

**I N T E R N A T I O N A L**

# Africans afflicted with HIV seek herbal salve

NAROK, Kenya (AP) - Jonathan Mwanza was once a powerful man in this rural town - a county councilor and lifetime member of Kenya's former ruling party. His hefty build spoke of wealth and authority.

That was before he contracted HIV. Without access to anti-AIDS drugs, he wasted away - stripped of his weight, his job, his community standing.

Mwanza, 56, then became part of a growing trend among Africans with AIDS: He gave up on government doctors and turned to a traditional healer in search of an herbal remedy.

"When I started taking it, I improved very much," Mwanza said, saying his weight increased from 138 pounds to 154 pounds after 11 months of treatment.

The development of AIDS drugs has made HIV infection a manageable disease in Western countries, but in Kenya about 600 people die from AIDS every day because the expensive treatment is not readily available.

Mwanza said he has been able to gain weight and stay healthy thanks to an herbal mixture given to him by Vincent ole Yiapan, a certified Masai traditional healer in Narok, 60 miles west of the capital, Nairobi.

Despite pledges from the government and pharmaceutical companies, there are no signs that HIV treatment in rural parts of Kenya will improve soon. In Narok, there is no laboratory capable of assessing the severity of HIV patients' conditions.

The Kenyan government certifies traditional healers, who have to show basic health care skills and knowledge of their trade. But Kenya's physicians generally reject traditional medicine as quackery.

Leander Otieno, a professor of medicine at the University of Nairobi, said scientific research on traditional Kenyan treatments for AIDS has been negligible. The herbalists' claims "have not been counterchecked," he cautioned.

Recent studies suggest some Chinese herbal remedies like the dried root zicao can help inhibit HIV. But in Kenya, herbal treatments have widely been regarded by the government as little

more than folk tradition, Otieno said.

Yiapan prescribes his powdered blends - labeled V1, V2 and V3 - depending on the severity of his patients' problems. He won't reveal his secret recipes, but he does display patient files to offer proof of their effectiveness.

While he doesn't claim to cure HIV, he said he is convinced he helps.

"These are particular medicinal plants that we have identified over the ages," said Yiapan, wearing a white lab coat and holding up jars full of colorful powders. "With these herbal, medicinal plants, I know that if I mix two or three, they will cure a disease."

Dozens of people line up outside the blue and white shack Yiapan built in a parking lot in Narok, a Masai trading center near the Masai Mara Nature Reserve. He uses 234 plants to treat everything from stomach aches to tuberculosis.

The 62-year-old former teacher said he took up his parents' vocation as a traditional healer after he retired mainly because of his daughter's death from AIDS four years ago.

"If I knew then what I know now, she would have

lived longer," he said.

Yiapan also lectures on how to prevent the spread of HIV and explains how in the absence of drugs, good nutrition and traditional herbs can help people live normal lives.

And unlike AIDS drugs that can cost \$2 a day in Kenya - where most people live on less than a dollar a day - his herbal treatments costs 1 cent.

"They are cheap and there are no side effects," said Lorna Naesia, a 30-year-old mother of one. "When I take them, I feel relieved, I feel comfortable, I feel just OK."

Naesia said she lost her job at a tourist resort after she contracted HIV, and her family refuses to see or speak to her. She now works a few months a year as an AIDS counselor, barely making enough money to keep her 11-year-old daughter fed and in school.

Yiapan gives HIV patients his herbal mixtures for next to nothing and makes sure they understand he is not curing them.

But some traditional healers, like 67-year-old herbalist Harrison ole Mukya, charge their patients significant sums and claim to cure HIV.

"There is no disease that we don't treat," Mukya said.



## FACES OF GRIEF

Relatives cry over the body of 18-year-old Palestinian Mahmoud Nasser prior to his burial. According to witnesses Nasser, who was unarmed, was killed by Israeli army fire enforcing a curfew in Jenin on Tuesday.

# Mugabe: Bush acts like 'God'

UNITED NATIONS (AP) - Zimbabwe leader Robert Mugabe recently warned of world dominated by one superpower, accusing President Bush of acting like a "political god" and calling British Prime Minister Tony Blair "his prophet."

Mugabe, accused of crushing dissent in his own country called for the United Nations to be more democratic and suggested the United States and its allies have blocked efforts that might diminish their power.

"Debate on the reform of the Security Council has been too long-drawn because of attempts calculated to protect those whose interests are best served by the status quo," he said in a speech to the U.N. General Assembly. "Ironically, it is some of the same forces that since last year have been raining bombs and hellfire on innocent Iraqis purportedly in the name of democracy."

The 80-year-old leader said the U.S.-led

war in Iraq and its aftermath had gone against U.N. values and warned of "the perils inherent in the status quo particularly with regard to the dominance of global politics by one superpower and its closest allies."

"We are now being coerced to accept and believe that a new political-cum-religious doctrine has arisen, namely that there is but one political god, George W. Bush, and Tony Blair is his prophet," Mugabe said, drawing a small scattering of applause.

Mugabe has ruled Zimbabwe since its independence from Britain in 1980.

The south African nation has been wracked by political violence and economic turmoil in recent years as Mugabe's government has seized thousands of White-owned farms for redistribution to Blacks. Seeking to crack down on dissent, the government has arrested opposition leaders, trade unionists and independent journalists.

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