

Developing Career Services at Makerere University



UASP Success Stories: Henry Nsubuga



From a young age, Henry Nsubuga knew he wanted to be in a profession where he could help people. Once considering the priesthood, his career journey eventually led him to the counseling profession and his current position as Manager of the Counseling and Guidance Center at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda.

Early in his tenure at Makerere, Henry began noticing a trend among his students: Yes, they sought support in grappling with relationship problems and other anxieties common to college students around the world. But Henry found they also regularly felt overwhelmed by the university-to-work transition. Many had no idea what career path they were interested in pursuing or how to start a job search process. According to Henry, “less than 3% of the population reach university

“Students would be applying for courses they didn’t know anything about [and then] complaining they didn’t like the courses... They were stranded,” as Henry described, “and we didn’t know how to address those issues.”

in Uganda,” so his students’ parents often did not have personal experience with higher education to be able to guide their students. At the time, career counseling was neither among the student services offered by the university, nor part of Henry’s own professional training. In 2015, he seized an opportunity to change that.

Henry applied and was selected to participate in a competitive fellowship, the University Administration Support Program (UASP). The program, designed and implemented by IREX since 2002, identifies managers at universities in Africa and Eurasia with the potential to be a catalyst for administrative reform. Fellows visit the United States for six weeks, engaging as a cohort in IREX’s leadership training and peer to peer learning during the first and final program weeks. Each fellow also participates in a four-week tailored placement at a partner U.S. host university to exchange best practices with counterparts in their administrative focus area.

Because Henry knew he wanted to introduce career services at Makerere University, IREX placed him with Florida State University’s Career Center. There he met a team that allowed him to shadow their operations and ask questions that were instrumental in informing his vision for career counseling back in Uganda. He continues to maintain contact with them today.

In the four years since completing his fellowship, Henry has a long list of achievements. He launched and has steadily grown the campus’s career service offerings, as well as relationships with employers. The number of students accessing services has grown by 60% since launch, to more than 1300 in 2018. Makerere now organizes career fairs that have likewise grown to attract over 1100 students; while interest from employers is growing with more and diverse organizations taking part, including companies, banks, and government services.



Henry introducing the university’s career services during student orientation

Henry has introduced a range of new services to the Center, including assessments to identify career paths matching students’ interests and strengths and micro credentials. Henry used a UASP small grant to co-develop an Oral Communications Digital Badge with IREX, and to deliver this to 55 scholars supported by the MasterCard Foundation. Through course exercises, feedback, and critique, participants develop their speaking and presentation



Prospective students/parents receiving career services at the Counselling and Guidance Centre

career services to students. The Center offers training to faculty and staff to help them offer basic career coaching to students. In fact, his counterpart at FSU joined him in Kampala in 2016 to help facilitate training to 20 faculty and staff to become career advisors (see photo to right).

Continuous data collection and adaptation is another guiding principle he observed at FSU and transferred to Makerere: “How many people visited [the Center], why they are coming, and where they have gone [been employed], what employers like about career fairs, what could be improved...if you have the data it helps you to provide a service.” Data has also helped him lobby for more staff and resources from the university’s top administration. To that end, relationship building and persistent efforts to raise the visibility of the Center with different units across the university, and with employers, is a third lesson he highlights from the fellowship.

Despite the strides made, challenges still abound. Resources are always tight; while his staff has grown from 3 persons to 5, Makerere’s 40,000 student population stretches them thin. Also, Henry adds that it can be difficult challenging a culture in Uganda that teaches students that one obtains a job through who you know, instead of by merit (“That’s something we’re trying to work on”). Across all, Henry recognizes there is much more he wants to be doing, more students he wants the university to reach.

“The [FSU] center is very... visible..., and that attracts more people to support them. The center [is supported] because it supports students to get jobs... [but they] keep on lobbying; they do a lot of... footwork. You may have all the beautiful ideas but [without constant lobbying, without relationships and building visibility], they stay with you and do little.”



Henry delivers training to faculty, with support from his FSU host

Still, he is optimistic about the future. Efforts to increase the Center’s visibility with university leadership are paying off; counseling services have been added to Makerere’s 2020-30 strategic plan, which he hopes will bring more funding to his unit. Supported by IREX travel grants for UASP alumni, he has presented at international conferences and developed research partnerships with institutions in Israel, India, Turkey, and the U.S. “Before the UASP,” Henry says, the counseling center did not have an international platform or network; “Now we’ve been able to share what we’re

doing with the rest of the world and we’re learning from them, we’ve developed relationships...you meet and you add on to your knowledge and see how it can be used in different settings.”