

Agricultural scientists discuss techniques of communicating science

The minister for Science, Technology and Innovations, Dr Elioda Tumwesigye, commended agricultural scientists who are applying biotechnology to improve crop varieties for disease and pest resistance. **Lominda Afedraru** writes.

Agriculture scientists from 20 countries on Tuesday converged in Uganda to discuss ways of easing communication in agriculture science.

According to the organisers, the scientists deliberated on several pertinent issues themed: "Strengthening Communication for Improved Biosafety Management."

The executive director Malaysian Biotechnology Information Centre, Dr Mahaletchumy Arujanan, in the key note address, emphasised the need for scientists to balance information about modern techniques used in plant breeding and safety concerns for the general public to be comfortable.

She noted that it is important to give factual information about scientific innovations in agricultural sector and urged scientists to give details about the breeding process of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) crops, the benefits and potential risks as well as issues related to safety.

In case of criticisms, she said it is important for scientists to explain the advantages of the technology because its key aim is to address challenges faced by farmers during the cause of farming.

The Director International Service for Acquisition of Agri Biotech Applications (ISAAA) AfriCenter, Dr Margaret Karembu, explained that it is important for scientists in the agriculture sector to work with the media because they can help simplify scientific issues ranging from product development and policy issues for the

understanding of the general public.

The minister for Science, Technology and Innovations Dr Elioda Tumwesigye commended agricultural scientists in the country who are applying biotechnology to improve crop varieties for disease and pest resistance as well as for nutritional value.

He urged the public not to misunderstand application of modern biotechnology in plant breeding because it is used world over to breed crops which are high yielding with potential for the farmer to earn increased income.

ABOUT GMOS

A GMO (genetically modified organism) is the result of a laboratory process where genes from the DNA of one species are extracted and artificially forced into the genes of an unrelated plant or animal. The foreign genes may come from bacteria, viruses, insects, animals or even humans.

"Scientists exist in this country to help solve societal challenges and as such agricultural scientists must be given the benefit to breed crop varieties in order for families to put food on the table. You know the pest and disease challenges our farmers growing coffee, maize banana and other crops are faced with and this can be addressed through breeding biotech crop," Dr Tumwesigye said.

The minister called upon Ugandan legislators to ensure the Biotechnology and Biosafety law is passed in order to enable farmers access crops that have been bred using modern biotechnology namely Maize tolerant against drought and stem borer, banana resistant to banana bacterial wilt and rich in vitamin A, Irish potato resistant to bacterial blight, rice that can grow in soils with less nutrients and cassava resistant to CBSV.