

## **International Symposium on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Public Health Care in Eastern and Southern Africa, April 2016**



Herbal medicine was exhibited at the symposium



Delegates at the IKS & Health Care in Rwanda, Kigali

The University of Rwanda (UR) in partnership with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), and Mount Kenya University (Kenya) held an International Symposium on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Public Health Care in Eastern and Southern Africa.

The symposium was held under the theme ‘Enriching public health equity and leadership through indigenous knowledge systems.’ Academics, researchers, policy makers and local traditional healers attended to learn from each other on how to upgrade indigenous knowledge on affordable health care. Dr. Christine Gasinzigwa, the director-general of science, research and innovation at the ministry of education, said the required period of research and development for conventional medicines makes modern drugs costly and healthcare inaccessible to a large proportion of the population.

“We need to work together as policy makers and researchers so that indigenous knowledge can be exploited or even transformed into pharmaceutical industry. There should be knowledge transfer at all levels and other mechanisms; people cannot remain depended only on Western medicines when we have local ones that can be used as well,” she said. Dr Theophile Dushime, the director general of clinical services at the ministry of health, said that this symposium is a great opportunity to upscale new knowledge that can nourish Rwanda’s health system. “We recognize that traditional medicine can complement modern medicine because there are illnesses that resist modern treatment. The problem is that traditional healing is done informally

but we will have elaborated policy and regulations to guide it by the end of this year,” Dr. Dushime said.

Daniel Gafaranga, the president of traditional healers in Rwanda said their invitation to the symposium shows how their medical system is being recognized. “We look forward to getting more knowledge to help us work more professionally,” he said. The WHO regional committee for Africa adopted a resolution in 2000 on Promoting the Role of Traditional Medicine in Health Systems: a Strategy for the African Region. The resolution recognized the importance and potential of traditional medicine for the achievement of Health for All in the African Region. The African heads of state and governments declared 2001-2010 as the decade of African traditional medicine. In a recent meeting of African health ministers, they extended the period from 2011-2020 as the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade for African traditional medicine.

By Diane Mushimiyimana