



A FARMER'S SAY >
By Michael J. Ssali

Hope for Uganda

Last week, Uganda hosted a three-day high-level conference on the application of science, technology, and innovation in harnessing African agricultural transformation at Speke Resort, Munyonyo.

It attracted delegates from across the world, mainly agricultural biotechnology scientists, farmers' group leaders, senior science journalists, entrepreneurs, and politicians, among others.

The theme of the conference was: "Integrating the path in Africa's agricultural transformation."

The event also coincided with celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa (OFAB) a major advocate and supporter of innovative technologies for agricultural transformation.

The celebrations included the recognition of journalists from across Africa for their committed effort in explaining agricultural biotechnology to the public.

Elioda Tumwesigye, Minister of Science and Technology and Innovation attended the conference, at which Vincent Ssempijja, Minister of Agriculture, represented President Museveni.

Agriculture in Sub-Saharan (SSA) countries is constrained by depleted soils, recurrent droughts, crop diseases, land fragmentation, high cost of inputs; lack of scientific innovation, and a whole range of other issues.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) crop yields in SSA have stuck at about one tonne per hectare compared to other regions such as South America and Asia where production is twice as much.

Speaking at the conference, Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda said that it is a big shame for Africa to have over 70 per cent of its adult population engaged in agriculture and still beg for food from Europe and America where about two per cent of the population is into farming.

Biotechnology and innovation have transformed agriculture in such countries such as China, India, Argentina, South Africa, Sudan, Burkina Faso and Brazil. Dr Rugunda, Tumwesigye, and Ssempijja assured the delegates that Uganda was set to pass the Biotechnology and Bio-safety Bill into law any time from then so that Ugandan farmers can benefit from growing disease resistant and drought tolerant crop varieties already developed by Ugandan researchers through modern biotechnology.

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