

The Curious Case of COVIDEX

By Cadreen Barungi Kabahizi

While millions worldwide grapple with the realities of COVID-19 and its immense costs on livelihoods, some scientists – on whose shoulders the mantle lies – are striving day and night to find the treatment for this deadly ailment. Although scientists have not yet found the cure for COVID-19, it is paramount that the relevant institutions invest in Research and Development, and innovation. Harnessing all effort, both local and international to discover remedies for COVID-19.

Professor Engeu Patrick Ogwang is one such Ugandan pharmacist who, in pursuit of his dream to manufacture herbal drugs, prepared a herbal remedy he called 'Covidex'. The Covidex herbal solution mainly constitutes of Zanthoxylum Challybeum or Zanthoxylum Gilletti and Warbugia Ugandensis, two types of trees found only in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Coincidentally, Patrick had been studying these two trees and their medicinal components for over a decade at Mbarara University of Science and Technology where he is an Associate Pharmacy Professor. It was the worldwide surge of COVID-19 that pushed him, together with his team of pharmacists from MUST, to make this specific concoction. This herbal mixture is now indicated as a supportive remedy management in the treatment of viral infections.



Many attest to the powerful properties this herbal concoction contains. Consumers say covidex provides relief from the heavy congestion brought about by the Coronavirus.

For several years now, Jena Herbals factory in Entebbe Uganda, which is now producing covidex, has been producing herbal medicines for cough and flu syrups, diabetes management, sickle cell management, and stomach ulcer management.

Following covidex's popularity and controversies, the President, after consulting Prof. Ogwang, approved the continued production of Covidex and its consumption by the covid patients. The National Drug Authority, too, after much consultation and testing, approved the concoction as a supportive remedy in the fight against COVID-19 on June 29th 2021.

Although the World Health Organization has not given approval for the use of Covidex, its efficacy as a supporting drug is hard to disprove. Africa Center for Disease Control recognises the existence and use of herbal remedies for the relief of COVID-19 symptoms. Many of these are still under clinical trials and will require more time to be officially approved. In the meantime, ailing Ugandans are using covidex with confidence in its ability to combat COVID-19.

Such innovative breakthroughs point to the further need for heavier investments in Research and Development. Ugandans need not rely too dependently on exported goods. Ugandans like all Global Southerners, have it in them to innovate and create what they need to survive, thrive and make a significant impact on the world.

Now sold at a factory price of 5,000Ugx (\$1.41) per little bottle, covidex has recently been subject to hoarding by some strategic businessmen who hiked the prices to as high as 50,000Ugx (\$14.1) per bottle.

We call upon the government to regulate the covidex prices, placing a price ceiling on the cost of covidex to the public. Covidex should be easily accessible and affordable to all the locals. In its effort to combat the deadly coronavirus, the Ministry of Health should also provide covidex to all COVID patients in hospitals.