

SPEECH BY THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF HEALTH DR. MERCY MWANGANGI, DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 11TH KEMRI ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC AND HEALTH (KASH) CONFERENCE TO BE HELD ONLINE FROM TUESDAY, 8TH –THURSDAY, 10TH JUNE 2021:

***The Chairman, KEMRI Board of Directors, Dr. Daniel M. Mbinda;
KEMRI Board of Directors Present;
Ag. Director General, KEMRI, Prof. Sam Kariuki;
Chairman, KASH, Conference Organizing Committee – Prof. Charles Mbogo;
All Key Plenary Speakers;
Distinguished Scientist & Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,***

Good Morning!

I am extremely delighted to join you this morning for the Official Opening of the **11th KEMRI Annual Scientific and Health Conference (KASH)**. Let me also take this opportunity to sincerely thank the KEMRI Management for successfully organizing this important conference now for the last 11 years running. It is equally gratifying to note that this conference has attracted more than **74 abstracts** from both the research institutions and academia, five plenary discussions, **13 scientific sessions and three symposia**.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this I must say is not a mean achievement coming during the COVID-19 pandemic in what we are now referring to the new normal. Let me also take this opportunity to formally acknowledge KEMRI's immense contribution in the response, control and management of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. We congratulate you for offering this important service to the people and government of Kenya.

Ladies and Gentlemen, they say that sometimes the best leader is realized during a crisis and that every dark cloud has a silver lining. This is true not just for KEMRI, but the entire Nation during this COVID-19 pandemic period. It is during this pandemic season that some of the KEMRI's innovations such as the **KEMrub Hand Sanitizers, the Virus Transport Media**

(VTM) and or the infectious disease prowess has stood out not just in Kenya, but also throughout the region.

As the foremost research agency of the Ministry Health, KEMRI's work in response to the containment of COVID-19 has been outstanding. From supporting the National COVID-19 surveillance, screening and testing covering over 60 percent of all the COVID tests carried out have been done by KEMRI, to technical input in the MoH COVID-19 task force. KEMRI has also offered numerous technical advice at different levels on the COVID-19 pandemic including the modelling of the trends and COVID-19 sequencing in the country.

Distinguished Participants; I am also informed that drawing from your vast capacity and experience over the years in Dengue fever, Rift Valley Fever, HIV and Hepatitis B kits, you recently completed the development of a PCR COVID-19 testing kit that is awaiting formal launch. This is encouraging given that such kit is not only cheaper to produce, but can also immediately be deployed across our remote health facilities to enhance community surveillance as well as mass screening of both symptomatic and asymptomatic cases.

Another encouraging development from KEMRI is in COVID-19 vaccine development global efforts. Other than your contribution in the initial research and clinical studies of the Oxford **AstraZeneca vaccine(Chadox1)**, and the identification and development of a local COVID-19 vaccine candidates that will significantly contribute to control of the disease in Kenya and beyond, beside the ongoing screening of natural products as potential drug candidates and efficacy trials of COVID-19.

It is therefore gratifying that the 11th KASH conference being held online for the first time, is aptly themed, "**Strengthening Health Systems in Kenya Through Research, Pandemic Preparedness, Technology and Innovations in the post COVID-19 era**". It is equally rewarding to note that the Conference has beaten the COVID pandemic odds and registered going by the number of abstracts being presented as well as symposia and record 13 scientific breakout sessions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have no doubt the level of engagement will not just mirror KEMRI's stature as the leading Institute for health research in Africa, but also propose innovative scientific solutions that will improve quality of health of all Kenyans. I am also informed and equally excited that the **Cochrane Review Kenya Chapter** will be officially launched during this conference. Cochrane Review is a knowledge management platform that promotes evidence-informed health decision-making by producing high quality, relevant, accessible systematic reviews and other synthesized research evidence and its launch in Kenya is a big boost to health research in the country.

KASH Conference, I understand is one of the strategies that KEMRI has continuously implemented that seeks to strengthen systems for disseminating, translating and transmitting research findings for evidence-based policy formulation and implementation. The promotion of dissemination and exchange of health research information through the KASH, and through platforms like the Cochrane Review serves to promote health science dialogue and exchange among scientists, health practitioners, development partners and policy makers for evidence-based decision-making and policy formulations.

It is my hope that these findings, recommendations which will be presented in the next three days of this conference, will contribute directly to the national discourse on health research and development not only in Kenya but world over.

Distinguished scientists, Health is a cornerstone for the comprehensive development and well-being of the people and a hallmark of national prosperity and social progress the concept of health promotion, as envisioned by World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Sustainable development goals, should be the focus of discussions among these great minds like those attending this conference.

Besides the pandemic, I note with satisfaction that KEMRI is addressing the key pillar of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) as declared by His Excellency, President Uhuru Kenyatta by

redirecting its resources to provide solutions to the health sector. Among the presentations in this conference that are relevant to this pillar include governance of the Health Systems at the National and County levels, achieving Universal Health Care, pre-term Births Initiative, and need for surveillance at devolved health units.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As COVID-19 pandemic has taught us, health threats are no longer local or affecting only one sector alone. It is for this reason that as researchers you must work with all the other sectors to address some of the health challenges facing our generations through the One Health and all government approaches. Global realities demand that we focus our attention to the following three areas: Climate change, the failure of more and more mainstay antimicrobials, and the rise of chronic non-communicable diseases as the leading killers worldwide.

Distinguished Scientists, the true test of research is whether people use it – for reference, for influence, and most importantly for policy change. It is my hope that KASH will give decision makers, opinion formers and practitioners access to a wider range of new and existing research outputs, providing an evidence base they can draw from.

And with those few remarks, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to declare the 11th KASH Conference officially open.

Thank you.

DR. MERCY MWANGANGI
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY,
MINISTRY OF HEALTH