Four Ugandans in race for Africa top engineering prize

By Taddeo Bwambale

Four young Ugandans are among 16 African engineers shortlisted for next year's prestigious prize for engineering innovation in Africa.

The 2018 Africa Prize for Engineering Innovation recognises the most talented African engineers from across sub-Saharan Africa.

Brian Gitta, one of the Ugandans nominated for the prize, is the developer of Matibabu, a low-cost reusable device that tests for malaria quickly and accurately without drawing blood.

His innovation has received global acclaim and funding from international bodies. His team was recognised by President Yoweri Museveni in 2015, who offered $50,000 (sh181m) in funding support.

Other Ugandan inventors vying for the continental prize are Alvin Kabwama, whose UriSAF healthcare kit tests urine for infections quickly, accurately and affordably; Arthur Woniala, the brains behind Khainza Energy Gas, a cheap biogas made from manure and safe for household use, and Lawrence Okettayot, who is behind Sparky Dryer, a low-tech dehydrator that dries fruits and vegetables to extend their shelf life and reduce food wastage.

The Africa Prize was launched in 2014 by the Royal Academy of Engineering. It comes with a six-month support programme including funding, training, mentorship and access to the Royal Academy of Engineering's network of high profile, experienced engineers and business development experts.

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The shortlist was announced yesterday in Cape Town, South Africa and covers a range of innovations in health, agriculture, renewable energy and audio aid for visually impaired people.

In June 2018, the finalists will present their businesses to judges in front of a live audience, after which one winner will receive £25,000 (about sh118m) and three runners-up £10,000 (sh47.5m) each.

Each of the finalists will develop skills that last a lifetime and be part of a growing community of talented African engineers working to accelerate socio-economic development through business, organisers said.

"Turning engineers into entrepreneurs is vital to unlocking the creative solutions that exist across Africa," said Africa Prize judge Moses Musaazi.

The engineers will be able to approach funders, clients and investors as well as access knowledge to improve their supply chain and business models, the prize organisers said.

Dr Elioda Tumwesigye, the Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation, said the newly-created ministry was working out plans to support local innovations through registration and seed funding.

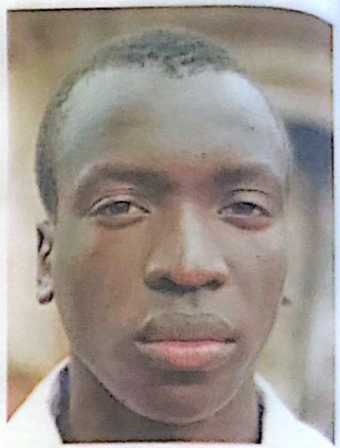
"We are creating a department for innovation registration and intellectual property. It will work with the Uganda Registration Services Bureau to provide, register and protect developers' patent rights," Tumwesigye said.

While primary support by the ministry is geared towards encouraging more home-grown innovations, the minister said initial focus will be on existing innovations.

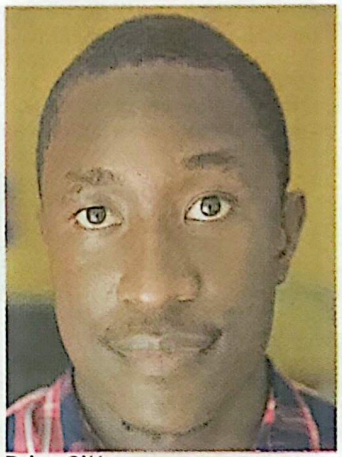
"We want to take care of already existing innovations so that the developers are able to translate the wealth of research and development into commercial value," he explained.



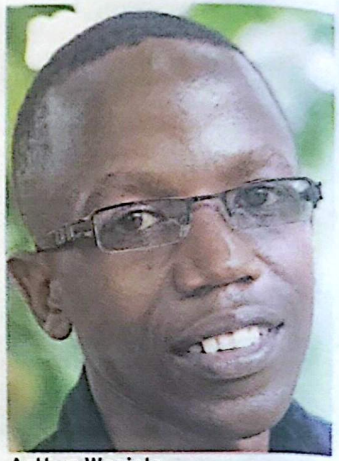
Alvin Kabwama



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