

Minister Tours PI Projects, Pledges Support

The Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Hon. Dr. Elioda Tumwesigye, on 4th April 2017 paid his first courtesy call on the Vice Chancellor Prof. John Ddumba-Ssentamu. Accompanied by his Permanent Secretary Mr. David O. O. Obong and other Ministry staff, the Minister thanked the Vice Chancellor and his leadership for making the advance preparations to facilitate his visit. Hon. Tumwesigye's visit is aimed at establishing the status of various projects under the Presidential Initiative on Science and Technology, with a view of determining the resources required to implement commercialisation of the innovation.

In his remarks, the Vice Chancellor congratulated Hon. Dr. Tumwesigye upon making history as the first Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation and thanked him for choosing to make Makerere University one of his first stops. Prof. Ddumba-Ssentamu reported that Makerere has been allocated approximately UGX 70billion since the Presidential Initiative was started, which has greatly facilitated research and innovation.

"The support that we have received from the Presidential Initiative has boosted our research and innovations, which have consequently improved our institutional visibility. Makerere currently ranks third in Africa in terms of research, with the other two institutions coming from South Africa," he said. The Vice Chancellor nevertheless noted that Makerere continues to face a lot of challenges; the biggest being inadequate financing, which affects the implementation various academic and administrative programmes. He was however happy to note that the University has established an Endowment Fund as a strategic avenue to attract funding from her alumni and the general public. This, he said would help Makerere University to reduce her overdependence on Government subvention.

Hon. Dr. Elioda Tumwesigye in his response commended Makerere for continuing to play a key role in the country's Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) ecosystem. He thanked the President for creating a separate ministry that supports STI at the national level.

The Minister visited the College of Engineering, Design, Art and technology to get acquainted with the innovations at CEDAT. He was received by the Principal, Prof. Henry Alinaitwe, the Deputy Principal and several members of staff, including researchers on the projects. The Principal welcomed and Minister and congratulated him on being the First Minister for Science and Technology Innovation. He informed him that CEDAT has been benefiting from Presidential Initiative fund for the last 6 years, and that the fund had greatly boosted innovations in the college.

The Minister stressed the importance of technology innovations as a driver for industrialisation. He said the country was facing about six challenges 1. Nutrition, 2. Disease, 3. Agriculture, 4. Climate change and its effects, 5. Clean, low cost, sustainable energy, 6. Inadequate skills 7. Lack of affordable shelter/ housing, 8. Water and sanitation.

Hon Dr Tumwesigye assured the researchers that his Ministry was committed to ensuring these challenges are addressed. He said the government had committed Shs50 billion to an innovations fund. This money will facilitate commercialisation of the innovations. He said Shs15 billion would go to ICT Applications.

The minister emphasised the President's call for consumption of home grown products. The slogan for this promotion is Buy Uganda, Build Uganda. This promotion is aimed at increasing compunction of Ugandan products and reducing importation.

Hon. Dr. Tumwesigye visited the irrigation projects and had a demonstration of the solar pumps. He was impressed by the technology and pledged support towards commercialisation of the pumps. He said, the President is eager to find a solution to food insecurity, owing to climate change. The long droughts have affected agriculture and there is a need to irrigate if we are to keep producing farm crops.

The Minister also visited the MakaPads project, where he was shown the process of making the sanitary pads. He was informed that the pads are made in a small factory in Kawempe and employs mostly women. The Minister learnt that the project has since 2006 been distributing pads to under privileged school going children in rural areas and the urban poor.

At the Centre for Energy and Energy Efficiency (CREEC) the Minister toured the solar testing laboratory, saw some of the energy saving stoves, biogas and fruit dyers. He was also told of a pico-grid producing 1.62 KW that was installed in Kiboga.

The centre for Technology Design and Development showcased various agricultural equipment which included fruit dyers, maize shredder, solar water heaters, steam engine, wind turbine, groundnut Sheller and a planter among others.

Other research projects included; Innovation Systems and Clusters Programme –Uganda, Grey Water Project, Academic Records Management System and ILabs@Mak.