LETTER OF THE DAY

Biotechnology law a welcome devt

After several years of activism, consultative meetings and nationwide sensitisation of both policy makers and the public, the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill 2012 has finally been passed into law - the National Biosafety Act 2017. This is a great milestone for Uganda as a nation, but most especially to the biotechnology fraternity. Thanks to all those that have taken part in this struggle, especially President Museveni, for his continued support towards this cause.

Before the Bill was passed into law, pressure had been piled against policy makers, government and the general public. The the argument was that Uganda was failing to exploit fully her production potential, especially in the agriculture sector.

This was because of failure by the government to adopt applied biotechnology as one of the solutions to the adverse climatic effects due to absence of the law. Now with the law in place, we students expect to enjoy a multitude of employment opportunities in the research field, quality control, information dissemination, production, import and export industry, and teaching.

We hope that with the newly adopted role of biotechnology in our nation's development, government will facilitate more the related

courses, especially in universities.

We have also seen the relevant course being introduced in other universities. In the past, the course was only offered at Makerere University at undergraduate level. All these efforts will go towards creating reliable manpower to enable the country to fully exploit the benefits of this technology. On the other, hand we welcome this as a challenge to enable us work harder and come up with more research ideas on how to address the many challenges we face as a nation, especially in the agriculture sector.

Government too has the task of protecting Ugandans from harmful biotechnology products, which many scientists overlook. This can be achieved through engaging the biotechnologists.

The government also has a challenge of protecting local producers from very stiff competition from external producers. It should also increase funding research towards this field.

Finally, it would be unfortunate if we are made to produce goods that are only welcome in the international market and not locally. And this is likely to be the case if the knowledge gap between the manufacturers and consumers regarding biotechnology products is not urgently addressed.

This comes as a challenge to the science communicators to carry out more sensitisation to get Ugandans to buy their products they produce.

When the above challenges are addressed, our beloved country is bound to take greater development strides arising from having this law in place.

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