

Banyoro hold discussions on HIV

HOIMA

By Robert Atuhairwe

The Omuhikirwa (Prime Minister) of Bunyoro Kitara kingdom, Andrew Kirungi Byakutaga, has urged the people of Bunyoro to embrace good cultural values which can help to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS. He said good cultural values which can help in the fight against the scourge are dying out and bad ones which promote the spread of the disease continue to thrive.

Speaking at an *ekyoto* (bonfire) discourse held in Hoima town on Monday, Byakutaga said issues of culture have made a big contribution in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

He added that the kingdom will use all avenues to increase the fight against HIV/AIDS through initiatives such as *ekyoto* to sensitise the people.

Ekyoto is a tradition dating back to centuries in Bunyoro where grandparents would entertain, advise and discipline the young through folktales and songs.

The *ekyoto* was organised in collaboration with Uganda AIDS Commission.

It is aimed at discussing strategies on how to fight the epidemic.

Byakutaga said society should see the need to promote cultural values and discourage bad ones such as domestic violence and widow inheritance.

He urged people to always test for HIV.

Byakutaga said Bunyoro should put more effort in fighting HIV because it is perceived to get most at risk population including long distance truck drivers, sex workers and pipeline workers during oil production stages.

"This place is going to be a hotbed because of the construction of oil-related infrastructures, so migrants are expected," he noted.

Samuel Tumusiime, the kingdom special assistant to the prime minister cited alcoholism and drug use as the leading causes of HIV.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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Hoima, with a population of 577,903 people, has an HIV prevalence rate of 6% compared to the national average of 6.0% as per 2016.

Annet Mutagaywa, the Hoima district HIV focal person, said the new strategy is to increase in teaching HIV/AIDS prevention education in schools since the youth were more vulnerable.

She said 567 youth get HIV every week as of 2015, of which 363 are females and 204 males.

"*Ekyoto* was a strategic tool to get males gather together and discuss what has been achieved," she added.