

THE TSAVO EAST RHINO DEATHS INQUIRY REPORT BY THE KENYA VETERINARY BOARD

BACKGROUND

The Kenya Veterinary Board appointed a team of experts to inquire into the reported Rhino deaths after a translocation process to the Tsavo East National Park. The Kenya Veterinary Board (KVB) is established under the Veterinary Surgeons and the Veterinary Paraprofessionals (VSVP) Act of 2011 which is an Act of Parliament to make provision for the training, registration and licensing of veterinary surgeons and veterinary paraprofessionals; to provide for matters relating to animal health services and welfare, and for connected purposes.

The National Veterinary Services have a crucial role to play in managing the problems associated with wildlife. However, since wildlife species span a broad taxonomic diversity and are generally free roaming, monitoring wild animal populations poses several challenges. National Veterinary Services, which are responsible for disease prevention and control measures need to evaluate their financial, human and infrastructure needs to meet this challenge. Over 60% of the pathogens responsible of human diseases are of animal origin with the majority of these pathogens coming from wildlife. It is vital to improve our knowledge of the diseases present in wildlife and the ways in which they can be transmitted to and from domestic animals and humans, in order to devise appropriate control measures.

National and Institutional Veterinary Services must invest in the development of science based standards on disease detection, prevention, and control as well as safe trade measures to harmonize the policies related to disease risks at the interfaces between wildlife, domestic animals, and humans. Wildlife, farm animals and even humans fall victim to this increasingly common pattern. The international community as a whole must consider prevention and control of animal diseases in wildlife as crucial components of safeguarding

of global animal and public health as well as biodiversity, while dealing with related agriculture and trade issues.

It is against this background where we consider wildlife health and welfare a key priority that we appointed an inquiry team to generate information that will help address the challenges that the Rhino translocation encountered in addition to better delivery of Wildlife Veterinary Services. The team started their investigations on 3rd August, 2018 and presented a report on 30th August, 2018. The findings of this Inquiry Committee in different phases of the translocation process, the postmortem on the dead rhinos, the PVS analysis, the main findings, discussion and the recommendations made.

The loss of all 11 black rhinos during a translocation to establish a robust rhino population in Tsavo East National Park (TENP) was an unfortunate event that has touched all conservation minded persons, institutions globally as well as the general public in Kenya. This event has taught us that proper planning from early in the project is critical and that small oversights can be disastrous. Organizational leadership is a critical factor in encouraging a culture of open communication and mutual trust among professionals so that sharing of critical information is unimpeded among all peoples involved. Corporate leadership issues should be interrogated by top management and corrective measures taken to restore good organizational order.

FINDINGS

- i. The Inquiry team grilled the all persons of interest including the veterinarians involved in the translocation and analyzed the submissions from the various actors.
- ii. Ten of the translocated black rhinos died under similar circumstances due to salt poisoning arising from the highly saline borehole water and the eleventh died of injuries incurred after it was attacked by a lion.

- iii. Water quality and reliability considerations were not adequately taken into account during the early phases of planning of the Tsavo East National Park (TENP) Sanctuary.
- iv. Water quality assessment came in late in the project and when it was done, the results generated were not shared with KWS management and notably the Veterinary and Capture Services Department involved in planning, the translocation process.
- v. The Environmental Impact Assessment was carried way back in 2011 to inform the translocation exercise in 2018, a very long waiting period bringing into question the validity of the report.
- vi. The black rhino translocation record of KWS over the last 2 decades or so remains comparable and even better than what has been achieved in other countries including those in Southern Africa where translocation is done routinely for commercial purposes.
- vii. Frequent changes in top Management at KWS over the recent past few years preceding the project impacted negatively on decisions and communications leading to departments operating in silos with very severe consequences.
- viii. The Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) assessment tool identified various weaknesses in KWS Veterinary Services Department which include: understaffing of the Veterinary Department, lack of a communication strategy leading to weak communication channels within the institution and limited training opportunities.
- ix. The KWS utilized veterinarians in their employment who are very experienced in the translocation process, clinical work and postmortem. An independent pathologist in good standing with the Board corroborated the post mortem findings.
- i. The inquiry team based on the standards of ethical veterinary practice resolved that the veterinarians who oversaw the translocation exercise acted professionally and therefore were not professionally culpable, a position that the KVB Board adopted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Rhino deaths that occurred due to salt poisoning was attributed to dysfunctional operations between the various departments and functional units of the Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) creating a need for a strong top management.
2. A charge of professional negligence cannot be upheld on veterinarians involved in the translocation of the Rhinos.
3. All departments need to be committed to sharing critical and essential information to all actors singling out the ecological monitoring team's need for improvement.
4. The boreholes with high water salinity should be decommissioned and reliable and safe drinking water sourced for the sanctuary.
5. In future, time bound water quality assessments and related environmental assessments should be undertaken at all newly established sanctuaries and similar sites.
6. The KWS Management should undertake a serious after action review of the entire translocation process to identify the real underlying causes of the oversights and blind spots that led to the failure in the black rhino translocation.
7. Teams undertaking Habitat Suitability Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) of sanctuaries and other similar sites for projects undertaken by KWS should include a representative of the user Veterinary Department with the resultant reports not being used beyond three years after their preparation.
8. The KWS should recruit more wildlife veterinarians and other staff to achieve its optimal staff strength as shown by the PVS tool findings in this inquiry and to ensure that wildlife sanctuaries and conservancies have wildlife veterinarians deployed to specifically serve these areas.
9. The KWS translocation Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Protocols should be reviewed to include a trial-run or pilot phase especially when black rhino and other threatened species are to be translocated.

10. The KWS should invest in wildlife health and welfare in addition to conservation focus including use of modern and more animal welfare friendly equipment, especially for boma construction.
11. The KWS should make efforts to enhance the security of black rhinos in TENP using means that do not over-rely on location of sanctuaries.
12. The practice of all veterinarians in Kenya (local and foreign) in any capacity should have prior approval from the KVB as provided for in the Veterinary Surgeons and Veterinary Paraprofessional Act, 2011 to avoid the omission exhibited by inviting Dr David Zimmerman into Kenya without involvement of the KVB which therefore invalidates any professional opinion attributed to him.
13. Head of Veterinary services should be answerable to the Director General directly so as to ensure independence and responsibility of the decisions made.
14. More continuous professional development programs through training opportunities should be accorded to the officers in the KWS Veterinary Department to ensure that Kenya is globally recognized as a leading Centre in Wildlife Conservation.
15. There is need to establish clear division of labor based on specialties within the KWS Veterinary Department with well-resourced and developed sections along the lines of specialization.
16. There is a need to develop national legislations, guidelines and standards on several wildlife aspects using existing international guidelines (OIE, IUCN, IATA etc) and/or review the existing ones to provide for wildlife health and welfare.
17. The slot of the Country's Director of Veterinary Services should be reinstated in the KWS Board of Trustees.
18. The KWS should have a communication strategy that is well disseminated within the organization and effectively implemented.

END

ANNEX

THE INQUIRY TEAM MEMBERS

Dr. Vijay S. Varma a renowned Veterinary Clinician of about 50 years clinical practice experience and Senior Lecturer, University of Nairobi and served as Chairman of the Inquiry Team.

Professor Mosoti E.G. Mogo an experienced Veterinary Surgeon of 30 years standing in Veterinary Anesthesiology, Professor University of Nairobi and trains wildlife experts in the University .

Dr. Thomas Manyibe Nyariki is a wildlife health expert with 23 years of professional experience in wildlife veterinary practice; wildlife pathology and diagnostics.

Dr. Mary Lucy Jeptepkeny Mongony (Mrs.) – B.A, MA, PhD is a KVB Board Member and experienced in conflict resolution.

Dr. Cathryn W. Wanjohi, OGW is a veterinarian with thirty five (35) years of public working experience and has lately focused on Veterinary Governance and holds a Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Nairobi and a Master of Science degree in Veterinary Microbiology from the University of Surrey, United Kingdom.

Dr. Esther Wangari Ngethe holds a Master of Veterinary Public Health and a Bachelor's degree in Veterinary Medicine from the University of Nairobi with 29 years of public sector experience and serves as a KVB Board member.

Mr. Paul Kariuki Ndung'u is a trainer for Veterinary Paraprofessionals with over 30 years of experience and a member of the KVB Board.