

Govt to ban killer cassava

Intervention. Government says it is sensitising communities on the deadly cassava breed and providing better and safe varieties to farmers.

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KAMPALA. The government is considering withdrawing a killer magana cassava variety that has claimed at least seven people in different districts. However, the process will take some time, a senior official has said.

Mr Okasai Opolot, the director of crop resources in the Ministry of Agriculture, said they are sensitising the public about the deadly cassava and providing better and safe varieties to farmers.

"The problem is that when cassava mosaic [virus] attacked other varieties in those areas, magana variety was not affected. So it is entrenched in those areas and removing it from communities is not easy," Mr Opolot told this newspaper on Wednesday by telephone.

Some of the new varieties being given to farmers include: Naro Cass1 and Nase14. They were developed by National Crop Resources Research Insti-



DANGERS

Signs.

Cassava poisoning presents symptoms like rapid respiration, drop in blood pressure and rapid pulse, among others, according to research findings.

Agriculture. Farmers assess the quality of cassava distributed by the government.

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findings, magana contains cyanide, a poisonous compound and an anti-nutrition element, that is lethal to humans.

Cyanide, according to findings, causes "disturbances of thyroid function and neurological disorders," resulting in death.

Cyanide poisoning, the government paper said, can lead to goiter, paralysis of the legs and presence of deep yellow-red urine in affected persons.

"Cyanide is an anti-nutrition element found mainly in cassava. At high levels it can be poisonous," reads part of the research findings, a copy of which this paper has seen.

Dr Titus Alicai, a programme Leader Root Crops Research at NaCCRI, said magana "is a local old farmer's variety" and not developed by scientists at the institute. Cassava poisoning mainly occurs when fresh roots are harvested and eaten raw or boiled.

"Farmers know how to use it; they process it. They either slice or ferment it, but I think they were not following that because of the famine situation," Dr Alicai said.

Uganda faced one of the worst famine situations last year

tute in Namulonge (NaCCRI), a government research centre.

The said varieties, Mr Opolot said, are high yielding, with a good taste and resistant to pests.

Early this week, the govern-

ment presented in Parliament a one-year research findings conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture explaining why people who eat magana variety in different parts of the country died.

According to the government