



## CAN AFRICAN MEDICINE HELP TO FIGHT CANCER, MR KUETE?

**In Africa, too, many people suffer from cancer. In Cameroon, for example, the number of new cases is growing steadily. But only a few sufferers have enough money to consult a doctor. Everyone else goes to the local healer.**

There they are usually given a mixture of herbs, the composition of which is a well-kept secret. "We really wanted to find out more about it and so we visited healers all over the country," reports the Cameroonian biochemist Victor Kuete. He and his colleagues collected more than 200 plants purported to have medicinal properties – plants with such evocative names as giant globe thistle, wild pepper, speargrass and Ethiopian pepper. In the lab they then extracted the active substances. But do these substances really have any effect on cancer? And if they do, how can the effects be explained? The first time Victor Kuete visited Mainz, four years ago, he had a

lot of questions in his mind – and a lot of little glass tubes of plant extracts in his suitcase.

More than 100 Cameroonian samples have since been investigated. Experiments in petri dishes have revealed that some substances do indeed slow down the growth of tumour cells which have become resistant to high-potency cancer drugs. Animal testing and clinical trials still have to be done, but Victor Kuete is already thinking a long way ahead: "Medicines deriving from African plants could drive cancer therapy worldwide and allow the people in my country access to better, more affordable treatment."

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