

## We need more young minds in Science by Mary Mwendwa



*Visiting Lecturer at Wangari Maathai Institute, Dr. Thumbi Mwangi (Centre) making a presentation with other scientists during a conference.*

Getting young people interested in science for a better tomorrow, is critical for Kenya. Yet there has to be a love and patience with science, notes this young researcher keen to understand the animal-human bond and disease transmission to man, through inclusive field studies. At 34 years, Thumbi Mwangi is a Clinical Assistant Professor at the Paul G. Allen School for Global Animal Health, Washington State University and believes that the veterinarian's role is to maximize the potential of the relationship between people and animals to promote the health and well-being of both.

“People's health is intricately related to that of the animals they own, and of the wildlife they interact with,” says Dr Thumbi in an interview .

And with three out of five of all human diseases originating from animals, Dr Thumbi is calling for more grounded scientific discussions in Kenya on the interactions between animals and man, and their health effect on the latter.

“It is critical to view animals both from the good and the bad angles with a focus to capitalize on the positives and reduce the negative effects,” he added. Dr Thumbi appreciates that veterinary medicine serves society fulfilling both human and animal needs thus he has dedicated his time to understanding the thin line between the illnesses in human and animal worlds.

But what drove him to complete a PhD at 32 years? He believes that his love for the animal world was nurtured in a small village, Endarasha in Nyeri where cattle, sheep, dogs and other domestic animals were not only companions as he grew up, but also significant members of their homestead. As a student at St Martin's Primary School and later at Njiiri High School, he knew his calling was driven towards finding solutions beyond the illnesses he had seen the domestic animals, sometimes dying from. He traces his turning point towards becoming a scholar early on during his Bachelor in Veterinary Medicine and Surgery degree training, to interactions with Prof. Kiama Gitahi, then the Associate Dean for Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and now director of the Wangari Maathai Institute at the University of Nairobi