

Institute starts plant for paper

By Agnes Nantambi

The Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga, has applauded the Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI) for starting a pilot paper plant, which will support import substitution.

The plant produces paper-related products using banana stems as raw materials and other wastes.

"Parliament should celebrate this success. We are going to organise a day, invite you (UIRI), debate you and celebrate you," Kadaga said.

While commissioning the plant at UIRI, Kadaga observed that using banana stems to make paper will create employment.

The Speaker said this reminded her of the time she tried to waken the trade ministry to produce pinner cloth from pineapples, currently made in Philippines and sold expensively, but nothing was done.

"When I looked at all the pineapple peels in the country, I thought we could get money and employment for people, but we failed. I am happy that UIRI has made this. We need more facilities to utilise all the peels in the country to create more employment," Kadaga said.

She revealed that Parliament lobbied for the Ministry of Science, Technology and Industrial to enhance value addition and at the same time promote more employment. The Speaker said Parliament is committed to appropriate enough funds for this ministry.

"If we cannot innovate, it means we shall continue being

a market for other countries. When growing up, we used to buy polythene bags for sugar yet we do not need to import everything we use, but such plants act as import substitution entities," she said.

Kadaga added that Parliament will soon organise an exhibition and invite the public to see what the researchers are doing.

"It is important that you are more visible and people know what you are doing, so that we increase the support and interest and also help our children be more creative," she said.

The plant produces paper-related products using banana stems as raw materials

The Minister for Science, Technology and Innovations, Dr Elioda Tumwesigye, said the paper plant is contributing towards the attainment of the objectives enshrined in the National Development Plan and the objectives to which his ministry was set up.

He said the plant will help in expanding the banana agribusiness value chain since Uganda produces a lot of bananas across the world.

"We are the second largest

producers of bananas in the world with 11.6 million tonnes competing with China (11.23 million tonnes). We have the capacity to reach India, which produces 26 million tonnes annually," he said.

Tumwesigye revealed that focus is now on producing banana flour and banana starch for pharmaceuticals, banana juice as well as exporting fresh

vacuum seed bananas.

He said out of the sh30b put under the innovation fund in his ministry, sh10b will go to UIRI to promote research.

Tumwesigye explained that Uganda has been importing a lot of packaging materials. He said with the banning of *buveera*, where people do not have solutions, but to import, the plant will help use bananas

as raw materials to produce packaging materials, which are environmentally-friendly.

The board chairperson of Uganda National Planning Authority, Dr Kisamba Mugerwa, re-echoed that science and technology application is one of the vehicles in enhancing socio-economic transformation.

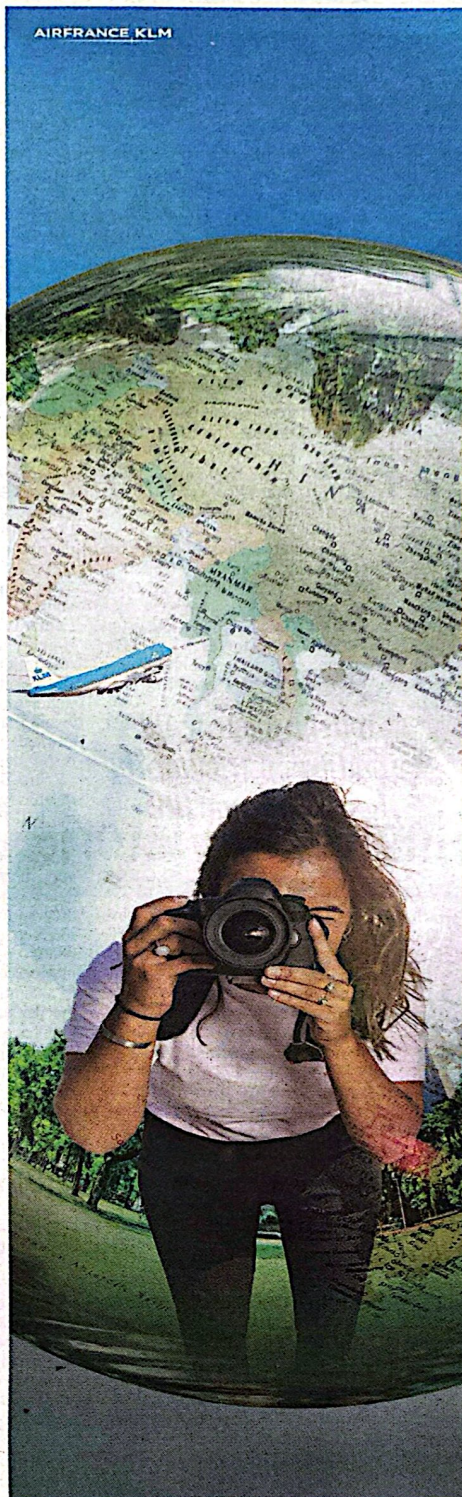
"Countries such as India

started with the cottage industries and prospered. So, we look forward to seeing enough support towards science and technology," he said.

The executive director of UIRI, Prof Charles Kwesiga, called for continued co-operation with the various government agencies to realise success.



Rebecca Kadaga looking at some of the paper made at the new pilot paper plant. Photo by Agnes Nantambi



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