MAK seeks agricultural support from Belgium

By Agnes Nantambi

Makerere University has requested Belgium to support its agricultural department to enhance development through skills and technology advancement.

The appeal was made by Prof. Noble Banadda, the head of agricultural and biosystems engineering department, who is also an alumnus of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium.

This was during a visit by officials from the Belgium embassy to the Makerere University Agricultural Research Institute in Kabanjo, Wakiso district on Friday.

The team was led by the first secretary to the deputy head of overseas, Alexandre Brecc.

Aim of the visit
The visit aimed at expanding the relationship between Makerere University and Belgium, as well as understanding the operations of the research institute.

It also looked at possible opportunities for partnerships in the field of agriculture and vocational skills training.

“Belgium has a strong commitment to the agricultural sector and has been a partner in capacity building,” Banadda said.

He observed that Uganda spends a lot of money on buying food processing equipment, while the country lacks spott welding skills.

“Many people are starting metal manufacturing businesses as opposed to spotting welding. This is because the skill requires expertise in which metal joints are not visible, especially in the food processing industry, as well as equipment such as robots, which is not readily available,” he said.

The tour
During the guided tour by the farm manager, Chrysostom Twegyira, the delegation visited the engineering and workshop, where machinery and other agricultural tools were fabricated.

They also visited the feed processing unit, the soil sampling and certification unit, the dairy chain, the banana plantation and goat breeding unit.

During the tour, the delegation had students from Ssewe Farm Institute, who are doing their internship training at farm.

Banadda observed that since they are alumni of Belgium, which has made a lot of advancements in agricultural production and technology development along the agricultural value chain, they are optimistic that a lot can be learnt from them.

He said there has been a lot of technological advancements and innovation, but research and commercialization have not been integrated into the results.

Banadda noted that in other countries, technology undergoes innovation before being commercialized, which is not the case in Uganda.

He challenged the process to always take into account helping commercialization of new innovations.

BETWEEN THE LINES
The visit aimed at showing officials what the agricultural engineering unit can do, especially in skills development in terms of capacity building.

Skills training
Brecc said his country has a five-year programme focusing on education and training at the school and teacher training institutes.

“Belgium is about to end in 2020. One of the reasons for our visit is Makerere University is to prepare for the next programme. We hope skills training will remain a top priority for Belgium,” he said.

Brecc was non-committal on financial support to be given to universities, but said following the needs assessment conducted, commitment will be made by the embassy to the university.

Dr. Isaac Kidumali, the senior lecturer in the department of agricultural engineering, called for an independent budget to enable the repair and procurement of new engineering equipment.

“We try to use the available resources, but the university and the Government should have a budget to equip the labs, so that they can do the required work,” Kidumali said.

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