



Network for Education &
Multidisciplinary Research
Africa (NEMRA)

NEMRA End-of-Year Event Report

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Date: December 20, 2024

Venue: Piato Restaurant, Kampala, Uganda

Theme: Celebrating Our PhD Successes, Research Breakthroughs, and Endless Possibilities

On December 20, 2024, NEMRA hosted its highly anticipated End-of-Year Event at Piato Restaurant in Kampala, Uganda. The event brought together a diverse group of members, collaborators, and distinguished guests, all united in celebrating NEMRA's progress over the past year while looking ahead to the future of African research and the organization's continued growth.

Remarks by Ms. Kakundwa Naomi (ExCom Representative)

Ms. Naomi, also the Coordinator of Finance and Administration at ExCom, encouraged members to remain engaged and actively contribute to the organization's activities. She urged members to volunteer their time, expertise, and resources to help NEMRA grow further. In her speech, she stressed the importance of regular subscription renewals, as this would enable NEMRA to manage its operations efficiently and ensure the smooth running of its activities.

Address by Dr. Christine Charity Mwebesa (BoD's Representative)

Dr. Christine Charity Mwebesa, a representative from NEMRA's Board of Directors, reflected on the origins of the organization and its journey thus far. She reminded attendees that NEMRA was not founded out of excitement but from a genuine desire to address and demystify the research challenges in Africa. Dr. Mwebesa emphasized that NEMRA's mission to strengthen research capacity and support researchers across the continent should remain central to the organization's work.

She also highlighted that while membership subscriptions are essential, they are not enough to sustain NEMRA's growth. Dr. Mwebesa encouraged members to be proactive in seeking additional funding through donations and other fundraising avenues. She also called for greater creativity and innovation to bridge the research gaps in African universities, noting that NEMRA has the expertise to make a significant impact.

Furthermore, Dr. Mwebesa tasked the ExCom with creating a comprehensive database of NEMRA members, categorized according to their areas of expertise. This would streamline operations and facilitate easier collaboration. She also suggested leveraging the wealth of reports and research outputs already produced by members to enhance knowledge sharing and organizational efficiency.

Keynote Address by Prof. Stella Neema

Prof. Stella Neema, a renowned academic and guest speaker, delivered the keynote address, recognizing NEMRA's remarkable achievements over the years. She celebrated the successful completion of numerous PhDs, impactful training sessions, and the implementation of several

successful research projects. Prof. Neema highlighted the MAKRIF project, which she is mentoring, aimed at establishing a research and innovation academy to coordinate researchers and their work for national development.

Prof. Neema recognized that while NEMRA has established valuable collaborations, there is still much work to be done to strengthen ties with the private sector. She praised the efforts being made toward the second International Conference, acknowledging it as a critical milestone for the organization.

She also shared her perspective on the wealth of untapped potential within NEMRA, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration across different sectors and research disciplines. She urged the members to focus on emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data, and to address global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and sustainable development.

Prof. Neema challenged members to ask themselves how their individual research could contribute to addressing these pressing issues. She emphasized the importance of collaborative research that centers the African perspective in global discourse. She also highlighted the need for increased knowledge dissemination, publications, public engagement, and active dialogue with policymakers.

In closing, Prof. Neema called upon NEMRA members to embrace these opportunities to solidify the organization's position as a leading force in African research. She stated that by taking these actions, NEMRA could contribute to a more prosperous and sustainable future for the continent.

Insights from Dr. Dennis Aguma

Dr. Dennis Aguma, a long-standing member of NEMRA and an academic at Birmingham City University, shared valuable insights into the challenges faced by PhD students, particularly in balancing academic work with personal life. He highlighted that the greatest obstacles in the PhD journey often stem from personal issues, such as managing family responsibilities and work commitments. Dr. Aguma urged mentors to be more aware of these challenges and offer necessary support to students.

He also provided essential tips on effective mentorship, emphasizing the importance of empathy, active listening, building rapport, trust, open communication, and goal setting. Dr. Aguma challenged NEMRA members, especially supervisors and mentors, to adopt a more compassionate and supportive approach to mentoring students.

Testimonies from NEMRA's Successful PhD Graduates

Some of the NEMRA members who recently completed their PhDs shared personal testimonies about how the organization supported their journeys:

- **Dr. Franklin Higenyi** expressed her deep gratitude for NEMRA's assistance, particularly in securing fellowships and sponsorship for data collection. She credited her mentor, Dr. Norman, for his invaluable guidance throughout her PhD. Dr. Higenyi encouraged fellow members to actively engage with NEMRA's resources, such as publications and networking opportunities. She also pledged to continue supporting NEMRA in future initiatives.
- **Dr. Joy Asiimwe Turyamwijuka** shared her excitement about discovering NEMRA and how its resources, especially the monthly seminars, helped her navigate a challenging period during her PhD. She emphasized how these seminars, and the continuous learning they provided, helped her stay on track and complete her PhD successfully.

Insights from NEMRA's Research Projects

Ms. Barbara Kayondo, Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) for the MAKRIF project, discussed how

NEMRA's network facilitated her involvement in this innovative project, which tackles youth unemployment by aligning university training with industry skills through a university-industry communication model. She highlighted the collaborative efforts of NEMRA members in sharing knowledge and resources, which have been crucial to the project's success.

Mr. Moses Tuhame, the project coordinator, emphasized the importance of grant writing in ensuring the long-term sustainability of NEMRA's activities and research projects. He stressed that NEMRA members need to be more involved in writing grants to secure funding for future initiatives. Mr. Tuhame also announced that his team on this project would support NEMRA by developing a Grant Writing Policy and Guidelines. He reported that a draft policy had been submitted to the ExCom for review in July 2024, and it would then be presented to the Board of Directors for approval before final dissemination to the wider NEMRA community. Additionally, the project will sponsor training for 20 selected grant writers (team leaders) starting in early 2025.

Open Discussion and Feedback

An open discussion session provided members the opportunity to share thoughts and ideas for the future of the organization. Key suggestions included:

- **Strengthening the Mentorship Program:** Members emphasized the need for a more structured and supportive mentorship program to guide emerging researchers.
- **Ongoing Engagement:** There was a call for more frequent interactions between NEMRA leadership and members to ensure continuous support and collaboration.
- **Publication of PhD Success Stories:** Members expressed a desire for greater visibility of NEMRA graduates' success stories, highlighting the organization's positive impact.
- **User-Friendly Payment Methods:** Members suggested improving the payment system for subscriptions to make it more user-friendly.

Members also expressed enthusiasm about expanding NEMRA's visibility through targeted advertisements and improving their grant writing capabilities.

Collaboration with AFROHUN and the NEMRA SACCO Initiative

In an open interaction with the members, Prof. William Bazeyo, a technical advisor at NEMRA, highlighted the importance of continuous member involvement in driving the organization's growth. He pledged NEMRA's commitment to collaborating with AFROHUN (African Federation for Research in Human Networks) to expand its impact.

Prof. Bazeyo also introduced the idea of establishing a NEMRA SACCO (Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization). The proposal was well-received, with members agreeing on a tentative share value of UGX 10,000 per share. The SACCO will be independently managed, following SACCO guidelines, and aims to empower members financially. It was agreed that details and formalisation of the SACCO takes precedence after the festivities.

Conclusion

The NEMRA End-of-Year Event concluded with a cake ceremony, where members shared in the festive spirit and exchanged wishes for a Merry Christmas.



