Nabisunjsa Girls’ School and Gulu University win techovation challenge

CHRISTOPHER TUSINE

Nabisunjsa Girls’ School and Gulu University are this year’s winners of the inaugural techovation challenge, organized by Resilient Africa Network (RAN) in partnership with Makerere University’s College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (Cedat). Nabisunjsa’s win in the secondary schools’ category followed a presentation of their Manager app, designed to help parents and teachers track and reliably monitor their little children. The app was developed by Faith Agasha, Martha Tewsigwe, Sonia Salim Swalehe and Monica Nanyangi.

Nabisunjsa was up against Bweranyangi Girls’ School, Nyaka Vocational Technical and Industrial Training Centre, Gayaza High School, Gulu High School and Lira Town College. The annual event was held at Cedat’s main hall on Friday, July 21, 2017. The challenge is a technology entrepreneurship programme, which offers young girls in schools and universities, an opportunity to develop solutions to community challenges.

In the universities’ category, Lira University’s Mobile-Edu app beat off competition from Mbarara University of Science and Technology’s (MUST) Gama app to win the award. The winning app is designed to improve information sharing and build a common platform among school administrators, relating to students. The app’s developers in this category were Scovia Ajok and Justine Gutu.

María Matemwe with the challenge’s participants

Olga Kiconco, a consultant at Innovation Village in Nairobi, was one of the judges of the challenge. She said they based their judgment on the feasibility of the apps’ prototypes.

For his part, Cedat principal, Dr Henry Alintewa, commended the winners and explained that innovation was important in registering a positive impact in the communities.

“The knowledge and skills shared and gathered during this challenge cannot be underestimated. It is such knowledge which has continued to contribute to the growth of not only individuals but also institutions,” Dr Alintewa said. Even though it was a victory, Maria Matemwe, who was awarded a recognition plaque, certificate of participation and a number of assorted items that included headphones, books about technology and innovations and school bags, while their teachers received Huawei smartphones, among other things.

Awarding the winners, the guest of honor, By Mirta Matereme, hailed Ran for engaging and encouraging young women to actively participate in fields that were previously an exclusive domain for men.

Many of us have seen how global issues can affect our economies even here in Uganda, turning our country into ‘Another El Salvador’,” she said. “To change the situation, we need to have the hands of both men and women to reign in all spheres and sectors of society.”

ABOUT THE APPS

The developers of Manager app called for more support to expand the impact of their app to parents.

“We need around 50,000 (about Shs 36m) for this prototype to become a real and useful app,” said Tewsigwe, on behalf of the group.

Twesigye, a senior six student studying Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics as well as information and communications Technology (ICT), said they were excited by the support. “We were so unpinnable; we realized our untrained caretakers have been bickering the children they are meant to protect,” she said.

She said once the app is fully developed, they would have their first app in Banda, a Kampala suburb, as it is the most affected area. Twesigye explained that once the app is put on Google play, it will require a parent to login with his/her details, go to their home page and get connected to a nanny trained by university developers.

“Each hour with our nanny will cost Shs 1,500. Our nannies will be disciplined. It will also have a feature where a parent, if they are unable to get in touch with the app, can position to monitor what will be taking place,” she added.

Meanwhile, the Mobile-Edu app developers said they were dazzled by the incidence of school dropouts in Lira and its negative consequences, through education.

“I had a relative who got pregnant while at school. She feared to tell us and unfortunately died in 2012 while giving birth,” she said.

Ajak said her relative would not have died if the school and her family were in close contact with the school, shortly before she disappeared from the institution without the administration’s knowledge.

“First, we shall require each school interested in working with us to pay Shs 500,000 as a connection fee. After that, the school will be able to update particulars about the performance of their children through the app,” Ajok explained. “Ajak added that parents would only get the updates once they pay for the app.

The Ran communications officer, Harriet Adong, said that they would select the two winners in the incubation process, while also working to see the challenge be extended to other schools.

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Jinja Parents’ School pupil wins essay contest

REACH/EWALI

Gabriel Lulu Mugabi of Jinja Parents’ School, who wrote his way to victory in the Uganda National Farmers Federation (UNFF) essay contest. The contest, which attracted participation from several primary schools in Jinja, saw contestants writing about ‘Managers of the challenges of climatic change for sustainable agriculture’.

The awards were held on the sidelines of the 2017 agricultural show.

Explaining the essence of the contest, Charles Ogang, the UNFFE president, said the essays were intended to help the pupils appreciate the relevance of agriculture in their lives.

“When pupils write about a theme, it becomes easy for them to have the enthusiasm on learning more about the agricultural practices exhibited in the show,” Ogang said.

On his part, Magabi applauded the teachers who have nurtured their pupils’ writing skills, which helped the pupils with essay writing.

“Tend to dedicate this victory to my teachers who have nurtured our essay writing skills through the newly formed writer’s club,” Mugabi said.

In response, the club patron, Margaret Tibatya, said she believes in the pupils’ writing skills and future.

“I thank the organizers of this competition, and I believe that the knowledge acquired by these pupils in the course of writing the essays shall guide their future lives,” Tibatya said.

DEBATE

Meanwhile, a group of students beat Members of Parliament (MPs) in a debate called to test their knowledge of climate change effects on agriculture. MPs Tony Muhindo (Bukonzo East), Cosmas Eliita (Jakabala) and the minister of state for Agriculture, Christopher Kihangana, found themselves trying to defend a motion on the relevance of agriculture to the youth.

A group of students, including Sophie Ageta (Tevor Girls school), Belinda Naguddi (Iganga SS), Justine Ayebebe (Nyakasa school) and Sarah Nakigoi (Gayaza high school), put up a spirited fight against the MPs.

Muhindo opened with a clincher.

“Agriculture is irrelevant to the youth because it fosters activities like deforestation, which have led to the clearing of the country’s forest cover in the name of growing cash crops, causing harsh weather conditions like drought,” Muhindo offered.

In response, Nakigoi declared that the MPs’ claims were in contravention of government policy on forestry. “It would be dreadful for a member of parliament to state that agriculture leads to destruction of the environment yet the government is championing the conservation of forest reserves like Kibagare forest through the NFA [National Forestry Authority],” Nakigoi countered.

At the end of debate, the judges, led by the UNFFE president Charles Ogang, declared the students the winners, as they had been able to buttress their points with relevant evidence.

In his final remarks, Kihangana appreciated the students for their articulate discussions on agriculture.

“In our school days, farming was considered an activity for peasants, but I’m happy with these students’ brilliant articulation of agricultural issues, and I hope they walk the talk and curb the unemployment rate in our country,” Kihangana said.

Former Agriculture Minister Victoria Ssentamu Nakayiza was also on hand to ask schools and parents to teach farming to their children.

"Those that have land should take their children’s for free education. I also call on parents to join the exercise, because research has shown that agricultural education increases the productivity between the ages of 25 and 35 in the form of seeking livelihood in agricultural-related practices.” She said.

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