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PRESS RELEASE

Makerere Builds Capacity for Soil Scientists

Makerere University College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences with funding from the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has embarked on training soil scientists for Uganda and Rwanda who can help in steering the African Green Revolution and other emerging issues related to land degradation.

This follows the decline in the intake of students into soil science courses that have left a deficit of human resource in soil science. Evidence reveals that jobs that require skills in soil science and management are allotted to people in other disciplines due to the scarcity of soil scientists.

With the support from AGRA, 15 Masters Students (10 from Uganda and 5 from Rwanda) are undergoing training under the co - supervision of Rwandese Scientists at ISAR and NUR. Seven Laboratory Technicians are to undergo refresher course in use and maintenance of modern equipment like the Infra Red Spectrometer for rapid soil analysis.

The three year project titled, "Building Capacity for Soil Health Research and Development in Uganda", commenced in June 2010 and will cost \$781, 994. The project is being implemented in collaboration with other AGRA funded institutions including NARO, Africa 2000 Network, Millennium Villages Initiative and the Regional Universities Forum for capacity building in Agriculture (RUFORUM).

Uganda has approximately 132 PhD Agricultural Scientists employed in universities and research institutions that serve the agricultural sector of whom less than 20 are Soil Scientists by training. Similarly, at Master's level, Uganda has less than 20 soil scientists.

In Rwanda, out of 8 PhD holders, 2 are trained in soil chemistry and fertility who are supposed to feed in five agricultural based universities, research institutions and extension delivery in all districts. The country has about 29 Masters holders of whom only 3 are trained in soil chemistry and fertility.

The inadequacy of training at Masters Level has also served as a dis-incentive for the choice of soil science as an option for undergraduates in the region. For example the graduate intake at Makerere University School of Agricultural Sciences in 1999 stood at 46 Masters Students but this dropped to 14 by 2008. In the then department of Soil Science Masters intake dropped from 6 students in 2003 to 3 students in 2008.

Additionally graduate intake has been very erratic due to the inability of students to pay their tuition.

This project will enhance professional capacity in Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM) to feed into other training, research and development institutions. The project will also strengthen the analytical capacity of Makerere University's laboratories to be able to provide services to research, training and farming communities in the country.

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