Strengthening Regional Collaboration in Agricultural Research and Genetic Resource Conservation

A high-level engagement between the SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre (SPGRC) delegation and the Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (MUAST) marked an important step toward strengthening regional cooperation in agricultural research, biodiversity conservation, and food security. The visiting SPGRC team, led by Dr Justify Shava, Head SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre; whilst the MUAST team was led by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Justice Nyamangara.

In his welcome remarks, the Vice Chancellor underscored MUAST's unique position as Zimbabwe's only University dedicated exclusively to agricultural sciences and technology. The Vice Chancellor emphasised MUAST's commitment to promoting indigenous vegetables, noting the paradox that such crops often attract more interest from elite groups than from communities that could benefit most.

Professor Nyamangara further affirmed that research and innovation remain central to MUAST's mandate, with structures in place to ensure quality assurance, teaching and learning, innovation and commercialisation of research outputs. Facilities such as the Climate Change and Food Security Institute (CCFSI) and Centre for Agricultural Engineering and Technology were actively developing technologies tailored for smallholder farmers.

Dr. Shava, in his remarks, elaborated SPGRC's role as a regional hub for plant genetic resource conservation, headquartered in Lusaka, Zambia. SPGRC coordinates efforts among SADC member states to conserve and utilise plant genetic diversity. He emphasised the importance of plant diversity in the face of climate change and called for strengthened efforts in germplasm collection, characterization, documentation, and utilization. He also proposed the development of academic programmes in plant genetic resource conservation to build regional capacity.

The meeting highlighted several areas for collaboration, including germplasm duplication, nutritional analysis of indigenous crops, and capacity building in data collection and documentation.