SCIENCE: MUSENERO ROOTS FOR MORE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR WOMEN



Musenero urges women teachers to encourage female students to pursue sciences

BY UMARU KASHAKA

Women and girls continue to be under-represented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education globally, despite the fact that more girls are in school today than ever before.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, women make up only 35% of STEM graduates, mainly because of gender stereotypes and limited access to quality education.

In Uganda, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, under the leadership of Dr Monica Musenero, is working to change that by introducing affirmative action.

"In the next term, we are going to have affirmative action for women as a ministry, because when women join science, they come up with the most unique products. Currently, however, we are predominantly having the male brain creating our innovations, and so we are missing out on the female brain," she says.

Musenero says affirmative action is necessary to encourage girls to study science subjects, and she thanks the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni, for the new lower secondary curriculum, which was rolled out in 2020 to produce secondary school graduates with employable skills.

"The lower curriculum has motivated a lot of girls to come forward; otherwise, they were withering away," she says.

"Yes, people were criticising our education system, and indeed they were right, but the Ministry of Education and Sports identified this and changed the system. So the people coming out of universities in future are going to be innovative. We have also come up with a way of converting graduates into innovators," Musenero says.



Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja observes a medical simulation demonstration by a Ministry of Health official during last year's National Science Week exhibition at Kololo Independence Grounds in Kampala

The minister notes that most graduates from universities are unable to innovate.

Musenero recalls that before the sitting Government made a deliberate effort to empower women and provide them with equal opportunities as their male counterparts in 1989, girls pursuing science-related subjects and courses were few.

"When I was starting high school in 1991, girls were very few in science because by Senior Two, girls were told not to do sciences and mathematics. And so, girls were afraid. I was fortunate to be in a girls' school – Bubulo Girls High School – where we did not have that fear of studying science subjects," she says.

Musenero, a scientist and epidemiologist, also recalls that when she joined Bubulo Girls High School, she was determined to study science subjects from the outset.

"I just wanted to do my thing and I passed the sciences extremely well. I realised that it is simply a matter of reorienting your thinking," she says.

Musenero advises girls aspiring to study sciences to build their confidence by aiming to be the best wherever they go.

"Once you determine it in your heart, it comes naturally. I also advise women to nurture others. Hold the hand of that girl child – even if she is not your own child but a neighbour's – and speak a few encouraging words," she says.

Musenero also urges women teachers to encourage female students to pursue sciences.

Data from the Uganda National Examinations Board shows that science subjects recorded a decline in top grades, with more candidates clustering in average performance bands during the 2025 Uganda Certificate of Education examinations. Musenero also implores women not to be consumed by negativity, saying it undermines their confidence.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IS NECESSARY TO ENCOURAGE GIRLS TO STUDY SCIENCE SUBJECTS.

"Not everything that happens around you occurs because you are being discriminated against. Some things simply happen because you are a worker," she said.

Musenero appeals to women to focus on their achievements and keep building on them.

"For me, that is what has kept me going. I am not a perfect human being, but I am always doing my very best. I do not pay attention to negativity. I focus on my strengths and I deliver on that. So, focus on your strengths and deliver," she advises women who look up to her.

Musenero commends the Government for championing women's emancipation and creating opportunities for them to occupy positions of leadership. "But I also want to thank the women, especially those in science," she says.

Musenero also says for an economy to place the ministry at the centre of its development, a minimum of 2% of the gross domestic product must be appropriated for the sector annually. The ministry's main budget currently stands at approximately sh380b.

"So we need much more than that, especially given the stage that we are at," Musenero says.

SCIENCE WEEK

Dr Musenero says the forthcoming National Science Week – one of Uganda's flagship annual events celebrating the power of science technology and innovation since 2009 – will be particularly exciting this year.

"The National Science Week has taken on a completely new dimension since 2021. It is one of the communication platforms where the public gets to see and interact with innovators, because most of the time they are working in their laboratories and workshops," she says.

This year's science week will take place in the last week of April at the Kololo Independence Grounds in Kampala.

Musenero says the event enables them to showcase the progress made in the sector.

"We have had thematic progress over the past five years, and this year we are going to showcase the impact of our products on the economy," she says.

The minister adds that they will demonstrate how science has positioned the country to execute a qualitative leap and transformation towards a high middle-income status of $500b within the next 15 years.

"We are going to show how we are interfacing with all the different sectors to make sure that the economy grows from $50b to $500b. It is going to be exciting and substantial. We will be holding sub-regional interactions because we have realised that some people from up-country find it difficult to attend," she says.

Musenero adds that they will hold several science weeks before the grand event at Kololo Independence Grounds.

"I really expect that after the National Science Week, no Ugandan should have an excuse to remain poor," she adds.