Recentralise veterinary services, doctors tell govt

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KAMPALA. Veterinary doctors under their umbrella body, Uganda Veterinary Association (UVA), have asked government to recentralise all veterinary services to the Agriculture ministry to improve the livestock sector in the country.

The demand was made during a press conference yesterday at their head offices on Buganda Road, Kampala, ahead of the annual World Veterinary Day (WVD).

This year's WVD will be celebrated on April 27 in Ntoroko District. The theme is: "The role of the veterinary profession in sustainable development to improve livelihoods, food security and safety".

A veterinarian is a person qualified to give medical treatment to animals.

Dr Sylivia Baluka Angubua, the UVA president, noted that under the current system, district local governments appear more interested in collecting revenue from the livestock trade without prioritising disease control and improving productivity.

"Previously, all veterinary services were under the Ministry of Agriculture and everything would be in order unlike the current situation where local governments prioritise collecting money from livestock products than improving productivity," Dr Angubua said.

She stressed that many officials at district level don't understand veterinary matters, requiring specialised skills.

Meagre funds

Dr Angubua explained that although a lot of revenue is generated through livestock trade, they only allocate meagre funds to support animal production departments at the district level.

District politicians, she noted, always clash with veterinary doctors over issuance of animal health certificates yet this should purely be a mandate of technocrats.

"When you look at the current recruitment at the district level, some of the veterinary doctors, who are appointed aren't competent enough yet there are graduates, who are supposed to do these jobs. Although there is a clause, which states that anyone with an equivalent of a Bachelor's degree in veterinary medicine, it has been abused by some leaders, who appoint anyhow," she said.

Such discrepancies in the recruitment of veterinary staff, according to Dr Angubua, directly affect the livestock sector.

The veterinary doctor to animals ratio standings at 1:20,000, far higher than the recommended 1:6,000 since Uganda's livestock sector is extensive where veterinary doctors have to move long distances to treat the animals.

Welcome proposal

The State Agriculture minister, Mr Christopher Kibanzanga, last night welcomed a proposal by the veterinary doctors to recentralise their operations devolved to districts two decades ago.

"When government resolved to decentralise services to local governments, the purpose was to work together to extend services nearer to the people but people at the district have misinterpreted. For instance, they think that decentralisation is about eating money without rendering any service. As the minister of Agriculture, I overwhelmingly support recentralisation," he said.

Dr Angubua asked the government to increase funding to the sector by at least 30 per cent to improve livestock productivity.

ISSUES AT HAND

Interest. Dr Sylivia Baluka Angubua, the UVA president, noted that under the current system, district local governments appear more interested in collecting revenue from the livestock trade without prioritising disease control and improving productivity.

Theme. This year's Uganda Veterinary Association will be celebrated on April 27 in Ntoroko District. The theme is: "The role of the veterinary profession in sustainable development to improve livelihoods, food security and safety".