

EDITORIAL

**Botswana College of Agriculture becomes an University**

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**Introduction**

The then Assistant Minister of Agriculture Mr Oreeditse Molebatsi, on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013 announce that Botswana College of Agriculture (BCA) will become a university and that the government of Botswana has agreed to this transformation.

Staff and students were ecstatic about the announcement, considering the prospects of new and good things to come. The mandate of the university would be expanded from merely training and researching on agriculture to encompass natural resources. It was on this basis that the new university was named Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (BUAN), perhaps limiting its chance of future expansion into areas like ICT, Marketing, Commerce, Business, and Entrepreneurship. However, it would take a while before everything falls into place; assembling a Governing Council and having a Chancellor. And 2017 was the year when major pieces fell into place. The Governing Council was set up and other committees, as well as inaugurating the University Chancellor, the current President of Botswana, His Excellency the President Lieutenant General Dr. Seretse Khama Ian Khama.

**Reflection**

Now that the governing body of the university is set, does the university has a plan to tackle the challenges that had eluded Botswana agriculture for 50 years; that of low productivity? The best ways of answering this question is to reflect or to go back to the cross roads. What did BCA and its forerunner, Botswana Agricultural College (BAC) achieve and what were their failures. What can the new university learn from those experiences? The questions to ask are how BAC/BCA contributed to food security and nutrition; how it prevented animal diseases, how it contributed to rural development, reduce poverty and create wealth? And specifically, how did it contribute to the quality of its graduate and their employability. Did its training and research contribute a number of start-up companies? Was its research able to reduce post-harvest wastage? Did it increase mechanization of agriculture, processing and value addition on the primary production?

**Looking forward**

After reflecting on what was achieved and the failures, then the task of gap stopping should commence. The biggest challenges currently facing Botswana as a country is that it is importing most of its foods. It is said that the country has an import bill of P147.9 million (USA \$ 15.02 million) for products such as milk, honey, goat and sheep meat,

vegetables and fruits, pork, cereals and chicken (Farmers Magazine Botswana 2016). This figure possibly does not include importation of by-products. Therefore, BUAN will have to rise to the challenge of contributing to food production. Another major challenge, which may mistakenly be perceived as the creation of BCA/BUAN is low employability of its graduates. Although lack of jobs is common for most graduates from all tertiary institutions, the subject matter trending on social media, especially Face Book by BUAN graduates is that programs offered at the institution does not prepare them for live post-graduation. This is the challenge that BUAN has to deal with in order to restore its image and earn credibility from prospective students, their parents, sponsors and ex-students. This is regardless of the fact that BUAN as an institution of training does not create jobs or conditions for employment. However, with change in curriculum, intensification of research, BUAN may position itself to be able to deliver graduates who a technologically prepared to innovate around job creation and its research be able to stimulate creation of start-up companies in agricultural related fields. The following are areas that BUAN would have to consider in addition to conventional agricultural syllabus; ICT innovation in agriculture (think the use of drones to scare birds in large scale cereal farms, applications for assisting in identification and diagnosis of diseases of animals and plants), epidemiology of diseases and pest outbreaks of national and regional interest (e.g Foot and Mouth Disease and crop pests), markets and trade and more importantly business and entrepreneurship. Agric-business and entrepreneurship should not be theoretical but based on real life scenarios that graduates will encounter after leaving university. The model here should be that of incubation and encouraging student to embark on establishing start-up companies while still on campus. This way, they will receive advice and mentorship from respective expertise on campus and industry.

The role of indigenous knowledge in natural resources conservation should not be ignored. These knowledge by our people may be what the country need as it enter climate change uncertainties. BUAN should be an example on how Batswana should go about conserving and managing the environment through cultivating the spirit of stewardship of the environment. Agriculture worldwide is been blamed for contaminating the environment and therefore promoting research and the use of clean energy by BUAN will reduce this long shadow hovering over agriculture. We have abundance of solar and wind energy that need investigations. In the past, most of our boreholes were powered by windmills, so what has changed?

Mitigating strategies against climate change are bankable technological undertakings these days, and BUAN has to position itself in the right space to benefit the country's efforts in combatting effects of climate change. Naturally, it then means that climate change should be streamlined into every relevant program or subject. This brings out the suggestion that BUAN should consider creating centres of excellence for science and agricultural science. Examples are Centre of Excellence for Climate Change in Agriculture, Centre of Excellence for Beef and Centre of Excellence for Innovation in Agriculture. These ideals are based on the fact that, as the only institution of higher education focusing mainly on agriculture and natural resources in Botswana, BUAN has the undeniable obligation of being the think-tank of the subject of agriculture for the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food Security and other relevant ministries. But to be considered a think-tank comes with an expectation of possession of reliable information and knowledge by those whom you want to impress as such a premier institution. Proprietorship of such information and knowledge under such circumstances as of a university, comes from intense research, and centres of excellence, together with post-graduate training are gate-ways for generating such information and knowledge. Creation of centres of excellence also offers opportunities for national collaboration and internationalization of training and research.

As a conclusion, BUAN needs to review its activities; the curriculum, research thrust and post-graduate training. Incorporation of climate change in its curriculum and the setting up of centres of excellence would be a strategic area to go into. Agric-business and entrepreneurship as part of the curriculum is critical in the face of fewer jobs in the formal market. And BUAN can help its graduates by fully preparing them for life after graduation.

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