



The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni (centre) with (seated, L-R): Dr Turyagyenda; Peter Ogwang, Dr Kaducu, Amoru; VEB Group CEO Samuel Abbey Ntswana and VEB Group CFO Avril Joycelyn Thobile. Standing are members of the VEB Group delegation, senior ministry officials and representatives from the Uganda High Commission in Pretoria. This was at State House Nakasero on Thursday

INVESTOR TO MAKE BIODEGRADABLE PADS

BY VISION REPORTER

The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni, has welcomed plans by South Africa's VEB Group to establish local production of biodegradable, single-use sanitary pads made from banana fibre.

She described the initiative as "great news," noting that it will not only safeguard the hygiene and dignity of Uganda's girls, but also add value to the country's abundant agricultural resources while promoting environmental sustainability.

Mrs Museveni met a delegation of investors from South Africa's VEB Group, led by Uganda's High Commissioner to South Africa, Paul Amoru, at State House Nakasero in Kampala on Thursday.

The meeting was also attended by the state minister for primary education, Dr Joyce Kaducu; the state minister for sports, Peter Ogwang; the education ministry permanent secretary, Dr Kedrace Turyagyenda; the commissioner for basic education, Dr Cleophus Mugenyi; the commissioner for health education and training, Dr Safinah Kisu Museene; and representatives from the Uganda High Commission in Pretoria, South Africa.

The VEB Group delegation presented plans to manufacture 100% natural, plastic-free and chemical-free sanitary pads using Uganda's abundant banana fibre. The proposed product, currently in research and development, will be fully biodegradable and designed for single use. It aligns with global hygiene standards while addressing environmental concerns. The Imara brand product is being developed specifically to meet the First Lady's requirement for high-quality, disposable hygiene solutions.

NATIONAL PRIORITIES

Mrs Museveni reaffirmed her commitment to safeguarding the dignity of Ugandan and African girls and reiterated her longstanding position against the normalisation of reusable sanitary pads for African girls.

The First Lady made it clear that while she welcomes investment and job creation, the dignity of the girl child remains non-negotiable.

"Any proposed interventions – particularly those concerning hygiene products for girls and women – must uphold the dignity and standards deserved by Ugandan children," she said.

"It is very difficult for me to accept that industries should be put in place

OTHER COLLABORATIVE INTERESTS

The delegation from the South African-based VEB Group presented potential areas of partnership in sustainable manufacturing, skills development, agro-processing and social impact initiatives, including the donation of biodegradable sanitary pads and eco-friendly nappies.

VEB Group's chief operations officer, Dr Tebello David Lefoka, said the company – with over 25 years of experience in skills development and manufacturing – plans to establish production facilities in Uganda and is committed to creating up to 7,500 jobs within five years, subject to the necessary facilitation and partnerships.

VEB Group has already delivered an initial consignment of biodegradable sanitary pads and baby diapers as part of its social impact programme, with future batches expected to be produced locally.

The delegation is scheduled to visit Mbale Industrial Park to explore potential investment opportunities.

to manufacture reusable pads just for Africa," Mrs Museveni said.

"Our children are as sensitive, they are as deserving. They need these services, but we do not want to give up on the decency of using what others use.

"I am a mother. I have girl children. I cannot see myself buying reusable pads for them. And since I cannot do that for my own children, I really cannot do it for any other child," she said.

"We must always seek solutions that uphold their dignity and ensure they receive products of the same standard used elsewhere,"

Mrs Museveni told the delegation.

She emphasised that although affordability remains a challenge for many families, it should not lead to permanent compromises on quality and dignity. Instead, she argued, the desire for better standards should inspire innovation, hard work, and economic empowerment.

"If you say, 'because you cannot afford this now, I will give you a cheaper material that you can afford for life', then that person will be content to just live by that. That is not the way we want to go. Our children must

know that they have to work harder and get what they want in life," Mrs Museveni said.

The First Lady expressed appreciation for South Africa's VEB Group's interest in investing in Uganda and contributing to the country's socio-economic transformation. She reiterated, however, that partnerships with Uganda must align with national priorities.

GROWTH GOALS

Mrs Museveni also underscored the importance of aligning any partnership with Uganda's broader development agenda and the vision of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Government, which prioritises sustainable growth, job creation and human capital development.

She reiterated the Government's commitment to industrialisation and value addition, particularly through skilling hubs and local manufacturing initiatives aimed at reducing imports, including furniture.

The First Lady highlighted Uganda's push towards self-reliance, especially in furniture manufacturing through government skilling hubs across the country.

"We are trying to make sure that we manufacture enough furniture in the country so that we do not import furniture anymore," she said, adding

that partnerships must complement, not undermine, existing local initiatives.

Mrs Museveni welcomed further technical discussions between the investors and ministry officials to explore practical areas of collaboration.

CO-OPERATION AREAS

Amoru described the engagement as part of Uganda's broader effort to strengthen Uganda-South Africa economic ties and attract credible investors who align with Uganda's development priorities.

He highlighted that while South Africa currently exports approximately \$1.8b worth of goods to Uganda, Uganda's exports to South Africa stand at only \$100m. This partnership, which includes technology transfer in agriculture and pharmaceuticals, is designed to help narrow that gap.

Amoru also briefed the First Lady on progress in academic co-operation with the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Currently, 31 Ugandan doctoral students are pursuing PhD studies at the institution, the highest number among participating African countries.

He said discussions are ongoing to formalise a memorandum of understanding to strengthen joint research, innovation platforms, postgraduate scholarships and institutional capacity building.