

Sida support to Research at Makerere University Remarks by the Swedish Ambassador to Uganda

Chair, Distinguished participants,

Makerere was one of the first institutions I visited when arriving in Uganda 2007. I have been here many times – it is always very enlightening and encouraging to meet people at this center of excellence.

“The future is not what we predict but rather what we create.” I believe this goes very much for research and its application in innovations and entrepreneurship. The growth of knowledge and the search for explanations have a value in themselves. Even more important – they form the basis for a sustainable development of any nation. The resources available for research have a major impact on a country's future potential. Good conditions for research open the way for innovations, contribute to growth and deepen our knowledge of the world. We all know that the best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas!

In our Swedish developments over time research and innovations have and continue to play – significant roles in our economic and social development. Last year the Government made the largest allocation ever of public funded research to reach 1% of GDP. With private investments, mainly in industry, our national research investments are among the highest in the world, nearly 4% of the GDP.

Globalization creates more of interaction and interdependencies. As a small country Sweden has to be internationally competitive – more than 50% of our GDP is based on exports. Research and innovations are fundamentals in that respect.

Consequently, the cooperation between Sweden and Uganda is a tangible manifestation of the importance we attach to the role of research in development – research of relevance to reduce poverty and help Uganda position itself in global competition.

There is a close connection between growth and knowledge. Raw material, oil, capital and labour are important factors but we know that knowledge, translated into innovations and production is growing as an even more significant factor. We have examples especially from Asia with very limited natural resources but huge human resources, converted into national assets through high quality education and training, closely linked to production and entrepreneurship.

Uganda is facing tremendous challenges in that respect. At independence there were about 4million people, today 32million and increasing by more than one

million a year. With this rate of increase, how do they all get proper quality education, health services and jobs? In the news today I see Hon Minister of Education claiming that the UPE programme needs 51,000 more classrooms. Last year 799 classrooms were constructed. The transformation of this potential wealth into productive forces and national asset is an issue for all Ugandans to address – and the research society. We know that high quality research must have its basis in high quality education – at all levels.

Our support to research capacity building can play a significant role for addressing some of these pertinent issues. However, it has to be based on solid funding by the Government of Uganda. I am aware of the competition for public funds and I sincerely hope that research gets its fair share of the national budget. I understand that science, technology and innovation will be presented as a new “sector” in the National Development Plan, recognizing the strategic role of STI in national development. This is a very encouraging move.

The bilateral research cooperation between Sweden and Uganda has been long and fruitful, dating back to 2000 when Sida/SAREC decided to embark on a new model of bilateral research cooperation, aimed at building up sustainable research capacity, and the establishment of a coherent agenda for research training in Uganda.

In our Swedish strategy for development cooperation with Uganda, research cooperation continues to be a key component. An agreement for continued cooperation 2010-14 amounting to 180M SEK has been signed with the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. With this partnership we want to see Swedish resources and cooperation adding value to your own efforts.

The ongoing and continued collaboration with 12 Swedish universities and institutions will add quality but also assist in building national and international networks. The cooperation also includes support to other four public universities through collaboration with Makerere.

Makerere is going through an administrative reform to ensure the effective and efficient running of the university with focus on transparency and accountability. It is extremely important that this exercise is fulfilled with continued adaptation of administration to changing circumstances. In this context I would also emphasize result-orientation of the work.

Research, although building upon creative and innovative individuals, cannot take place in isolation. The interaction with the society at large is fundamental. Policies and programmes for national and local developments should to a larger extent be guided by solid knowledge and research findings in their work. Researchers and institutions themselves also have great responsibilities to

communicate their findings through publication, seminars and feedback to involved communities. It may give credit to the individual to add research findings to the CV but of less value for society at large if it ends with a report on the shelves.

A few days ago, we could read news that Makerere has become the highest-ranked university on research publications in East Africa, indicating the level of visibility on the internet. I say – well done – and continue with your efforts to climb further. But it cannot end there at a website. Research has a crucial role in enhancing an enlightened public discussion and debate and in that sense also act as an agent of innovation and change. Public debates based on solid “state of the art” as a point of departure are certainly wanting!

“Prosperity for all” – a theme well known by now – is ambitious. However, such a development does not come by itself. It boils down to hard work, priorities, of having long-term visions beyond elections – to the question of allocation of resources and efficient management of existing resources. In other words: to walk the talk. I hope all stakeholders take on that challenge – and that research will and can make invaluable contributions in that respect.