

BY SYLVIA KATUSHABE

URSB urged to protect student innovations

KAMPALA. As skilling takes centre stage in schools, the Ministry of Education together with Uganda Registration Service Bureau (URSB) have cautioned that without Intellectual Property (IP) rights, students/schools risk losing ownership of their ideas and innovations.

This comes as the country is promoting the competence based curriculum, especially for O-Level learners. Under this curriculum, learners have been encouraged to develop projects that solve real life problems.

According to the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Education and Sports, Ms Kedrace Turyagyenda, there is a growing number of creative ideas that have been developed by different learners in different schools. However, they remain unprotected under the Intellectual Property (IP) law.

The ministry, together with URSB have asked schools to encourage students to register their innovations to safeguard them from misuse and plagiarism, while ensuring that they benefit from their work.

"Intellectual property is so fundamental, that we as Ugandans and Africans are late in getting its maximum utilization. It provides the framework through which such ideas, products, and creative outputs are protected and valued," Ms Turyagyenda said.

Speaking during the recent World Intellectual Property Day event, Ms Turyagyenda explained that without proper protection, such ideas can easily be copied or commercialised by others, leaving innovative Ugandans out of the race to improve technology.

"People come here and find our fine crafts made by uneducated grandmothers. They buy it as a craft, take it where



Ms Kedrace Turyagyenda, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Sports (centre) and URSB Registrar General Mercy Kainobwiso (3rd right) interact with students during the World Intellectual Property Day at URSB offices in Kampala last week. PHOTO/SYLVIA KATUSHABE

they are going and they just adjust something small and they call it their own. They get the intellectual property, which is not theirs," Ms Turyagyenda said.

Intellectual property rights are the rights given to persons over the creations of their minds. They usually give the creator an exclusive right over the use of his/her creation for a certain period of time.

According to URSB, IP refers to creations of the mind, such as inventions; literary and artistic works, designs and symbols, names and images used in commerce. IP rights grant the owner of

the work exclusive rights to exploit and benefit from his/her creation.

Last year, URSB in partnership with the World Intellectual Property Organization launched an IP programme in schools to help learners protect and commercialise ideas and innovations. The programme is aimed at integrating intellectual property awareness into the education system. This is planned as a way of equipping learners with knowledge on how to identify, protect, and commercialise their creations, fostering innovation at a young age.

Ms Turyagyenda emphasised that in-

tellectual property not only helps secure ownership, prevent unauthorised use and gives innovators a competitive edge but also creates opportunities for learners to earn from their ideas.

"We consider quality education to be holistic, to be the education that develops a young child and a young person in all aspects of life. The mind, the capacity to think innovatively and creatively, to solve problems, to be literate and numerate, to be able to interpret what is written by other people and convert it into what works for us," she said.

Adding that, "It's not the grades on a

piece of paper. It is the capacity to translate what you know in your mind into something tangible and practical."

Ms Turyagyenda highlighted that under the Competence based curriculum every learner has potential that can be nurtured.

"These young people are extremely creative, they are able to do things that we can't imagine because naturally we have the creativity in us. What the school system does is to develop that and empower them to know what each is capable of and go ahead and use it," she said.

URSB Registrar General Mercy Kainobwiso emphasised the need for continuous sensitisation and education of the young people about IP as more learners develop new innovations that need protection.

"We have decided to capture young people when they are still young, because of the fact that the government had a shift in the education curriculum where it is now practical rather than theoretical," she said. "The law is available and it is modern [enough] to protect intellectual property."

Educationists welcome the ideas of promoting IP in schools saying it will help students to understand the importance of registering their ideas and innovation and in the long run earn from them.

However, Ms Moreen Asimwe, assistant director of studies at Christ the King SS in Kalisizo, said it might not be practical with project work since students from different schools may produce similar projects. "Students at times have similar project work because Uneb gives schools the same theme," she said.