

EDITORIAL

Cancer-causing creams: Inaction will kill us all

Uganda is once again flooded with potentially cancer-causing creams and soaps. The country's Standards bureau by proclamation banned the said cosmetic products 18 months ago. Rather than disappear, more than 80 different types of the contraband have proliferated to populate Ugandan markets, including supermarket shelves.

We are alarmed that the country's coterie of economic crime investigators cannot, in addition to Uganda Revenue Authority, reconnaissance teams, locate and stamp out the illicit businesses enriching a handful. Professionals in these government agencies must act decisively, apprehend the culprits and controvert claims that they are complicit.

Lebanese and Nigerian nationals alongside some Ugandans are named in official petitions as illegal importers of the beauty products. An inventory of their businesses and locations based on filed records with URA, the Immigration Directorate and Uganda Investment Authority, should make them easy to trace.

The issue:

Contraband creams

Our view:

We demand a sting government operation to arrest, prosecute and deport the outlaws dealing in the contraband.

Inaction will consign thousands of Ugandans with appetite for lightening to incurable health hazards. Why? The answer resides in the World Health Organisation caveat: These lightening creams and soaps contain mercury and hydroquinone that cause "kidney damage, skin rashes, discoloration, scarring and a reduction in the skin's resistance to bacterial and fungal infections".

Unfortunately, the government's own inventory confirms profusion of these products on markets for different segments of the population. Health is wealth, so goes the refrain. If sale of these cosmetics are not stopped, even individuals not using them will shoulder expenses to treat relatives or friends lightening themselves to the sick bed.

Our view is that the government must crack the whip on this matter with urgency. Uganda's liberal economic policy and legendary hospitality to foreigners should not render the country a dumping ground for suited masquerading investors, and cross-border criminals, often officially supermassaged for their real or perceived financial worth.

The government has a cardinal responsibility to protect and serve the citizens. This no-good business of contraband proliferation tests that resolve and flags the incompetence of bureaucrats. We must also borrow practices elsewhere. Last month, a court in the United States fined Johnson & Johnson Shs1.5 trillion after California resident Eva Echeverria, according to a report by *Reuters*, proved that she developed "ovarian cancer after using the firm's talc-based Baby Powder for feminine hygiene".

Ugandan consumers may not be as empowered to pursue litigation against powerful corporates or moneyed individuals. They, however, should be clothed against the cannibalistic appetite of unprincipled capitalists. We demand a sting government operation to arrest, prosecute and deport the outlaws. The contrabands too must be seized and publicly destroyed.

Our commitment to you

We pledge:

- To be accurate and fair in all we do.
- To be respectful to all in our pursuit of the truth.
- To refuse to accept...