

# Science works: Uganda must back its innovators and show up at Kololo

**F**rom April 30 to May 3, all roads should lead to Kololo Independence Grounds, not for politics or ceremony, but for something far more transformative – a national showcase of Ugandan skill. The annual Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Week, spearheaded by Dr Monica Musenero and her team, is no longer just an exhibition of ideas. It is now a marketplace of solutions and finished processed products.

This year's theme *Science Works*, is not a slogan. It is a statement of progress and proof. For years, the STI Secretariat, under the guidance of President Yoweri Museveni, has invested in scientists, innovators and entrepreneurs, often in the face of skepticism. Many Ugandans have questioned whether funding scientists is worth it, arguing that results take too long or are not visible enough. Yet this year's exhibition answers that doubt with evidence: the transition from prototypes to finished products ready for consumption and commercialisation.

The Kololo showcase will bring together a wide ecosystem of innovators. In agriculture, institutions such as National Agricultural Research Organisation, as well as private ventures like Coffee Investment Consortium Uganda (CICU) and NONDA Commodities will demonstrate how value addition is transforming raw materials into high-quality finished goods. Coffee, long exported in raw form, is now being processed, branded and packaged locally, capturing more value for Ugandans.

In pharmaceuticals, companies such as Dei Biopharma, Microhaem Scientifics, Jena Herbal and other emerging players are steadily reducing Uganda's dependence on imported medicines. These innovators are not just producing drugs, they are saving



the country millions of dollars in import costs, while strengthening national health security.

The e-mobility sector is equally compelling. Ugandan companies such as Kiira Motors Corporation, Spiro, Gogo Electric and Zembo are redefining transport with electric vehicles, solar-powered motorcycles and clean mobility solutions. These are not future concepts, they are present-day innovations available for Ugandans to see, test and even purchase. They also signal Uganda's commitment to environmental sustainability and industrial transformation.

What makes this year's Science Week truly remarkable is its structure. It is designed not just as an exhibition, but as a fully-stocked "Made in Uganda" supermarket, where innovation meets the market. Here, visitors can interact with products that have moved from idea stage to commercial readiness. It is a powerful demonstration that innovation is only complete when it reaches the consumer.

Equally important is the integrated system behind these innovations. The STI ecosystem brings together regulators such as UNBS, UNCST and URSB, research institutions, universities and private sector players to ensure that products meet standards and compete globally. This co-ordination reflects a maturing innovation environment, one that understands that science does not operate in isolation, but within a network of support systems. However,

one persistent challenge remains – public impatience. There is a tendency to expect immediate results whenever government funding is allocated to scientists. Yet history teaches us that innovation is rarely instant. Consider Henry Ford and the early Ford Model T.

When it was introduced in 1908, it lacked many features we consider standard today and was difficult to operate. But through continuous refinement, it became one of the most influential inventions in modern history.

The Google Play Store did not emerge fully formed. It began in 2008 as Android Market and was gradually refined over six years through continuous upgrades and system improvements into today's leading global app marketplace, demonstrating that meaningful innovation is built over time, not achieved overnight.

These global examples mirror Uganda's own journey. The progress we see today at Kololo is the result of years of investment, experimentation and collaboration under the leadership of Dr Monica Musenero and the STI Secretariat. It is a reminder that science is a process, one that requires patience, trust and sustained support.

Looking ahead, there is even greater potential.

Aligning future science weeks with major continental

events such as AFCON 2027 could open Uganda's innovation sector to international markets, partnerships and investment opportunities. It would be a strategic move to showcase Uganda not just as a consumer nation, but as a producer of knowledge, technology and solutions.

The message to Ugandans is simple: show up, engage and believe. Attend the Science Week not just to observe, but to appreciate the journey behind each product. Support local innovations by buying Ugandan. Recognise the effort behind every breakthrough.

History consistently reminds us, every successful innovation we admire today once looked incomplete, delayed or even like a failure in its early stages.

*The writer is a publisher of The Innovator's Handbook and The Presidential Handbook, publications that review and publish development and innovation achievements.*



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