

## HIV vaccine in the offing, says Kavi

By BRIGID CHEMWENO

Medical researchers have expressed hope of discovering a vaccine for HIV.

The researchers, working for Kenya Aids Vaccine Initiative (Kavi), said it has taken long to develop a vaccine for the deadly virus because they wanted to get it right.

"The research work is slow, tedious but our objective is to get it right. There are challenges in this process since the vaccine must have ammunogens that can induce responses capable of recognising multiple HIV variants," said Aggrey Omu Anzala, one of the founding members of Kavi.

Speaking during the MAISHA HIV and Aids conference in Nairobi, Prof Anzala said a vaccine must elicit long-term immunity for it to be effective.

He revealed that Kavi is currently testing two HIV vaccines in Nairobi, adding that they will know if the vaccine is effective when they reach the third phase of the testing.

### INFECTION DOWN

He said one of the vaccines will soon proceed to Phase II of the trial.

National Aids Control Council Director Nduku Kilonzo said HIV infection rate in the country had dropped due to aggressive awareness campaigns being undertaken by the organisation.

"Kenya has seen a decline in HIV incidence rates among adults aged 15-49 due to the scale up of various prevention and treatment programmes," said Kilonzo.

She said another MAISHA HIV and Aids conference is scheduled to take place from May 7-8 this year.

"The conference will provide a forum to share knowledge as well as identify research gaps and priorities in the implementation of the Kenya Aids Strategic Framework," she added. Statistics show that an estimated 1.6 million Kenyans are currently living with HIV.

## CoG wants more cash

By ROSELYNE OBALA

The money set aside for Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE), salaries and village polytechnics in the Division of Revenue Allocation Bill is not enough, the Council of Governors has said.

The council said it expected Parliament to allocate ECDE at least Sh5 billion, Sh3.3 billion for youth polytechnics and Sh12 billion for salaries.

Council chairman Isaac Ruto (Bomet) yesterday said the proposed allocation for the 2015-216 financial year will not be sufficient given the circumstances surrounding resource contestations among various stakeholders.

"We recommend the Senate for its effort to push for an increase of Sh7.7 billion. This is a slight improvement but we still have a shortfall, especially in ECDE and polytechnics," Ruto said.

# 'We have biotech structures to deal with GMO issues'

Stakeholders from 30 countries attending a meeting in Nairobi call for lifting of two-year ban on GMO imports

By DANN OKOTH

Scientists insist the country has an effective mechanism to regulate Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) to ensure safety contrary to a statement by Health Cabinet Secretary James Macharia citing lack of adequate biotechnology structures.

Kenya University Biotechnology Consortium Secretary General Joel Ochieng said the biotech community was saddened by Mr Macharia's

statement, which they insist will misinform the Cabinet that is to decide the fate of the ban on GMOs.

Dr Ochieng, who is also a senior researcher at the University of Nairobi, College of Agriculture and Veterinary Science under the Agricultural Biotechnology Programme, said four regulations that implement the Biosafety Act have been gazetted to ensure compliance with all activities undertaken within a field.

"GMOs are monitored from development to consumption, and the National Biosafety Authority has inspectors in all key areas such as ports of entry, field trials, and along product value chains to ensure compliance. Further, the Kenya Bureau of Standards (Kebs) has developed a standard for market surveillance to reinforce efforts on compliance," he said.

He said Kenya had existing legal, human and infrastructural capacity to



Participants at the International Conference on Agricultural Biotechnology and Biosafety Communications at Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi on Monday  
(PHOTO: MOSES OMUSULA/STANDARD)

manage GM foods.

International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications Director Margaret Karembu said reputable international organisations such as the European Commission, the US National Academy of Sciences and the World Health Organisation have assessed biotech crops and found them to be safe and beneficial to the global food supply.

### SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

In 2011, the European Commission released a compendium of 50 research projects on the safety of biotech foods over the last decade. In addition, the European Commission funded research from 130 projects involving 500 independent research groups over 25 years, concluding that there is no scientific evidence of food safety risks for biotech foods, she said.

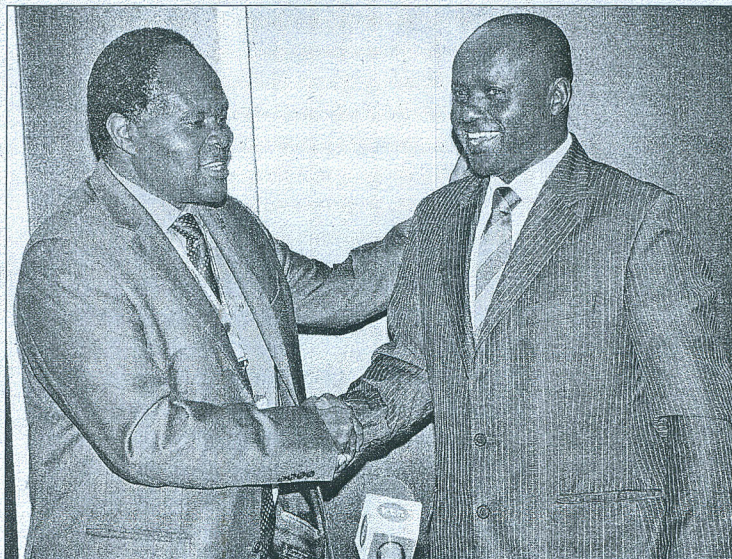
And delegates from 30 countries from around the world attending an international Agri-biotech and Biosafety Communication conference in Nairobi have asked the Government to lift a two-year ban on GMO imports. They also resolved to step up measures to demonstrate how agricultural production challenges can be tackled using biotechnology, and how it can directly contribute to food and nutrition security, poverty alleviation, job creation and sustainable economic development.

Addressing the delegates comprising farmers, scientists, policy makers, private sector, the media and science communicators, Industrialisation Principal Secretary Wilson Songa emphasised the role of agricultural biotechnology in propelling the country towards prosperity.

## University sets out to raise Sh10b to boost research

University of Nairobi Vice Chancellor Peter Mbithi (left) and Standard Group CEO Sam Shollei during their meeting yesterday.

(PHOTO: BEVERLYNE MUSILI/STANDARD)



By AUGUSTINE ODUOR

The University of Nairobi (UoN) is planning to raise Sh10 billion to boost its research and scholarships kitty.

UoN Vice Chancellor Peter Mbithi said the initiative, which is part of the university's rapid transformation agenda, will entail major fundraising drives to boost the institution's capacity to meet its objectives.

He said the three-step programme, expected to take three years, will start with highlighting the university's research breakthroughs and attracting many brand ambassadors.

"Research is at the core of this institution's programmes and we must raise enough money for the same," he said.

The VC spoke yesterday in his office when Standard Group Chief Exec-

utive Officer Sam Shollei visited him.

Present were William Ogara, UoN Director, Centre for Internal Programmes and Links, School of Journalism Director Wambui Kiai and UoN Enterprise and Services Managing Director John Kenduwo. Standard Group's Commercial Director Irene Kimani was also present.

### ALUMNI BASE

Mbithi said the university has done "good and progressive researches", many of which are not known by Kenyans. The university's research fund currently stands at Sh4 billion.

He said the endowment fund shall be raised by 2017.

"We hope to tap into our broad alumni base which currently stands at 174,000. Some of these persons are well placed in the society and would

wish to give back to the university," he said.

Mr Shollei said the Standard Group will support the university's efforts. "We have pledged to support you as you seek to transform the society by being the best university in Africa," he said.

Prof Mbithi said the university had developed an internal research funding strategy that will foster studies intended to solve societal problems.

Shollei said the Standard Group will partner with the School of Journalism on a raft of exchange programmes to develop the capacity of staff and foster UoN students' practical learning.

He urged the university to make available its professionals to comment on various topical issues on the Group's media platforms.

## Media role in democracy praised

By NANJINIA WAMUSWA

The public trusts the media as an important tool for promoting democracy, a study has revealed.

This survey was conducted by a group of NGOs and journalism scholars drawn from various local universities and sponsored by the Kenya Peace Network.

The public would, however, want the media to do more in exposing corruption and other malpractices in the public offices, the report says.

The report titled 'News Media, Public Sphere or Exclusive Space', while praising the media for safeguarding public interest, wants to see increased coverage of county news.

According to the report, the public is also unhappy that the media do not give issues that affect the ordinary citizens enough coverage.

"There are serious malpractices like corruption at the counties which the media outlets have not reported because some of the journalists have been compromised," said University of Nairobi lecturer George Nyabuga during a Media and Public Participation workshop at Eastern Hotel.

He added: "Former journalists have been employed in the counties as communications directors who ensure only positive stories come out." While launching the report, Information Secretary Ezekiel Mutua called for training journalists to make them more effective in their work.