University don roots for traditional medicine

By Chris Muqasha

The Government should develop institutions which are engaged in traditional medicine, a university don has urged.

Dr. Edward Kanyesigye, a senior lecturer and the dean of the school of medicine/faculty of health sciences at Uganda Christian University (UCU)-Mukono, said there are important drugs, which are traditionally known, but the Government can refine them to an international level.

Kanyesigye was on Monday leading a delegation of 20 students from the University of Karlinska in Sweden who visited Rukararwe Partnership Workshop for Rural Development in Bushenyi district to compare traditional herbal medicine with the conventional drug/medicine.

Rukararwe is one of the community education centres promoting the use of traditional herbal medicine. The centre has an artificial forest, where they grow a variety of indigenous medicinal trees and herbs. According to Epitream Kashaba, the head of herbal medical unit at Rukararwe, among the cases they can handle are enlarged prostate gland, urinary tract infections, malaria, asthma, allergies and skin diseases.

"There are known drugs which have passed from one generation to the next, and efforts must be put in place so that they are preserved through value addition," Kanyesigye said, adding that, traditional medicine should be taught the university level.

Kanyesigye said some developed countries have already picked interest and allocated resources towards the development of traditional herbal medicine.

"The tables we import and take are extracted from our plants, leaves and roots. What a place like Rukararwe needs is to see how they can add value by building a processing plant," he said.

He warned against environmental degradation, saying: "Some diseases, such as skin cancers, are linked to use of chemicals which have contributed to environmental degradation."

Dr. Zakaria Gombekwa, a specialist in traditional herbal medicine at Rukararwe, said traditional healers have knowledge about different types of traditional medicine, but they have not been helped to develop them further.

"It is unfortunate that some traditional healers have died before passing over their knowledge to the young generation, which knowledge cannot be got from the academic books," Gombekwa said. He added that the challenges are in packaging, drying, storage, dosage, and diagnosis of diseases.

Alby Ayebaze, the head of eco travel, said traditional herbal medicine can be taken up had as a tourist attraction.