

## **Cattle Disease, Ethnic Tension Strain Uganda Border Region**

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Migrant cattle herders flee Tanzania, bringing disease and ethnic conflict that could destabilise southern districts.

Ugandan authorities are scrambling to diffuse a volatile situation along the Ugandan-Tanzania border after more than 3000 cattle herders were expelled from Tanzania.

Uganda's top police officer, Inspector General Kale Kayihura, made a recent emergency tour of the cattle-growing area and warned that the expulsion could damage relations between the countries.

This followed a formal protest earlier in the week by Uganda foreign minister Sam Kutesa who complained of Tanzania's treatment of the mostly Ugandan herdsmen.

The traditionally migrant herdsmen and their families, along with an estimated 300,000 Anchole cattle, began arriving in southern Uganda in March after being forced out of Tanzania.

The Tanzanian authorities claim the herdsmen were living in the country illegally, although some had been there nearly ten years, and were threatening government-owned grazing areas.

The grasslands in the cross-border region west of Lake Victoria, which recently has been affected by a drought, have come under pressure from various cattle interests.

The situation has strained relations between the two East African countries and also led to tensions among competing ethnic groups, local farmers and cattle herdsmen.

Residents of the village of Kityaza, the epicentre of the conflict just 20 kilometres from the Tanzanian border, are irate because the cattle have trampled their gardens and livelihood.

"It is not good," said James Mugisha, head of the local defense office. "They disturb our business."

The already high tensions have been heightened because some of the herdsmen are ethnic Tutsis from Rwanda who fled the 1994 genocide for the open grazing lands in Tanzania.

The Tutsi herdsmen met open hostilities from the estimated 100,000 Hutus now living in Uganda's nearby refugee camps. The Hutus fled Rwanda about ten years ago after Tutsis regained control of Rwanda.

Recently, an additional 5,000 Hutus settled in the camps after fleeing Rwanda-backed militias fighting in the Congo. Members of the deadly interhamwe fighters, who carried out the Rwandan genocide, are said to be among them.

Mugisha said the Hutus have planted gardens and integrated into the community, "We have no problem with them. But they're worried about their land."

To make matters worse, the herdsmen's cattle were infected with hoof-and-mouth disease.

"The herdsmen have brought [sick] cattle. They are dying every day. They have brought disease to our cattle," complained village businessman Alfred Bunyenzi.

No one is happy that the Rwandan conflict has come to their village, he said, along with the diseased cattle.

"If they don't separate them soon, they will start fighting," he said of the Tutsis and Hutus. "They can't drink in the same bar."

Security in the community needs to be reinforced, he said.

Not only is the community upset about the ethnic strife and cattle disease, but the cattle are also draining the man-made watering ponds that are critical for the coming dry season.

"We made small dams. Their cows come [and] drink all the water," he complained.

Despite the recent heavy rains, Bunyenzi said it is not much compared to past years, "This is small rain. This is arid land."

The nearest large body of water, Lake Nakivale, is too far for most locals to water their cows each day, he said.

Bunyenzi appealed for vaccines to check the spread of the disease. "We don't have drugs or veterinary offices," he said. "We are very worried about the disease."

The herdsmen, meanwhile, say they have been put in an impossible situation by the Tanzanian government.

Samson Nyabirungu is a Ugandan who took his herd to Tanzania during a drought in Uganda in 1993. He and his family were forced to leave Tanzania and now live in the open with their cows and goats.

He understands the complaints of local farmers whose gardens have been trampled. The herdsmen appease the local farmers by giving them a cow to compensate for the damages, he said.

But their herds are dwindling because of the disease, he said, and the herdsmen can't move due the quarantine placed on the diseased cows.

Without help from the Ugandan government, Nyabirungu feared a bleak future for his family and those of the other herdsmen.

"The immediate need from the government is to provide us with vaccines," he said.

He wants Uganda to designate grazing land where the herdsmen can settle, he said. Because most of the families are living in the open, they also need blankets, cooking pans and sheets of metal roofing.

Without that, he said, "our children will die because they have no food".

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**Location:** Africa

**Focus:** ICC - International Criminal Court

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