

## **Pastoralists endure sufferings as evicted from Ihefu Wetland to southern regions.**

Civil-society groups have charged the Tanzanian government with having "grossly violated human rights" during an operation to relocating thousands of families and their livestock from Mbarali in Mbeya to Lindi and Mtwara Regions in southern Tanzania.

The relocation was meant to protect the Ihefu wetlands, which are in the Usangu Nature Reserve, a water catchment for Mtera Dam, which is the country's main hydroelectric power source. However, the evicted families have reportedly lost property and been subjected to harsh deprivations, while thousands of livestock continue to die in the transfer operation as a result of poor logistics and lack of veterinary and other services.

It is feared that tick-borne diseases and tsetse flies endemic to the region will cause further massive livestock deaths in the absence of cattle dips and other infrastructure.

An investigation by three non-governmental organizations - the Land Rights Research & Resources Institute (HAKIARDHI), the Pastoralist Indigenous NGOs Forum (PINGOs) and the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) - found that more than 10,000 cattle died of diseases and fatigue as there are no veterinary facilities like cattle dips in place in Kilwa in Lindi region alone. Emmanuel Mvulla, programme officer at HAKIARDHI, recently said the government failed to provide vaccination against animal diseases such as tick-borne fevers, which are common in the area etc.

Kilwa, for instance, needs seven cattle dips, which cost Tsh27 million (\$25,700) each, but the government has constructed only one which is not functioning as yet. The district also needs 22 water reservoirs, which would cost Tsh 20 million (\$19,000) each, but the district has only two such facilities.

Mr Mvulla said the operation was driven by a mistaken perception of environmental hazards caused by livestock and showed that the government had failed to find a sustainable balance between agricultural activities and livestock keeping. According to a report by the civil society groups, the government erred by relocating livestock keepers to protect the Ihefu wetlands "as they were merely water users downstream in the Ihefu valley."

Mr Mvulla said various studies - including theirs - have established that large and small-scale farmers in Usangu valley were partly responsible for the declining water levels in the area, as they had put up irrigation schemes that at points were not properly administered. Mr Mvulla said they had recorded cases of district authorities forcing herdsmen to sell cattle at prices as low as Tsh40, 000 (\$38), while the actual price for a healthy cow ranges from Tsh120, 000 (\$114) to Tsh300, 000 (\$285).

He alleged that thousands of households had suffered immense loss of property and harassment by corrupt government officials who extorted bribes to let them their livestock. In Mbarali, for instance, herdsmen found with cattle were fined Tsh 10, 000 (\$9) per head of cattle, which was supposed to serve as a vaccination charge, whereas in fact cattle were not vaccinated.

*The cattle owners were also being made to pay costs of transporting their animals to the final destination, and also had to pay village authorities along the way to have cattle offloaded from trucks for a rest. At points of offloading, herdsmen were being forced to pay Tsh300, 000 (\$285) to have their cattle "accepted into the area."*

Anthony Diallo, the Minister for Livestock Development, however, said his ministry was not involved in the exercise of relocating livestock from Mbarali to the south of the country. "The Vice President's Office, which is responsible for the environment, is supposed to oversee the whole operation. They gave the order to evict the pastoralists," he said.

Moses Mashaka, the Mbarali District Administrative Secretary, said he had been instructed by his superiors not to speak to press, while District Commissioner Hawa Ngulume could not be reached for comment as she was said to have been admitted to hospital.

A veterinary officer from the Ministry of Livestock Development, however, said the government operation to relocate livestock to the southern regions seemed to lack expert advice, and so was bound to fail as the lack of infrastructure like cattle dips meant much of the livestock would die of tick-borne diseases, and tsetse fly as the southern regions are particularly infested. He said even as the government turned a deaf ear to warnings of this kind and decided to go ahead with the mass relocation, "The transfers were supposed to move very slowly, to allow what is called weather familiarization," as the cattle move from the cold Mbeya region to the warm Lindi and Mtwara regions.

Ihefu, a catchment basin of Rufiji river in the Mbeya city, is also known as the Usangu wetland. Around 1,000 pastoralists, who collectively own two million heads of cattle, have been asked to leave the basin.

Authorities claim the area is a protected area and a game reserve while also being an important water resource for the Ruaha River, which feeds multiple hydroelectric projects downstream and joins the Rufiji River. Authorities also added that intensive human activity was not allowed in the reserve. Regardless of this, pastoralists had settled in the area with their livestock for some decades..

No alternative settlements had been made for the pastoralists, who claim they had nowhere to go. Authorities say they were free to go anywhere in the region but suggested they cut down their cattle to a manageable quantity.