

20 April 2016

Prof. John Ddumba Ssentamu  
Vice-Chancellor  
Makerere University

Thru:  
Prof. Edward K. Kirumira  
Principal  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Makerere University

Dear Sir:

We write to express our concern about the future of the doctoral programme of the Makerere Institute for Social Research. None of us are at present employed at Makerere University. But many of us have had an attachment to MISR as external research associates or as visiting lecturers. Many of us have been involved in the teaching of MISR doctoral students, and all of us have watched in admiration as MISR's doctoral programme has grown from its infancy to become the leading center for post-graduate training in the social sciences in eastern Africa.

Recent reports in the Ugandan media indicate that your administration is uncertain about the future of the PhD programme. We wish to stress the following:

1. Uganda's universities are critically undersupplied with qualified PhD holders. The rapid expansion in the university sector, and the very low rate of completion in graduate programmes, means that only 11.7 percent of the total academic staff at Uganda's universities hold PhDs. According to a 2012 report from the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology, most of Uganda's PhD holders are senior men. Many of them have published comparatively little since the completion of their degrees. The UNCST report terms their record of research productivity 'dismal'.
2. Since its inception in January 2012 our colleagues at the Makerere Institute of Social Research have been working to build up a programme for the training of PhDs in the social sciences. It is a five year course. The programme begins with a period of training in social science methods and theory and culminates in a three year period of research leading to the writing of the dissertation. At present there are 31 students enrolled. The majority of them come from Uganda, but there are students also from Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and other places. Several of the students enrolled in the programme have successfully applied for funding from external agencies to support their research and writing work. Many of the signatories to this letter have attended MISR's seminars, and some of us have worked directly with this cohort of PhD students. We regard them with great admiration and hope: their work is timely and important; it is carefully grounded

in scholarship; and it contributes meaningfully to international debates in the students' respective fields.

We urge you to regard the continuance and expansion of the PhD programme at MISR as a matter of great importance. Over the course of several years MISR's Executive Director, Mahmood Mamdani, has worked with MISR's talented teaching staff to create an extraordinarily valuable centre for the training of a new generation of African social scientists. By virtue of the networks they have established during the course of their training at Makerere graduates of the PhD programme will, in the course of time, take up teaching posts in Uganda and in other places in eastern Africa, constituting a new generation of leadership in Uganda's academic life. It would be a matter of enduring disappointment if, at this early stage, this place of great promise were prematurely closed down.

We further urge you to take into serious consideration the possibility of renewing Prof. Mamdani's contract as Executive Director of MISR. We are aware that some members of the MISR community have made serious complaints about Prof. Mamdani's leadership of the institute. We are not in a position to evaluate these complaints. We urge you to adjudicate them fairly. It is for us to point out that, so far as we are aware, there are no social scientists in Uganda's universities who have greater intellectual and analytical reach, greater organizational prowess, and better connections with external supporters than Prof. Mamdani. In our view it would be premature to deprive MISR of his expert leadership at this crucial stage in the life of the PhD programme.

Sincerely yours,

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