Regional Initiative in Science and Education: African Natural Products Research Network (RISE-AFNNET)

Comments by Prof. Lillian T. Ekirikubinza during the opening of the National Stakeholders' Workshop on “Repositioning the Natural Products Industry to Meet the Current Challenges in Uganda”

April 30th, 2010, Metropole Hotel, Kololo, Kampala - UGANDA

With a rapidly growing population, Sub Saharan Africa is grappling with the challenge of attaining the millennium development goals. The region’s alternative riches are however found in its natural resources with the African natural products promising great benefits as an industry, putting in mind the fact that the global market for natural products is US$170 billion and continuing to grow.

In Sub Saharan Africa, Makerere University is taking lead in promoting natural products science and technology competences in the region with a view to securing and sustainably engaging the African Natural Products industry for socio-economic development.

The Natural products Industry is a multi- and inter-disciplinary science that addresses the problems and issues associated with biodiversity and ecology, indigenous knowledge, intellectual property issues, development, value addition, quality, marketing and trade.

Makerere University has over the past generated knowledge on natural products and this knowledge has stayed on the shelves. With the policy shifts at the University, we have decided to engage all stakeholders in order to transmit this knowledge to the final beneficiaries, the community. Such applied science can contribute to the solution of the diverse problems facing the region.

As the region improves politically and economically, the importance of Natural Products resources is assuming increasing significance. Many manufacturers are opening up industries in Uganda for example Quality Chemicals but some of their main challenges are raw materials and product development. Makerere University pledges to work with such Industries in the area of product development through quality research. Makerere also pledges to take lead in networking natural products players such that knowledge can be shared for the benefit of all from the producers on farms to the processors and consumers.
Another challenge to the Natural products Industry is the acute shortage of trained personnel. This can best be addressed when Universities join hand with the Private sector and Government to build capacity and it good that it is one of the intentions of the African Natural Products Research Network of Makerere University. It is our hope that by the end of this workshop, solutions will have been identified and bonds created for bigger benefits in the Natural products Industry of Uganda.

So, I declare the workshop open as We build For the Future.