

# ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION IN KENYA, IS IT RIGHT ON TARGET?

**Dr. Josh Odhiambo Chairman – LGS (EA)**

Did you know that Kenya currently undertakes close to 800,000 inseminations annually? However this is not something to celebrate considering that there are over 3 million dairy animals of which over 2.5M are breeding. This means that only one in four breeding animals are inseminated. But why is Kenya still experiencing challenges almost 80 years after introduction? Why is it that A.I adoption is still low at about 25% when nearly all dairy farmers are aware of its value? Where is the disconnection between the Service Providers and the farmers? Are the farmers discouraged in a way or what is going on? It is these specific questions that stakeholders in the dairy industry continue to grapple with on a regular basis that led to the formation of Livestock Genetics Society of East Africa.

To try and fully understand the factors at play it is best to start with the history of AI in Kenya. Artificial Insemination service provision in Kenya started in 1935 when it was introduced as a tool for combating infectious breeding diseases and also as a way to maximize on use of best genetics. At the time, it was concentrated on large-scale dairy farms and commercial ranches and was organized by breed associations. Exotic cattle in Kenya were first introduced in the early 20th Century with Friesian breed being the first in 1908 followed by a large consignment of pedigree Friesian and Ayrshire from South Africa in 1920. Within the same decade breeds such as Jersey and Guernsey being brought in from Europe. The Sahiwal breed was brought in from India and Pakistan in the year 1939 and much later the other breeds. In the year 1946, Central Artificial Insemination Station was established to centralize semen production and run A.I services countrywide under the Director of Veterinary Services (DVS). The year 1965 saw the Government establish the Kenya National Artificial Insemination Services (KNAIS) with the desire to serve more smallholder farmers whose numbers were on the increase soon after independence. With support from the Government by way of subsidy and funding from development partners at the time the number of inseminations rose gradually over the years. A peak of 548,000 recorded doses was reached in 1979. This trend however started to face challenges and from 1983 there was tremendous decline in KNAIS activity due to inability to sustain the highly subsidized A.I service and unfavorable economic conditions prevailing then. As a result of Policy change contained in Sessional Paper Number 1 of 1986 on Economic Management for Renewed Growth cost sharing of A.I services was introduced the same year. This resulted in privatization of A.I service in 1991 with Dairy Co-operative Societies, A.I self help groups, Private Veterinarians and Private Inseminators providing the service. Subsequently the Government introduced privatization of delivery of A.I Services in 1991 because of increasing financial requirements and in line of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) which was also being introduced at the time. The recorded inseminations dropped to about 50,000 doses around 1995 following the privatization of the service. This has however picked up and we believe will continue to rise and be sustainable. But what is really the situation today as far as service delivery is concerned? Can the situation really be

improved? Two cases have been illustrated below to help shed light on the possibilities in the service delivery. The cases of Mr. Njoroge Kimani a Service provider at Kinangop and that of Mrs. Josephine Wafula a farmer in Webuye to serve as typical cases.

Mr. Njoroge started offering the services in the year 2005. He started with the support of family members who contributed towards his purchase of the AI kit soon after completing the AI course at AHITI Kabete. Although he had previously taken an Animal Health Course, he felt his chances of success with the farmers would be better with his ability to offer Ai services. With no means of transport at the time Njoroge had to do with whatever means was available to him to reach farmers.

Many a times he would walk, some days use Matatu, and others hire a motorbike. Soon after he got a bicycle to improve his mobility but that proved a challenge, as he could not cover much distance. He resolved to get a motor bike. He approached a number of institutions for support without much success. He must have a good relationship with the bank before he could be allowed to borrow. A period of at least six months was required by most banks at the time. His lucky break came in the form of support from a Microfinance institution that his mother was a member of. Through the Chama, the institution was willing to give a loan of Ksh.

100,000/= with the group being a guarantor for the loan. With the loan, Njoroge upped his plan to reach out to farmers in far placed areas which were previously left out of his loop. He marketed himself at every opportunity in field days, churches, cooperative meetings, and local barazas he could attend. He also printed business cards which he gave out at every opportunity. But in addition he felt that word of mouth will be his best marketing strategy. He resolved to use every opportunity to serve animals to offer exceptional service in such a way that the farmer will be compelled to offer him another opportunity whenever the service opportunity arose and tell others about him. To differentiate himself as far as his ability to offer advice Njoroge resolved to be continuously seeking new information through internet, shows, field days, newspapers and magazines, radio and TV.

He also made sure he assisted farmers to prepare animals well. Whereas many Service Providers were quick to serve the farms and dash off to the next case, Njoroge took time to offer free advice on whatever challenges he saw on the farm. He took keen interest that the farmers were feeding all the animals adequately by supplying enough fodder and feed. Where there was for example shortfall in supply Mr. Njoroge sought to link the farmers with suppliers of quality inputs and occasionally would even bring them personally to the farmer. Those short on fodder he went out of his way to assist them grow adequate quantities and of diverse nutritional value.

As was expected of him Njoroge made sure that he assisted each farmer to select a good bull for the animals being served. To bring out the best results the bulls he chose corrected the bad traits in the animals he was serving, the selection in most cases being done long before the day of service. This he did using the catalogues being offered by the semen distributors. Eventually this paid off as more farmers got to seek the

services of Mr. Njoroge, many being referrals by other farmers who were happy with the services that he was offering. At the moment Njoroge serves over 140 cases monthly, up from the 10 cases he served per month when he was starting. In fact he is planning to employ an assistant to help him with the increasing number of cases. He is currently well sought after as a speaker in farmer seminars and field days. He also serves as the Chairman of the Association formed by A.I Service Providers to champion their interests which include finance, insurance, sourcing of semen and equipment, licensing and training. He is also rated the best Service Provider in his county for consistency in terms of service delivery and reporting.

The case of Mrs. Josephine Wafula serves to illustrate a success case of a farmer who is benefiting from AI service. Josephine started dairy as a way to supplement her income while she was working with Pan Paper Mills as an accountant. Having seen the kind of prices on offer at Webuye town at the time, she decided she wanted to be one of the suppliers of milk in the town. To begin with, Josephine chose to do a business plan for her business. She was familiar with business plans from her training and she decided if she was going to succeed she needed to get her planning right. The business plan also gave her the best herd size to have if she was to adequately manage and provide for the dairy animals. On the two-acre piece of land she had acquired earlier she built a Zero Grazing Unit, the plans having been provided by the area District Livestock Production Officer. To prepare for the animals she decided to plant a variety of fodder on her piece of land and also on another additional 3-acre piece of land she hired from a neighbor. Whereas most farmers would have been content with Napier, Josephine chose to plant Desmodium, Lucerne, edible cannas, Columbus grass, and Rhodes grass all at the advice of the DLPO. She also planted some maize for silage. She was informed that the greater variety of fodder will serve to ensure that quality fodder will be available to her animals throughout the year.

To get the best animals, Josephine was advised to buy animals from the best breeders of dairy animals. She sought finances from her SACCO and armed with 300,000/= she went searching for animals in Nakuru. Although most of the breeders had sold out their stock at the time, Technology Farm were willing to offer her three animals but she had to wait for a month for her chance to buy the animals. She used the time to complete the Zero grazing unit and also source for the right person to look after animals when they arrived. Considering the high cost of the investment, Josephine chose to look for a trained person to look after the animals. She sought the services of the same livestock officer who advised on the need to interview a number of potential employees for the job. A good number of persons had trained in livestock related courses and there was need to pick out the best within Webuye for the work. With the help of other officers from the District Livestock Office, Josephine was assisted to interview the employees. One of them Mr. Simuyu, with reasonable training and experience in Animal Health was picked up for the job. However so as to be sure of the performance Josephine chose to send Mr. Simuyu for further exposure at ADC Namandala in Kitale for a week. Simuyu was also given a chance to visit Technology Farm Nakuru where the animals were being sourced from. It was also agreed that the District Livestock Production Officer would personally supervise the employee for two months to

ensure that he performed as expected. So as not to leave anything to chance, Josephine also took personal initiative to train herself on matters relating to dairy production. She sought and bought the best books on the subject, while also researching on the same over the internet. She particularly took keen interest in animal breeding. If she was going to succeed in dairy business, she needed to be sure that her future calves were better off than the parents, and this was not going to be possible if all was left to chance. The high cost of animals she was buying also got her thinking. If she was to make money in the future, the possibility of her becoming a breeder by her own right had to be open. The business plan she had drawn also indicated that sale of breeding animals will be core to her success. But core to her success was the selection of a good AI Service Provider to offer the service.

She sought the indulgence of the District Veterinary Officer, who she was told were responsible for their licensing and monitoring of performance. A number of providers were available but one particular one was selected for her based on performance and service delivery.

In the period following the delivery of animals and shortly after calving Josephine was able to work with the AI Service Provider and all the other team members to ensure that her breeding was successful in terms of the right bull and the right preparation.

What do the two cases seek to illustrate? Whereas AI service is a common day activity at the farm, success of the service is not. Meticulous preparation is required by both the AI provider and the farmer if successful inseminations are to be realized. Gone are the days where AI was being used to get animals in-calf only, it is now an opportunity to see to it that successful breeding gets done with careful bull selection for each animal being served. Whereas the two cases show successful cases, the reality on many situations is far from rosy.

Many farmers still do not access AI service due to the high failure rates they have experienced. Other than the high prices which hold them back, others cannot get animals in good condition necessary to get them come on heat. So as not to leave anything to chance, players in the industry made up of the local producer of semen Kenya Animals Genetics Resource Centre (KAGRC) Importers of semen, the DVS Office, the DLP Office, Distributors and A.I Service Providers have gotten together to help streamline the delivery of A.I services. In line with other industries, the service providers would like to see self regulation become a reality in the industry. Livestock Genetics Society, the association bringing together all the stakeholders was formed to address some of these challenges being faced. If growth in the sector has to be achieved, then it would have the responsibility of each player to see to it that mechanisms are in place to remove the bottle necks that are currently holding back the growth of this important industry. Core to planning and addressing the challenges is the ability of the industry to record and report all the AI cases nationally. Education of all stakeholders and especially farmers was going to be critical. This is the route the Livestock Genetics Society has taken to shape the industry and bring the sector to where it should be. Mainstreaming of professional ethics, continuous accurate record keeping and reporting, ensuring that the cold chain is maintained, effective farmer education and conducting all aspects of Artificial Insemination in a proper business manner will ensure profitability and sustainability for all parties concerned. Then we will be right on Target.