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VIP IN TOWN

# Kenyans mingled with Bill Gates and didn't know it

Billionaire Microsoft company owner walks into Eldoret chemist unnoticed

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**T**o many, he was just an ordinary mzungu who was touring Kenya to sample the country's beauty and serenity.

But before recognition could hit any discerning passerby, he was gone. That is the way Bill Gates, the billionaire owner of Microsoft Corporation, walked into a pharmacy in Eldoret yesterday.

It was business as usual on Kenyatta Street before three metallic Land Rover Discovery and a Toyota Regius pulled up near Life Care Pharmaceuticals.

Mr Gates clad in a checked shirt, khaki trousers and brown leather shoes, alighted from the Toyota and walked to the chemist to inquire about anti-malaria drugs.

The unassuming billionaire passed many people unnoticed, as he arrived in the town where he is supporting hundreds of people on anti-retrovirals under his Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The programme is being undertaken under Eldoret-based Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital's Academic Model for the Prevention of HIV and Aids (Ampath).

Few people realised there was an unusual visitor in town as Mr Gates went about his business in the pharmacy with some of his security detail in dark sun glasses positioned at the entrance of the chemist as others kept vigil outside.

Most passers-by did not notice his presence except for a few who were suspicious of the presence of foreign security personnel. Not even Eldoret police were present in his entourage.

He stayed at the chemist for about 10 minutes before leaving and boarded his Toyota Regius vehicle registration number KBC 952 Q, which drove in the midst of the three posh black Land Rover Discovery cars with tinted windows.

The owner of the pharmacy, Dr Mburu Mureithi, said he was taken by surprise by the visit.

"I was not aware he was coming. I was just called from the other room and told that there were visitors at the counter," Dr Mureithi said. Mr Gates was keen to understand the drugs available for prevention and treatment of malaria, which is rated as one of the main killer diseases in

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the country and Africa as a whole. He said Mr Gates inquired more about available malaria medicine and their cost.

"He was also keen to know prescription and dispensing details and those that we sell over the counter," Dr Mureithi said.

Sources privy to his visit indicated he was in the country on holiday and to assess the impact of his sponsored projects on the lives of Kenyans.

Prior to his visit to chemist, the billionaire held closed door meeting at Partners in Prevention offices near Eldoret Club which is one of Ampath's programmes. Present were programme manager Dr Sylvester Kimaiyo and MTRH's director Prof Harun Mengech.

Journalists were barred from covering the meeting.

**Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates speaks at a keynote address at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada in this January 6, 2008 file photo. He is in Eldoret for Aids related charity work. Photo/ REUTERS**