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IN ANY CORRESPONDENCE ON
THIS SUBJECT PLEASE QUOTE REF. NO:

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

STI/05/46

16th May, 2022

Rt. Hon Speaker
Parliament of Uganda
KAMPALA, UGANDA

**SUBMISSION OF RESPONSE TO THE REPORT BY THE SELECT
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION**

On 11th May, 2022, the Report of the Select Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation on COVID-19 related research for the FY 2019/20 to FY 2021/22 which was tabled to the House on 11th May 2022 was presented to the House. I was required to make a formal response thereto. Please find attached hereto my response that I intend to present in the House.

Thank you,



Hon. Dr. Monica Musenero Masanza
MINISTER OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

CC: Deputy Speaker

— CC: Clerk to Parliament

CC: Secretary to Office of the President

CC: The Government Chief Whip

17th May 2022



**Rt. Honourable Speaker,
Honourable Members.**

On Wednesday 11th May 2022 the Report of the Select Committee on Science Technology and Innovation on COVID-19 related research for the FY 2019/20 to FY 2021/22 was read out in parliament and laid on Table.

The terms of the select committee are listed on page 1 of the committee report. These are;

- i. To establish the progress in the development of a locally manufactured COVID19 vaccine;
- ii. To establish the amount of funds so far released for the research, innovation and COVID 19 vaccine development;
- iii. To establish how effectively such funds were utilized;
- iv. To establish the challenges faced in the development of the COVID 19 vaccines and medicines;
- v. To inquire into any other matters incidental to the above;
- vi. To recommend a way forward to Parliament.

RT Hon Speaker,

First, I express my gratitude to the Committee for taking the time to interface with me and my team, and especially the scientists who were on the frontline of the work that was in issue. I believe the interactions were mutually beneficial and will improve the culture and practice of scientific research in this country. As I will highlight below, that research has never been more critical, and its value is self-evident. I thank the Committee for its very detailed report, and especially for the various observations and recommendations made. We have

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taken these to heart and will continue to study them more carefully even after today. In a special way, I thank you, Madam Speaker, for it was during your leadership as then Deputy Speaker that the Committee was established. It has often been said, sunlight is the best disinfectant. You guided well. We complied with the Committee to the best of our ability. And we welcome the report and its comments.

Madam Speaker, I will now turn to the contents of the report.

A perusal of the select committee's observations and recommendations as detailed in their report¹ highlights four main points that I will itemise below:

- A. That the pathogen economy research is necessary and viable in Uganda and the funds government has so far invested are justified.
- B. That some research projects by our Ugandan Scientists have progressed to the point of preclinical and clinical stage.
- C. That more funding should (be) allocated to enable the quick acquisition of research results and build specialised facilities that support research.
- D. There is need for enabling laws and improvement in the operations relating to the management and monitoring the research projects.

RT Hon Speaker

I will now proceed to elaborate on the four points itemised above.

1. That the pathogen economy research is necessary and viable in Uganda.

It is globally agreed that when COVID 19 became a pandemic there was no rule book on how to handle it. The good efforts of this government managed to protect Ugandan(s) against its deadly effect even in the face

¹ See pages 13, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 31, 38, 42, 43, 44, 46, 48, 51, 54, 55, 56, 61, 62, 63, 66, 69, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76 and 77

of developed countries hoarding the vaccines they had developed using their scientists.

An initiative (The Presidential Scientific Initiative on Epidemics, PRESIDE) to promote our Ugandan scientists to develop vaccines and other products that can shield us in the future, and reduce our reliance on foreign countries was set up by H.E President Museveni (See appendix 2 to the report). The select committee correctly concluded that the need to develop the pathogen Economy is viable in order to protect the Ugandans against pandemics now and in the future.

PRESIDE was meant to complement and not replace ongoing efforts by the different sectors, focusing on specific priority areas identified and/ approved by the president. The relevant sectors were expected to continue with their strategic, regulatory and oversight initiatives. PRESIDE was designed to provide a supportive rather than obstructive environment for the scientists.

It is important that the Honourable Members take note that, Africa is the biggest consumer of vaccines due to high number of disease outbreaks. Currently 99% of vaccines consumed in Africa are imported. This means that Africa only manufactures 1% of the vaccines it consumes.

2. That some research projects by our Ugandan Scientists have progressed to the point of preclinical and clinical stage.

RT Hon Speaker,

One of the terms of the select committee was to establish the progress of the COVID-19 related research. This was on the backdrop of a claim no research was capable and our Ugandan scientists did not have capacity to undertake such research.

RT Hon Speaker,

I thank the Parliament which supported and funded the projects, it showed that this house has faith in its Ugandan Scientists. The committee report has taken it a notch higher by documenting the status of the research and showing that our Ugandan Scientists have indeed made progress in the areas of research.

The committee report on page 3 details the field activities undertaken that led to the committee visiting Uganda virus Research institute; Joint Clinical Research Centre; Jena Herbal Laboratory; Gulu University; Busitema University; Makerere University College of Veterinary Medicine among others.

The committee has throughout the report been consistent in recommending that the preclinical and Clinical studies for the vaccine should be expeditiously concluded (see page 18, 22 of the report). This is important because it confirms the progress made by the scientists in the research through the vital exploratory stage and clears them to proceed to the next steps in the vaccine development stages journey listed on page 14 of the report. The committee report therefore confirms progress made by our Ugandan Scientist in this field of scientific research.

3. That more funding should be allocated to enable the quick acquisition of research results and build specialised facilities that support research.

RT Hon Speaker,

1. In the FY 2019 / 2020 while I served as Head of PRESIDE 5.3bn was approved by parliament and released to the then MOSTI who procured the required equipment.
2. In the FY 2020/2021 we were informed as PRESIDE that 31.03bn and 3.32bn was appropriated by parliament. Of this 15.79bn was allocated to the MOSTI for the procurement of equipment and 15.25bn also allocated to MOSTI to cover the operations of the scientists coordinated under PRESIDE. I must make mention that only 12.65bn was released to the scientists, we have no information on the shortfall of 2.6bn.
3. In FY 2021/22 allocated 50bn towards the construction of a pilot vaccine manufacturing plant. A further 52bn was appropriated for vaccine research and development to enable the scientist continue their work
4. In FY 2020/21 the then MOSTI received 2.74bn under the innovation fund which was to be released to fund scientist outside PRESIDE framework.
5. It is perhaps important to mention here for members to note, Madam Speaker, that no funds were ever released to PREESIDE directly for research purposes. Research grants were released directly to the grantees and the processes were managed by the predecessor Ministry of Science and Technology.

Rt Hon Speaker at no time was I personally responsible for the management of any financial resources that was allocated to the work of the PRESIDE team as this was being coordinated by the Ministry and accounted for in accordance with the framework provided for in the Public Finance and Management Act.

Rt Hon Speaker,

The support of this parliament to fund research as highlighted above is commendable but it is low when compared to the other countries. The committee report at page 15 points out that *“United States and Germany invested approximately \$ 2 Billion and 1.5 billion respectively in COVID 19 vaccine research and development by March 2021.”* This may explain the leaps and level of success registered by these countries. Our scientists have nonetheless made commendable progress despite our limited resources, but certainly the limited irregular funding releases have in some cases led to the slow progress of our projects achieving the desired timelines of vaccine research, testing and eventual approval.

RT Hon Speaker,

The committee in cognisance of the above have recommended an enhancement in government funding (see page 70 of the report), they have recommended the completion of the animal lab project to support the project for the development of vaccines and therapeutics (see page 23 of the report). The committee also observed the need of transgenic rats in Pre-Clinical trials, recommended that;

“An animal laboratory facility at COVAB should be expedited for breeding of the transgenic mice in order to cut on the cost of future importation of the same” (See page 77 of the report)

The construction of the breeding lab will cost money but it will give us independence from the relying on imported mice from other countries with this capacity. This will boost research in Uganda. I therefore appreciate this wise observation and recommendation of the committee, whose end result will benefit Uganda.

4. The need for enabling laws and improvement in the operations relating to the management and monitoring the research projects.

RT Hon Speaker,

The committee made some recommendations aimed at putting in place procedures to improve the management and monitoring of research projects.

Since my appointment as the Minister responsible for Science, Technology and Innovation, I have taken steps to determine and document the progress of the projects formerly under NRIP in MOSTI. The recommendations of the committee will improve our level of operations and support that will be given to all the scientists for the good of the country.

The relationship of PRESIDE and the then MOSTI was governed by a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the then line Ministry (MOSTI). PRESIDE did not disburse money to the scientist and as discovered by the committee the project entities directly accounted to MOSTI as the line Ministry (see page 44 of the Report). The recommendations by the committee on accountability at page 45 that there is need for a prescribed format of accountability, and the need for clearance certificates (see page 45 of the report) at every stage is welcomed.

CONCLUSION

RT Hon Speaker, In conclusion I would like to make specific reference to accusations on my person, PRESIDE and the many eminent scientists we work with that were made on this floor of Parliament.

The Hon Member of Parliament of Ntungamo made a tirade of accusations on the use of resources appropriated to PRESIDE while I was heading the institution. His unsubstantiated accusations that prompted an Ad Hoc

Committee of Parliament to be established were to say the least not in good faith and caused a lot of discomfort, frustration and annoyance to our dedicated scientists who like me have dedicated their lives to find cure and protection for our citizens and ourselves.

All my professional life I have dedicated myself to fighting pandemics and rather dangerous disease outbreaks in the pursuit to save lives of people I didn't know and will never know. I have fought Epidemics such as Ebola, Cholera, Murburg, Hepatitis, yellow Fever among others. It is on record that In 2014 as a team leader in Sierra Leone I earned global recognition during the Ebola Pandemic that claimed 4000 lives in a country with a population of 1.2mn people.

Rt Hon Speaker, never before has my integrity and commitment to duty ever been questioned or have reason to be questioned until now and sadly here in my own country, so it is very disheartening to have to read these accusations in the media, hear comments on TV and Radio and to have to explain to my family and friends on how unfair and untrue all these statements are.

But despite the pain, anguish and anger this has caused me and all the scientists working with me to build our capacity, I want to assure this august house that we shall not be derailed or distracted in our pursuit to develop our vaccine research and development capacity.

As I demonstrated here today, we welcome scrutiny, we appreciate constructive criticism, we shall never hesitate to correct our wrongs and above all we shall be transparent and accountable to our President, our Parliament and the people of our country

Once again, I thank you, Madam Speaker, for having set up the Committee and provided its terms of reference. I thank the Chairperson and Members of the Committee for a job well done. It was a lengthy process, from which we have taken many lessons. We are wiser and much better than we were before this process. We are also relieved that the Committee did not find any misappropriation of funds because there was none. We trust under your leadership, Madam Speaker, this matter will now hopefully be put to rest, following the light that has been shed on the work that we did under PRESIDE, and the lessons we take from this process.

Rt. Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members, I thank you for according to me the opportunity to make this response to you. I assure you of my commitment to make Science Work for our nation and assure you of my commitment to the service of our country.

I undertake to keep this August House updated of the changes put in place in line with the recommendations of the committee.

I say all this For God and My Country

Dr Monica Musenero Masanza
MINISTER OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT