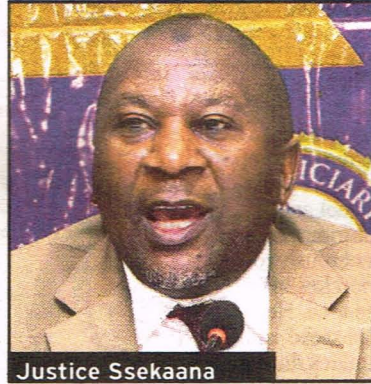
TREAD WITH UTTER VIGILANCE

Each judge of the High Court, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court is given a research magistrate/assistant to assist them in researching and drafting judgments.

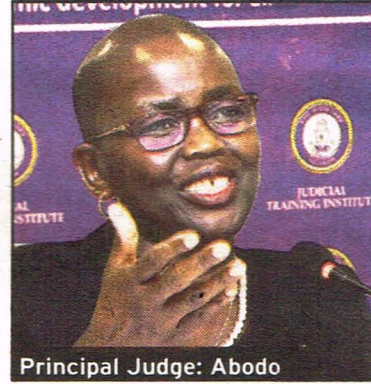
"We recognise that judicial research is being transformed by technology platforms such as AI. However, do not over-rely on them. Use them ethically



Lamunu Ocaya



Justice Ssekaana



Principal Judge: Abodo

because, for example, AI cannot exercise judicial reasoning. Neither can it independently distinguish a judicial reasoning or a comment in the case," Ocaya said.

Underscoring their role in the administration of justice, Ocaya said they are not merely researchers, but serve as quality controllers in the justice system.

Citing the huge workload pressures on most of the judges, Ocaya urged the research magistrates to effectively support judges for timely resolution

of cases. Ocaya said the training was specifically designed to sharpen the capacity of the research magistrates as the Judiciary kicks off a new legal year.

"When legal opinions are thorough and reliable, judgments become well-structured and properly referenced, contributing to doctrinal clarity and reducing contradictory rulings," Ocaya said.

Principal Judge Jane Frances Abodo remarked that without research support, the quality and credibility

of many judicial decisions would be compromised.

"Your work, therefore, directly contributes to upholding the rule of law and maintaining public confidence in the judiciary," she said.

Abodo explained that research magistrates are not merely researchers, but custodians of methodological discipline.

Supreme Court judge Mike Chibita urged the research magistrates to ensure timely, accurate and reliable opinions are rendered

to their respective judges by taking advantage of authoritative legal sources such as Uganda Legal Information Institute.

"You should know that the quality of your work directly influences judicial outcomes and public confidence in courts," Chibita said.

Prof. Andrew Khauka, the executive director Judicial Training Institute, underscored the need for the Judiciary to invest in research, saying it is key for sound decisions.

HEARING OF ELECTION PETITIONS

As the Judiciary braces for the hearing of the election petitions, Court of Appeal judge Musa Ssekaana urged the research magistrates to keep updated with the electoral laws to support the judges quickly resolving them.

"You should know that if someone filed an election petition before the winner has been published in the gazette, such a case is a nullity. If it is a voter petitioning, his or her case has to be supported by 500 signatures of the voters in such constituencies," Ssekaana said.

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