



Animal health experts discuss the future of veterinary service delivery in Kenya's ASAL regions

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The future of veterinary service delivery in Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) was recently discussed by livestock keepers and Kenya's top animal health experts. The workshop, which was held in Nanyuki on 4 and 5 October, 2017, was attended by 63 participants and was organised by the national Department of Veterinary Services and Kenya's Veterinary Board (KVB) in collaboration with the Global Alliance for Veterinary Medicines (GALVmed), and the IGAD Centre for Pastoral Areas and Livestock Development.

In Kenya, ASALs are home to 70% of the country's livestock which, according to Kenya's Department of Veterinary Services, are worth an estimated Ksh280 billion (US \$2.7 billion). But delivery of quality veterinary services and products in the ASALs is hindered by many challenges, including: the large remote areas, wide dispersal of livestock herds, poor logistics i.e. rough terrain and inadequate roads and cold chains, the pastoralists' nomadic lifestyle, and the limited budget allocated to animal health services by national and local governments.

The Nanyuki workshop invited ASAL regional stakeholders to discuss how livestock keepers can access sustainable, affordable and quality veterinary products and services. Traditionally, particularly in the ASAL regions, the gap in veterinary service provision has been filled by locally available non-veterinarians and non para-veterinarians, such as community based animal health workers (CBAHWs), who lack veterinary qualifications but may have received ad hoc training and live with, or in close proximity to, livestock keepers in these regions. As well as receiving advice from CBAHWs, ASAL livestock keepers tend to treat animals themselves, based on local knowledge and what they have observed of animal health workers in the past.

Mark Karbolo, a pastoralist from Olpusimoru region in Narok County, credits CBAHWs with the survival of 30 of his cows and 200 sheep and goats. From his home, the nearest qualified animal health specialists are located 150 km away in Narok town, and rarely attend pastoralist livestock. To request the assistance of such specialists to his remote location would also be costly for Karbolo, hence his reliance on locally available non-veterinarians for guidance. "They live among us and go to the towns to bring us [livestock] medicines. They are also cheaper, so they really help us," says Karbolo.



Public and private sector involvement

According to Dr Ochieng Odede, Technical Director at Sidai Africa – a social enterprise operating in the livestock sector – the private sector is deterred from setting up animal health provision in the ASALs due to subsidies and issuance of free animal health products from, for example, government or animal health NGOs during emergencies. “If I’m running my shop and farmers who I’m serving get everything for free, I cannot sell to anybody,” says Dr Odede. “That creates a hostile business environment for the private sector.” However, whilst working in the ASALs, Sidai Africa have observed that pastoralists are willing to pay for good quality animal health products if they see positive results, according to Dr Odede.



Participants at the Nanyuki workshop proposed that the ASAL county governments need to reach out to qualified animal health professionals and create financial incentives that will encourage them to stay in the area. Since devolvement of the Kenyan Government in 2010, county governments have been able to stipulate the number of veterinary surgeons and veterinary paraprofessionals required to meet their county’s needs. The Kenya Veterinary Association (KVA) are also urging county governors to employ more veterinary surgeons in the sub-counties, and more veterinary paraprofessionals in the wards, according to Dr Samuel Kahariri, KVA Chairman. Animal health training institutes are also being encouraged to allocate a certain quota of students from the ASALs to be trained in animal health, and to increase the number of professional animal health workers in these regions.

Filling the gaps

As a signatory of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), Kenya is bound by the institution’s guidelines, which call for veterinary services of member countries to be provided by professionals. However, there are currently 2,000 veterinary surgeons and about 8,000 veterinary paraprofessionals registered with the KVB. These numbers are insufficient to meet the needs of the country’s livestock keepers, and their reach is limited to the economically lucrative peri-urban regions where most animal health professionals are based.

As part of efforts to enhance better quality training and to address gaps in veterinary service delivery in Kenya, the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) began a yearlong internship program in January 2017, with a target of training 1,000 animal health graduates at various training institutes and universities. The programme, which is funded by the Kenyan Government, has since trained 582 interns. Some have been placed in ASAL regions like Turkana County, and are working under experienced veterinarians to provide animal health services to the communities that live there. “They are exposed to the market, where they deliver services and get to know the challenges,” says Dr Dulu Thomas Daido, Deputy Director of Veterinary Services at the DVS. “CBAHWs were used where there were gaps but with this programme coming in, there will be no gaps, there will be quality health services provided,” Daido continues. Experience in the field gives the graduates credibility, leading to a higher chance of employment following their internship; the programme is also a prerequisite for graduates to be registered with the KVB as veterinary surgeons or veterinary paraprofessionals.

In spite of the current initiatives, it was agreed that the needs of livestock farmers in the ASAL areas are still largely unmet. Due to the uneven distribution of qualified animal health providers, one recommendation from the workshop was to conduct veterinary service delivery mapping in the ASALs, and match this data against the number of livestock in these regions, so that gaps in service provision can be quantified and properly understood before implementing initiatives to fill the gaps. As those gaps are filled, workshop participants also recommended that veterinary services in the ASALs be delivered by qualified personnel, in line with Kenyan laws and OIE guidelines. Dr Lois Muraguri, Director of Policy and External Affairs at GALVmed asserted in her presentation that livestock and their keepers, irrespective of where they are, deserve access to quality veterinary care, and urged participants to be pragmatic in offering short and long-term options to address lack of access to quality livestock services by livestock keepers in the ASAL areas. “A functional and practical approach should enhance rather than curtail access, be affordable, and serve the needs of farmers in the ASAL areas,” said Dr Muraguri.

Written by James Karuga