

Makerere, editors launch climate journalism program

OBSERVER TEAM

KAMPALA — On a campus long known for shaping Uganda's intellectual life, a new effort is taking shape that could change how the country tells one of its most urgent stories: climate change.

Makerere University, working with the Uganda Editors' Guild and backed by the British High Commission, has launched a specialized climate journalism certification aimed at strengthening how Ugandan reporters cover environmental issues at a time when the country is increasingly feeling the effects of a changing climate.

The programme, developed by the university's Centre for Climate Change Research and Innovation, seeks to push climate reporting out of the margins of newsrooms and onto the front pages. It arrives as Uganda's largely agricultural economy grapples with erratic weather patterns, crop disruptions and growing internal migration linked to environmental stress.

For many in the media industry, the challenge is not simply about awareness. It is

about expertise.

Alex Atuhaire of the Uganda Editors' Guild, which helped design the training, said the course is intended to equip journalists with the skills needed to interpret complex environmental science and turn it into compelling reporting.

"One of the key objectives of the Uganda Editors' Guild is to facilitate engagement and mentorship to enable us to play our agenda-setting role," Atuhaire said during the programme's launch at Makerere University.

"Our editors will not only offer mentorship but will ensure that the work you do is of the quality to get published on the major platforms in the country," he added.

The certification course, structured around eight modules, is delivered entirely online and allows journalists to study at their own pace. It was developed through collaboration between scientists and media professionals, an approach designed to bridge the long-standing gap between scientific research and newsroom storytelling.

Environmental reporting in Uganda has often struggled to compete with the

immediacy of politics and daily breaking news. Complex scientific issues frequently remain underreported or simplified, leaving the public without the deeper context needed to understand the stakes.

Revocatus Twinomuhangi, dean of the School of Forestry, Environmental and Geographical Sciences at Makerere University, said journalists play a crucial role in translating technical knowledge for wider society.

"Journalists are the bridge between science and society," he said. "If you cannot explain something simply, you do not understand it well enough."

The training programme is supported by the British High Commission through the Climate Smart Jobs Programme, reflecting growing international interest in strengthening climate reporting capacity in countries most vulnerable to environmental disruption.

British High Commissioner Lisa Chesney said the initiative is part of a broader effort to ensure that the stories of climate change in Uganda are told primarily by local journalists.

Those working in the field say the need for stronger environmental reporting has become

increasingly clear.

Leonard Namukasa, a journalist with InfoNile, noted that many reporters hesitate to cover climate issues because they lack confidence in the underlying science.

As a result, climate stories can fall through the cracks of daily news cycles that prioritize faster-moving political developments.

Namukasa encouraged newsroom leaders to give reporters the time and space needed to pursue deeper environmental investigations, work that often requires sustained research rather than quick turnaround reporting.

The organisers hope the programme will gradually shift that culture.

Makerere University also plans to expand the training beyond journalists. According to Professor Sarah Ssali, the university's deputy vice chancellor for academic affairs, future phases could include training for local leaders and religious figures, groups that often play influential roles in shaping public understanding at the community level.

The idea is to build a wider ecosystem of climate literacy across society.