



President Museveni (centre) interacting with Dr Wayengera (third-left), as health state minister Sarah Opendi (third-right) and other medical officials look on. This was at State House, Entebbe. PPU photo

# Museveni hails Makerere researcher on virus test kit

By David Lumu

In 2014, when the Ebola epidemic broke out in West Africa, Dr Misaki Wayengera was one of the top Ugandan physicians who were dispatched to contain the virus.

At the time, he was also working on the Pan-Filovirus Rapid Diagnostic Test kit.

However, he had a funding challenge until Grand Challenges Canada came to his rescue with a \$100,000 (about sh360m) grant.

It is through this Canadian grant that Wayengera developed a Pan-Filovirus Rapid Diagnostic Test, a paper-strip test, similar to the one used in pregnancy, to detect Ebola and Marburg viruses.

This year, Wayengera impressed the World Health Organisation (WHO) with his ground-breaking innovation, which medics across the globe say is a timely invention for proper diagnosis of haemorrhagic fevers, such as Ebola.

On Monday, Wayengera, a senior lecturer at the department of pathology, immunology and molecular biology at the College of Health Sciences, Makerere University, was recognised by President Yoweri Museveni for his towering role in the fight against haemorrhagic fevers by developing the test kit. The kit has now been approved by WHO to diagnose Ebola and Marburg viruses.

According to a statement issued by State House yesterday, Museveni also pledged funding for scientific innovations.

"I want to congratulate our scientists because they are waking up and producing a lot of products. The Government will fund you.

- He is attached to the Department of Pathology at Makerere University's College of Health Sciences.
- He holds a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery from Makerere University, a Master's degree in Bioentrepreneurship and a PhD in pathogenomics from Toronto, Canada.
- He has conducted research on Ebola since it first broke out in Gulu, Masindi, and Mbarara districts in 2000 while a second-year medical

student at Makerere University.

- He attended Nabumali High School, Mbale for his O'level, from 1993-1996 and later joined King's College, Budo.
- Together with a team of researchers from Makerere University Medical School, Wayengera developed a model that could lead to a cure or preventive treatment for HIV/AIDS.
- Wayengera's search for the cure of HIV/AIDS has now taken 14 years.

## WAYENGERA'S FACT FILE

It is the issue of prioritisation and putting the money in the right place," he said.

The President was speaking during a meeting at State House, Entebbe on Monday, which he held to recognise Dr Wayengera for winning the WHO high innovation challenge in Product Development Category that took place at the WHO Africa regional headquarters in Congo (Brazzaville).

Museveni also commended Wayengera and his team "on the achievements realised, adding that the research can bring in a host of benefits to society because the products form the core that addresses many human challenges, such as haemorrhagic fevers and HIV afflictions that immensely affect the world."

After developing the test kit,

Wayengera said in 2015 that he needed about \$100m (about sh3.6b) to build a facility that he said will house modern laboratories.

During the State House meeting, Museveni said the Government will support the efforts of researchers by establishing a manufacturing facility that will enable them to put all the products together.

Wayengera's innovation on Ebola and Marburg diagnosis comes at a time when the region is battling with a fresh Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

DR Congo was declared an Ebola epidemic in August last year, especially the conflict-riddled areas of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri on the borderline of Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.

WHO has also dispatched Ebola

vaccines to safe-guard medics and the population from contracting the disease.

Museveni observed that Uganda has, on several occasions, been attacked by epidemics, including Ebola and Marburg, resulting in the deaths of trained preventive workers and the wananchi.

When Uganda was struck by Ebola in 2000, which claimed several people, including medics such as Dr Matthew Lukwiya, Wayengera was a second-year student studying medicine at Makerere University.

Dr Rhoda Wanyenze, the Dean of the School of Public Health, Makerere University, described Wayengera as "a smart biomedical scientist who has done groundbreaking research and innovations."

"We are very proud of him," she said.

During the meeting at State House, state minister for health Sarah Opendi also saluted Wayengera and his team for the innovation, saying "their efforts will go a long way in easing the diagnosis of viral haemorrhagic fevers, such as Ebola and Marburg".

Wayengera thanked Museveni for recognising the efforts of his research team and for the support.

The test kit, Wayengera said, is also easy to deploy in rural settings, where there are no laboratories and expertise.

The meeting was also attended by WHO representative and the head of the mission in Uganda, Dr Yonas Tegegn, Prof. Charles Ibingira, the Principal of Makerere University College of Health Sciences, Prof. Pontiano Kaleebu, the director of Uganda Virus Research Institute and Prof. Wilson Byarugaba.