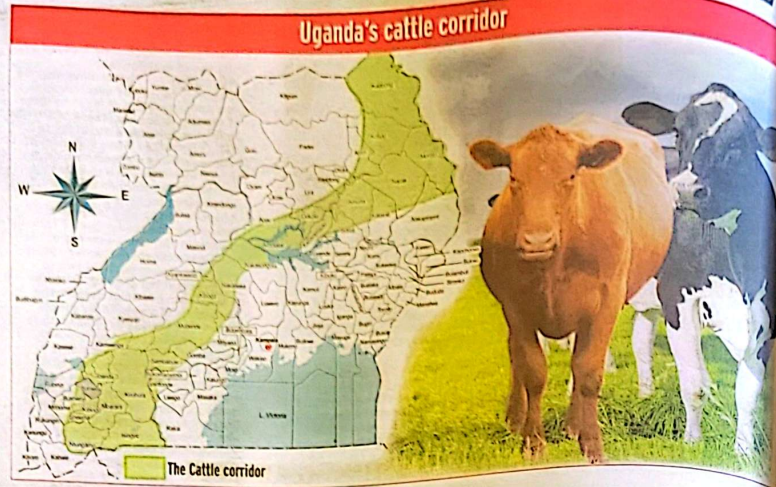


Beating the quarantine: Why

Much of the cattle corridor is under a quarantine. This is because of endless bouts of mainly foot and mouth disease. In a three-part series, the origin of the disease will be examined, why it persists and what should be done to get rid of it. In the first part, Joshua Kato examines where foot and mouth disease comes from and why measures to stop it are not bearing fruit.



Dr. James Muwanga

From across the border in Tanzania, cows continue entering Uganda, through the cattle corridor. As herdsmen move around in search of water and pasture, the disease spreads across the corridor.

Cattle corridor most affected

Most of the affected areas are in the cattle corridor. This runs from the south-western part of Uganda, through Rakai, Isingiro, Kiboga, parts of Mbarara, Sembabule, Gomba, Mubende, especially around Kiganda, Kiboga (Lwamata area) Kyankwanzu, Ngoma in Nakaseke, parts of Masindi, Nakasongola, Teso and Karamoja.

It is called the cattle corridor because it is there that at least 80% of the cattle in Uganda are kept. On top of cattle, there are also goats and sheep. Out of an estimated cattle population of 13 million, according to the 2014 livestock census, 10 million are found within the cattle corridor. There are also about 10 million goats in the corridor," Dr Muwanga says.

The corridor is largely flat with short shrubs and a lot of grass. It is also dotted with rivers and streams. According to researchers Daniel McGabey and Zoe Visser, livestock production



Cattle kept in paddocks can be protected from contracting diseases from infected animals. Some farmers introduce new animals on their farms without testing for disease

is the dominant livelihood activity. It had formerly open rangelands in the 1940s, which were under extensive pastoralism, but were allocated to land owners.

The allocation, according to another pastoralism researcher, Frank Muhereza, started in the late 1950s and early 1960s when the

government of the day allocated large chunks of the cattle corridor to big ranchers. According to Muhereza, the purpose was for the ranchers to develop them into commercially viable beef and dairy production centres. At the time, individuals got areas starting at five square miles of land. Government ranches such as Sanga and Kisizi also got allocations. In total, around Ankole, 207 ranches of five square miles each were created and given to individual commercial farmers.

Under the Masaka ranching scheme, which mainly covered areas of present day Sembabule district, around 100 ranches were created in areas of Lugushuru and Musi. Today, modern ranches such as Frank Farm, Rainbow Ranchers and Sembabegya Estates are

Livestock diseases persist

were handed out remained there as tenants. In Ankole, many of them, mainly Ishima started using the ranches after paying user fees to the big farmers.

In the early and late 1960s, milk and beef production indeed increased. "Many of the big ranchers introduced improved breeds," Christopher Ataho, in Gomba says. Improved dairy cows such as the Holstein, Friesian were introduced. However, production on the ranches within the cattle corridor started dropping during the 1970s as political instability took centre stage. This is because most of the planned establishment of water dams, community spray races and improved pasture were not set up.

However, ranches in other areas such as Ankole, Masaka and Mubende remained untouched. When the NRM government came to power in 1986, the question of the 'squating herdsmen' in the cattle corridor rose again. Additionally, some new but wealthy 'cattle keepers' also got land in Sembabule and Kiboga/Kyankwanzu. Depending on the size of the herd, hundreds of individuals got or retained areas ranging from 30 hectares to four square miles.

With this re-modelling, cattle keeping became more settled mainly in the Ankole and Sembabule areas, Ngoma and Kyankwanzu. There was a big move to keep improved breeds for their commercial benefits among farmers in Ankole and Sembabule areas, while the traditional cattle, for example, the Ankole cattle were gradually reduced. The number of cattle in the country rapidly grew from around five million in the mid-1990s to over 14 million at the moment. This included improved breeds.

In Ankole and most of Sembabule, the ranchers paddocked their land for better management. They also set up watering dams and spray races.

It was expected that with the paddocking and reduction in mobile pastoralism, diseases should have reduced. However, some farmers still encroach the corridor with their animals and this is why the quarantine has persisted.

Why quarantines fail

"While we have a quarantine on paper, in actual practice some livestock continue moving around and out of the quarantined areas," Sam Bulago, a cattle keeper in Ngoma, Nakaseke says. He accuses some officers who are supposed to man the livestock checkpoints of engaging in bribery to allow cattle move through.

This view is supported by Dr Muwanga, a veterinary officer who operates in the districts of greater Masaka including Sembabule, Lyantonde and Kiruhura.

"In reality, all these areas have been under a quarantine for the last two to three years, however, farmers have continued selling cattle," Muwanga says. He explains the predicament at the border. These cattle keepers regularly cross from Tanzania to Uganda, through the porous unmarked border points.

"Pastoralists from Tanzania enter Uganda and sell their infected animals to cattle traders in the open markets across Isingiro and as far as Mbarara," Muwanga says. He explains that the traders then sell the cattle to both abattoirs and cattle farmers. So even if a farmer had



Cattle crossing near River Kafu area to Kiryana ranch in Masindi district. Open grazing has contributed to the spread of diseases

Signs of foot and mouth disease

- High fever lasting two to three days
- Eating less, due to painful blisters in the mouth, nostrils, teats
- Weight loss
- Low conception rates
- A large drop in milk production in dairy animals
- Abortions
- Increased death rate, especially in newborn animals
- Reluctance to move or stand, due to sore feet and/or lameness



Keeping cattle in paddocks limits the spread of foot and mouth within the farm

or even culling them must be undertaken. However, under the current situation, the Government does not even follow up the owners of the sick animals to see what they are doing with them.

In developed farming countries, governments normally go to the affected areas, pay the farmers for the sick animals, which are then culled. If that is not possible because it is expensive, the government should instead have trained extension workers to visit the farms and help farmers deal with the problem.

"We are increasing sensitisation among farmers to make them aware of the threat posed by these diseases and how to stop their spread," Wakabi says.

On the ground, agriculture ministry officials who are supposed to control the movement of these animals are not keen on that responsibility. This is why even under the quarantine, animals continue moving out of the quarantine areas.

"Farmers in the cattle corridor earn a living from livestock. If you put the region under many years of quarantine, they will find ways of getting these cows out of the quarantine areas to the markets," Muwanga says.

While driving between Sembabule-

Mubende-Miyana in December 2017, this writer saw over 10 trucks carrying cattle to Kampala. Each truck carries an average 30 cows. This was the same case on Ngoma-Semuto-Kampala road and Nakasongola-Kampala road. Most of these trucks end up at the various meat abattoirs around the country, including the City Meat Packers in industrial area, Kalerwe (Lutuli) and Kyenume in Mukono district.

At the livestock checkpoint in Bombo where trucks carrying cattle are stopped on that route, the officers only check for movement permits as stipulated by the agriculture ministry from source. But even with these regulations, lack of personnel affects the enforcement of the laws.

"There are not enough veterinary officers to carry out effective checking at these stop points," Muwanga says.

Indeed, the agriculture ministry talks about low funding to the sector, leading to low number of personnel at the checkpoints to make sure that farmers and traders comply with the rules.

Next week, the writer will look at what should be done to stop disease spread and endless quarantines

According to the agriculture ministry livestock movement regulations, for any animal to be transported for breeding purposes, there must be a letter from a parish chief where the animal is coming from. For

genuine recommendation, a farmer is by law to have a register of all his animals that is also known to the Parish chief.

A person moving the livestock also has to apply to the district veterinary officer (DVO), for a letter of

animals are headed for). Thereafter, the animals must be examined and treated by a qualified veterinary personnel to ensure that they are healthy.

A health certificate has to be given after

treatment.

After receiving a treatment letter and letter of no objection, the DVO will then issue a movement permit, which includes period of travel, route to be taken, number of animals, purpose of

plate and signatures of issuing officers.

However, when one is moving animals for slaughter, there is no need for a health certificate or a letter of no objection from the DVO as long as the animals have been

day of marketing by a qualified veterinary staff! But the question is: are these animals brought to the abattoirs checked? The answer is 'no' and this is why diseases continue afflicting the livestock sector and of course the