

The tool enhances efficiency and structure, but it does not replace the mind of a judge.

BY KARIM MUYOBO

The Judiciary has rolled out a new Shs2.2 billion digital judgment-writing tool aimed at tackling a backlog of more than 167,000 cases pending across courts countrywide.

According to the recently released court file census report, a total of 167,353 cases are pending across all court levels, with 46,542 classified as backlog—meaning they have remained unresolved for more than two years.

A further 4,629 cases are awaiting judgment, a stage judicial officers say often contributes significantly to delays.

Officials note that each judge handles between 500 and 600 cases annually, a workload that has strained the system and slowed case disposal.

These figures already paint a picture of a justice system under strain.

But the new system, developed by the LexisNexis Rule of Law Foundation and unveiled in Kampala yesterday, is designed to cut the time judges and magistrates spend drafting judgments by embedding legal research tools and structured templates directly into Microsoft Word.

Ms Caroline Obo, a lawyer and researcher with the foundation, said a baseline survey conducted before de-

New legal tool targets backlog



Chairperson of the Judgment-Writing Tool Committee Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire (centre, seated), Lead Consultant at the LexisNexis Rule of Law Foundation Afsoon McClellan (2nd left, seated) and other judicial officers during a training on the digital judgment-writing tool in Kampala yesterday. PHOTO/KARIM MUYOBO

velopment confirmed that judgment writing consumes a substantial portion of judicial officers' time.

"In criminal cases, once a trial ends, judges take considerable time writing judgments. The same applies in civil matters after hearings. This contributes

directly to delays," Ms Obo said.

The project was implemented in collaboration with the Judiciary, with support from former Chief Justice Alfonse Owiny-Dollo.

Justice Geoffrey Kiryabwire, the chairperson of the Judgment Writing Tool

Committee, said the concept dates back to 2012 during a case management training in the United Kingdom.

"The discussions we have had for years about leveraging technology in judicial work have now materialised into a practical tool accessible to judicial of-

ONLINE FUNCTIONALITY

The system operates within Microsoft Word – already widely used by judicial officers – and supports offline functionality. It also links with key judicial systems such as the Electronic Court Case Management Information System and the Uganda Legal Information Institute.

ficers on their laptops," Justice Kiryabwire said.

He further revealed that the idea was partly inspired by a foreign judge who had developed a personal drafting aid, prompting efforts to explore a similar solution for Uganda.

Initial attempts using open-source platforms were unsuccessful, but the breakthrough came after engaging LexisNexis at a legal information conference in Cape Town, South Africa.

The tool integrates Ugandan legislation, jurisprudence and legal materials directly into the drafting interface, eliminating the need for judges to switch between multiple platforms.

Ms Afsoon McClellan, the lead consultant at the LexisNexis Rule of Law Foundation, said the software was developed after consultations with members of the Bench, the Bar, academia, civil society and the Judiciary's ICT leadership.