

New Vision in partnership with the Irish Embassy, Travelcare and Trocaire is searching for Uganda's most innovative teacher. Every Wednesday, we shall profile some of the nominated teachers until August when a panel of judges shall select the best. A total of top 12 teachers will each win sh1.5m. The five most outstanding teachers will enjoy an all-expenses paid study trip to Ireland early next year. Today, **Conan Businge** brings you Andrew Zirintusa, a teacher who has changed the teaching of agriculture

It is past midday on a Saturday and some of the agriculture students of Makerere College School are preparing to set off to their farm, located 50km away.

In their company, is a teacher, Andrew Zirintusa, who not only takes them to farms, but also to agricultural research centres. He believes student's enthusiasm to learn should be raised by the techniques a teacher uses, both in and outside the classroom.

"I believe in practical application of what I teach. But this does not mean we are just going to be digging. Children also need to be shown the world of research in agriculture," he explains.

His hands-on style of teaching has helped him improve academic scores of the students and schools, on top of winning countrywide bio-technology competitions.

Zirintusa has been teaching for the last 10 years. He started his journey in a Universal Secondary Education at St. John's SS Wakitaka, from 2007 to 2014. He later joined Makerere College School in 2015.

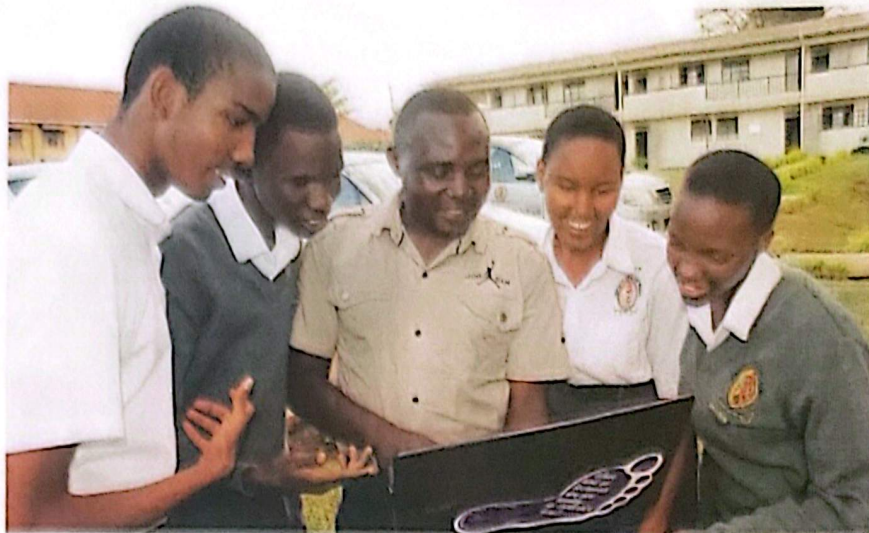
He is a great admirer of agricultural biotechnology studies, a technique he uses to inspire students to do sciences, especially agriculture as a subject.

"Students want to discover and know new things," he says.

According to Zirintusa, all this can be done, without getting into extra costs, but by taking advantage of the available research centres, laboratories and facilities owned by the Government.

He adds, "There are few students doing sciences in the country. When it comes to agriculture, most students wrongly imagine it is meant for local farmers who are less educated," he explains.

Zirintusa, whose name loosely means, fortune will deliver me to



Zirintusa with his students. He uses the practical method of teaching agriculture. Photo by Abou Kisige

Zirintusa re-invents teaching agriculture

destiny, says students need to be helped to change this mindset. "This is a new style of teaching agriculture. We need to see how we can sustain agriculture in the region, amidst climatic changes," he explains.

About 60% of Uganda's population is engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing. Agriculture has grown at an average rate of 2.8% per year in the last eight years. It presents immense opportunities for growth in other sectors like manufacturing especially agro-processing.

Before joining Makerere College, Zirintusa had opened up gardens using about the 200 agriculture students he had in his school.

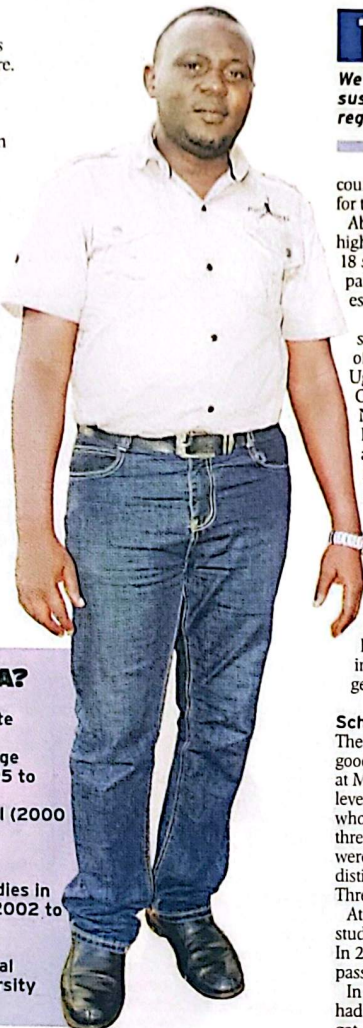
"We would study agriculture, using practical work in the gardens. Students should learn by doing, if we mean what we are teaching," he explains.

Makerere College is now opening up gardens at its new site in Mulawa for academic purposes. He is currently involving students at Makerere College in bio-technology research.

Bio-technology competitions
Makerere College has won the

WHO IS ZIRINTUSA?

- He went to Mpumde Estate Primary School in Jinja
- Zirintusa joined Kilira College Butiki for Ordinary level (1995 to 1998)
- Went to Jinja SS for A'level (2000 to 2001)
- Pursued his first degree at Kyambogo University.
- Bachelor of vocational studies in agriculture with Education (2002 to 2005)
- He is currently pursuing a master's degree in agricultural extension at Makerere University



TOP TIP ✓

We need to see how we can sustain agriculture in the region, amidst climatic changes

country's bio-technology competition, for the last two consecutive years.

About 300 students from eight higher education institutions and 18 secondary schools last year participated in an annual science essay writing competition.

The competition, now in its second year, was held at the end of last year, was organised by Uganda Biosciences Information Centre (UBIC), which is based at National Crop Resources Research Institute in Namulonge. It aims at encouraging students to pick interest in agricultural science and technology.

But the brains behind the city-based school competitions, is Zirintusa, who has changed his style of teaching agriculture.

The agricultural biotechnology is designed for students interested in careers such as laboratory or research technicians in plant biotechnology, breeding, genetics, or physiology.

School performance

The school's performance has been good for the two years he has been at Makerere College. At the Ordinary level in 2016, there were 107 students who passed in distinctions and credit threes. The following year, there were 150 students and they all got distinctions and the worst had credit Three.

At A'level in 2015, there were four students and they all passed with Bs. In 2016, there 20 students and all passed with B and C.

In his former school, in 2012, he had 80 students and of these 17 got distinctions and the rest got

What others say

Makerere College School headteacher Martin Mulyingo: Zirintusa is a committed and disciplined teacher. He always devises unique ways of teaching his students. He loves teaching through practicals.

Practical activities in the school farm promote students' interest to enter production and marketing of crops and livestock in the society after school.

Dr Barbara Zawedde, the Co-ordinator at UBIC Zirintusa has been working with us, to help students understand biotechnology and its value in our country. He helps students are always among the top students in the biotechnology competitions.

Dr Zawedde who is a regulatory advisor for some of the NARO biotech projects, adds, "Zirintusa is always willing to learn and has great interpersonal skills."

Anita Tibasaaga, the media and public relations officer for Uganda Bio-Science Information Centre (UBIC) say, "Zirintusa is a very organised and serious teacher."

"We always organise contests and he has for years been presenting students in these competitions. Whichever schools he joins as a teacher, he succeeds."

She adds that he handles sophisticated bio-technology trainings for students, "But makes sure students excel in class and in these competitions."

Jane Bawayo, workmate He is a good teacher and is always there for his students. He participates in school activities. He is already helping students in the next competition for biotechnology.

credit three and one credit four. The following year, of the 90 students, 20 got distinctions and the rest all passed in credits three to five. He says he works with fellow teachers to make sure that the students excel. "It is not a one-man job."

Other contributions

He was involved in the tree greening project for his school. He was tasked alongside his colleagues to plant trees for the school, on their new campus in Kira Town Council in Wakiso district.

One of the students, Michael Mugabi says: "We love our trees and with the support of Zirintusa, we hope that our trees will soon be a great value to us in learning, but also as wind breakers and shades." Apart from the agriculture projects and tree planting, Zirintusa is also involved in promoting discipline in the school.

"He is one of the house masters at Makerere College, and has greatly helped our boys become good students," says Musinguzi Patrick, one of the parents with children in both O'level and A' level at the school.