

Makerere University and Okayama University, Japan sign Research Cooperation Agreement

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) agreement to cement the collaboration between Makerere University (Mak) in Uganda and Okayama University (OU) in Japan has been signed at a ceremony hosted by the Embassy of Japan in Kampala on Tuesday 8th November 2016. The Vice Chancellor, Prof. John Ddumba-Ssentamu signed for Makerere while the President of Okayama University, Dr. Kiyoshi Morati, signed for Okayama University. The ceremony was also attended by H.E. Kazuaki Kameda, the Ambassador of Japan to Uganda, the Chancellor of Makerere University - Prof. Ezra Suruma, Prof. Bernard Bashasha - Principal of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) of Makerere University, staff from Makerere University, Okayama University and the Embassy of Japan.

In the agreement, the College of Natural Sciences (CoNAS) and College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) of Makerere University will be collaborating with the Institute of Plant Science and Resources (IPSR) of Okayama University. The agreement encompasses the following activities: Exchange of students; Exchange of faculty and staff; Collaborative research, instructional and cultural programmes; and Exchange of research information. The need for this MoU was muted after Dr. Arthur Tugume and Prof. Hannington Oryem-Origa (CoNAS) hosted a team of five Professors from Okayama University in October 2015 in the current Department of Plant Sciences, Microbiology and Biotechnology. Subsequently, Dr. Arthur Tugume visited the Institute of Plant Sciences and Resources (IPSR), Okayama University in March 2016 to help further possibilities of collaboration between the two institutions. Mr. Cyprian Osinde, a staff of Makerere University is already undertaking research work for his PhD studies at the IPSR.

In his welcome remarks, H.E. Kazuaki Kameda – Ambassador of Japan to Uganda expressed his pleasure to host the signing ceremony between Makerere and Okayama universities. He noted that the MoU furthers cooperation between Japan and Uganda as countries that have enjoyed cordial bi-lateral relations for many years. H.E. Kazuaki promised support to the two universities during their cooperation and expressed his hope that the MoU would facilitate and enhance academic staff and student exchange as well as research.

Prof. Ezra Suruma, the Chancellor thanked H.E. Kazuaki for accepting to host the signing ceremony. Prof. Suruma expressed gratitude by the government and people of Uganda for the support from the Government of Japan especially through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for a long time. He said that, his hope is that Okayama and Makerere relations grow stronger and fruitful for a very long time. He reiterated that Makerere University management is committed to offering support to the cooperation between the two institutions.

The Vice Chancellor of Makerere University, Prof. John Ddumba-Ssentamu in his remarks said, 'Makerere University and Okayama University both operate in a highly competitive global environment. In this regard, we as the Management of Makerere University openly embrace internationalization as a cross-cutting factor and are always on the lookout for mutually beneficial collaborations that can further strengthen our competitiveness'. He also noted that while the MoU signed is targeting plant sciences and agriculture, it is his hope that in the cooperation under

this framework, more mutually beneficial areas to further strengthen our collaboration will be added. He also thanked H.E. Kazuaki for hosting the signing ceremony and expressed appreciation of Makerere University and Uganda at large for the support from Japan to many sectors in the bi-lateral relations between the two nations. Prof. Ddumba-Ssentamu also thanked Dr. Arthur Tugume from the College of Natural Sciences (CoNAS), Makerere University and Prof. Wataru Sakamoto from Okayama University for taking the lead to ensure the MoU is signed.

The President of Okayama University, Dr. Kiyoshi Morita expressed his gratitude to be here when the cooperation between Makerere and Okayama universities is marked by the signing of an agreement. He further said that he is honored to be signing for Okayama and is hopeful that the two institutions will mutually benefit from the agreement signed. Okayama is a recognized top university in Japan and globally, engagement of universities from around the world for research enhancement is taken seriously by the university, he noted. He also expressed his hope that Okayama and Makerere universities will continue to work together to strengthen the cooperation.

Dr. Tugume Arthur, the coordinator of the cooperation in CoNAS gave background remarks of the MoU that was signed. He explained that initial talks that led to this agreement were initiated in 2013 by Prof. Hannington Oryem-Origa of Makerere and Prof. Wataru Sakamoto of Okayama. He said, 'today's ceremony is a sign of the mutual trust and friendship that has developed relatively rapidly between our two institutions over a period of approximately three years and is a good indicator of our willingness to strengthen it even further'. He further noted that, 'as scientists they operate in a highly competitive world. Thus, if we are to make significant impact in our societies using scientific tools, we believe in the power of synergy. It is under this background that we, our Institutions, Makerere University and Okayama University felt that having a framework of cooperation is the only way to go if our societies are to harness the benefits of the expertise scientific knowledge at our institutions'. Dr. Tugume also expressed his appreciation of the management at Makerere and Okayama universities to ensure the signing of the MoU and it is his hope that this is only the beginning and more will be achieved.