

# Government, farmers lose

In the second part of the series on the permanent quarantines across the country, Joshua Kato examines losses incurred by farmers and the Government and also looks at the reasons why some of the measures have not been effective

In January, this writer visited Lufula, a slaughterhouse at Kalerwe, Kampala district to find out whether there was scarcity of beef, since most of the cattle corridor was under quarantine. However, there was no reported scarcity of beef.

Surveys at the city abattoir on Port-bell Road gave the same results — no scarcity of beef. The question then is, where is this beef coming from, yet nearly 80% of the cattle corridor is under a no-livestock movement quarantine that has been in effect for between two and 10 years? On average, 1,500 head of cattle are slaughtered across the country daily.

The trade in livestock is still sold and smuggled out of the quarantined areas to markets. Smuggling is done both during day and night. However, in the process, farmers lose a lot of value of their livestock while government too loses revenue. Exports have also been affected severely, with countries in Europe and even Kenya rejecting Ugandan beef products because of certain diseases.

"There is no way these quarantines can be ended if stakeholders continue behaving and operating as they are doing now," Cecil Bugingo, a large scale rancher in Kiruhura district, said. Kiruhura is part of the cattle corridor, which is currently under quarantine. There are over 31 districts that have been under a ban in the last 10 years, which include Lufula, Sembabule, Lyantonde, Kiruhura, Nakaseke (Ngoma), Nakasongola, Kyankwanda, Gomba, most of Karamoja, Namutumba and Nebbi.

Bugingo talks about a combination of factors, including a poor or weak enforcement system, wrong or non-effective methods of vaccinations and cattle keepers who do not care. The quarantine is mainly imposed in Uganda to curb the spread of the foot-and-mouth disease. The disease causes mass deaths of livestock and affects the quality of beef.

### Districts losing revenue

Dr Khalid Kirunda, a veteran veterinary researcher/consultant, currently heading the Mbarara Zonal Agricultural Research Centre, put cattle deaths by foot-and-mouth at around 350,000 since October last year. If each of those cattle cost sh1m, then that is around sh35b lost.



A health worker inspecting cattle in Moroto district. The entire Karamoja region has been under quarantine for a number of years, leading to losses on the side of farmers



Minister Joy Kabatsi said the Government was vaccinating cattle against foot-and-mouth in some regions

His estimation is that another over sh30b is lost through less milk production and sales by farmers each year.

"These losses do not include lost revenue by the Government," Kirunda says. Most of the districts in the cattle corridor depend on livestock as a main source of revenue.

"Sixty percent to 90% of our local revenue

comes from taxes off livestock," says a local under quarantine for a number of years, leading to losses on the side of farmers

county LC3 chairman. Ngoma is found in Nakaseke district.

"We have been forced to cut down on our revenue expectations because of the quarantine," says a local revenue official in Sembabule.

Local leaders think that rather than imposing a total ban, the quarantine should be selective, only affected parishes or ranches.

**Blanket quarantine bad**

Paul Ssembugya, owner of Ssembugya Estates, a rancher in Sembabule, agrees with local leaders. He proposes that government stops imposing blanket quarantines. "When a blanket quarantine is imposed on a district, it affects everybody, including those farmers whose cattle are not sick," he says. He further explains that the longer the quarantine stays, the more desperate farmers get. "What do you expect farmers to do with the accumulated number of cattle on the ranches?" he asks. Obviously, they have to find ways of selling them.

"Once a total quarantine (ban) is imposed, enforcement becomes a challenge. This acts as a source of income for top district authorities who

## Pigs implicated in spread of foot-and-mouth virus - study

A study by Dr Sheila Balinda in 2014 showed that goats and sheep have been implicated in foot-and-mouth epidemiology as they may act as foot-and-mouth carriers. This is because when they are infected they may not show clear signs and symptoms of the disease.

"Pigs have also been implicated in the spread of foot-and-mouth disease as they are said to excrete the largest amounts of the viruses under certain climatic conditions."

Balinda said. A study by Makerere University and the National Livestock Resources Research Institute in 2014 showed that there was a foot-and-mouth outbreak in Rakai district, where pigs were found to be positive.

It is apparent that foot-and-mouth disease control strategies such as vaccination and quarantine should be enforced on other domestic animals as well as they are also susceptible to the disease.

This implies that the focus of vaccination and control of campaigns on cattle alone means the virus is left to circulate among other animals, thereby resulting into spontaneous outbreaks.

"We are carrying out vaccinations. However, we do it in a wrong pattern," says Bugingo. For example, if a district has got seven sub-districts, vaccination can be carried out in only three or two, leaving the others vulnerable.

In some cases, individual ranchers vaccinate their animals, while other do not care to do so. "This means that even if my livestock is free from disease, there are other farmers in the same area whose animals are sick and this means that the Government has no alternative but to declare quarantine on the area," Bugingo says.

Vaccination is costly. For example, Dr Muwanga says a dose costs sh7,000. This is administered for each cow after

six months. With over 12-13 million cattle, around 10 million goats in the cattle corridor, the Government may need at least sh220b to carry out each round of vaccinations for just one year.

The Government would need at least sh440b a year. It is also worth noting that this amount excludes the cost of managing the personnel and the logistics involved. Note that the entire agriculture ministry budget is about sh800b.

# revenue over quarantine

ask for bribes from cattle buyers who load the animals at night," Ssembugya says.

"Farmers are selling at half the price or value of their livestock because they are doing so illegally," Ssembugya says.

### Way forward

"The Government should sign a bilateral understanding with Tanzania about how to handle the cross border, uncontrolled livestock movements," says Paul Ssembugya. The number of cattle that cross into Uganda is in thousands every year. The animals graze through the open border bushes and enter Uganda, which is why controlling their entry is difficult.

It is common knowledge that foot-and-mouth disease enters Uganda through the porous border between Uganda and Tanzania. Strict border checks must be put in place to handle this challenge.

"The area of Tanzania bordering Uganda is like a free grazing zone without any serious control of diseases," Dr James Muwanga, another veteran veterinary officer, with a lot of experience working in the cattle corridor says. "Although it is not easy, Uganda must try and stop the cross-border movement of animals," says Lovis Byaruhanga, a farmer.

### Let checkpoints work

Trucks carrying cattle easily move through the checkpoints. The personnel supposed to handle the checkpoints are not enough. They also ask for bribes to let the cattle through.

"The quarantine remains on paper most of the time across these areas. This is because while the Government may want to enforce it, they cannot do so because they do not have enough numbers of personnel to enforce. On the other hand, farmers are also not keen at enforcing the quarantine because it makes them incur losses," Muwanga says.

The main cattle routes from the cattle corridor include Kiruhura-Sembabule-Masaka-Kampala, Sembabule-Gomba-Mpigi-Kampala, Sembabule-Mubende-Kampala, Ngoma-Kapeeka-Kampala, Nakasongola-Kampala, Mbarara-Lyantonde-Kampala, Isingiro-Mbarara-Lyantonde-Kampala and Teso-Mbale-Kampala.

On each of these routes, there is a livestock checkpoint, whose main task is to verify that animals are not coming from quarantined areas. For example, between Nakasongola and Kampala or Nakaseke and Kampala, the main checkpoint is in Bombo.

In an interview with a cattle trader at Lufula, he pointed out that as soon as quarantine is declared, they have to find a way out and this is when bribery comes in.

"We obviously bribe at the various checkpoints in order to take our livestock to the market. We have farms to run, homes to manage and children to feed," he said.

According to Nyama platform, an association of livestock farmers which advocates proper livestock handling, there is need to ensure enforcement of the Animal Diseases Act of 1964.

The highlights of the Act include emphasis on the animal movement controls at borders, within the country, manned livestock routes, enforcement of quarantine restrictions as well as putting in place structures to handle impounded animals.

In Kampala, for example, animals impounded

## Controlling foot-and-mouth disease

● Vaccination of animals at least every six months is the greatest method of control. This means that you do it twice a year.

● Keep your animals in fenced ranches and then prohibit entry of other animals and animal products. If you buy new



Cattle being transported to Kampala. Despite the quarantine, the supply of beef remains steady in the country, according to a recent study by this newspaper

cost is sh1m. On the other hand, the average indigenous cattle in an area, it means the Government spends close to sh100b, just to pay off the farmers. If there are around 10m hybrid dairy cows in the same area, that is an additional sh40b.

With the agriculture budget standing at around sh800b for the whole year, getting funds to carry out culling may be a problem. However, some individual farmers cull their sick animals.

"Last year, I culled 20 sick animals in my sick bay and when they failed to heal we killed and buried them," says Samson Bashasha, a farmer in Isingiro.

Mass vaccinations key

Foot-and-mouth disease can be prevented and controlled by vaccination of susceptible livestock (cattle, goats, sheep and pigs) six months.

According to agriculture state minister Kabatsi, the Government has an on-going programme of vaccinating livestock foot-and-mouth across the country.

"Vaccination programmes are on across the country," she said. Of course, funds to acquire vaccines on time

Experts propose that "ring vaccine" also help contain the disease if strategically to create barriers between zones and disease-free areas. It involves cutting off affected areas, vaccinating all animals there.

"In such cases, the government pays the affected farmers and then the livestock is killed," says Dr Muwanga.

This, however, is an expensive undertaking for the Government.

The average cost of an indigenous mature

Next week, we examine measures from

"Farmers are also not so keen at enforcing the quarantine because it makes them incur losses."

by city authorities are kept at the city abattoir where other livestock is slaughtered.

It is only after paying fines that the animals are taken back to peri-urban herds.

The forum says that this is a potential risk to farmers in Kampala and since there are no designated facilities for the impounded animals, this is the bitter pill that farmers may have to swallow.

The Nyama platform further proposes an amendment of the Act to become more prohibitive than it is now.

For example, anybody convicted of an offence is liable to a fine of sh6,000 or imprisonment for 12 months or both. It is important to note that this is a minimal fine, which most people can afford.

**Cull affected animals**

In most developed countries, when a disease breaks out in an area, livestock are slaughtered, which is referred to as 'culling'.

animals, have an area where they can be held for checking for at least two weeks before they are integrated into the main herd.

● Have strict bio-safety control, where you disinfect every person or vehicle entering the premises.

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