

# Govt told to regulate use of harmful chemicals on food

By Charles Etukuri

The Uganda Veterinary Association (UVA) has called on the Government to strengthen systems and deter food and meat vendors from accessing dangerous chemicals used in meat preservation. Responding to the ongoing operation by Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and Uganda National Bureau of Standards on the structural standards of the butcheries and investigating meat preservation mechanisms, Dr. Sylvia Baluka Angubua, the UVA president, noted that they were concerned about the safety of all the animal products that are offered on the market.

Dr. Baluka, who was flanked by the other UVA members, Uganda Veterinary Board, Dairy Development Authority, National Drug Authority and Uganda Meat Co-operative noted that previous complaints about the quality of meat on the market had been made by the concerned stakeholders.

"As veterinarians, we are aware that there are many weaknesses and many issues that affect the safety of the meat in the market and that this was not the first time we are acknowledging or raising these issues," she said.

She noted that as veterinary doctors, their key duty was to ensure that the food animal leaving the farm for the slaughterhouse is healthy, free of veterinary drug residues and is transported using appropriate means.

"Many times, the transporters fall short of the required standards. You find the animals are overcrowded on the trucks and sometimes when they go to get the movement permits, they claim they are transporting 10 animals but when they reach the slaughterhouse you find 30 animals. You then find those with broken hoofs and some hanging outside the truck. We have condemned this before," she noted.

She noted most of their members had complained of threats against them and families, especially from traders who transported the animals to the



Uganda Veterinary Association assistant treasurer Abubaker Mayanja (left) and Dr Sylvia Baluka Angubua during a press conference on meat handling in the country at Wandegaya veterinary department in Kampala yesterday. Photo by Kennedy Oryema

slaughterhouses whenever they carried out operations against them and politicians whenever they put in place quarantines. She also noted that in some cases owners of slaughterhouses rejected their attempts to condemn carcasses that were not fit for human consumption.

She urged Government to strengthen their capacity to enable them do more than what they are doing.

"We need adequate money for fuel and motorcycles or vehicles. We are not office people. We are field people," she noted. Baluka also called on the Government to strengthen all systems in place to make it difficult for an average Ugandan to access some of the chemicals which were confiscated as they were being used to preserve meat.

She noted that for the country to achieve food safety "we must effectively regulate and ensure good practices along the entire value chain from the farm to the consumer. This means every actor along the value chain must play their role at the right time for the Ugandan consumer to receive safe meat of animal products".

Last week, KCCA closed

over 20 butchers' shops and arrested nine suspects who were allegedly found using dangerous chemicals to preserve meat.

Dr. Robinson Nabasa, the KCCA health inspector, who headed the inspection, told the press that they had not yet found formalin in use, but they had found other chemicals like Tsunami, which he said was also illegal. He noted that all butcher's shop owners will also be required to undergo medical examination.

## BETWEEN THE LINES:

Uganda Veterinary Association urged the concerned authorities to ensure that the licences issued out those who have meat stalls are reviewed regularly.

"We have found butchers, in possession of other chemicals, but these chemicals are hazardous to human life and we do not encourage this. We shall arrest them as well," Nabasa said.

Dr. Baluka noted that it was their responsibility to ensure

that only safe meat reaches the consumer.

Dr David Kasibule, the vice-president of UVA, also urged the concerned authorities, especially the urban, municipal and division authorities to ensure that the licences issued out to individuals to run meat stalls are reviewed regularly.

"If one has communicable diseases, why should he continue to operate a butcher?" he wondered.

The crackdown comes in the wake of a detailed *Saturday Vision* investigation, which revealed that most of the butchers' shops, especially those dealing in meat, chicken, and also fish and grasshopper vendors were using unregulated preservatives to make the old products look fresh.

The four-weeks investigations also found out that the practice has been exacerbated by the lack of proper monitoring mechanism of the bodies tasked with supervision like Kampala Capital City Authority, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Industry and also the Uganda National Bureau of Standards.

By Edward Anyoli

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