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Why Somalia needs stronger control of veterinary drugs and better enforcement of animal-health laws ?

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Abstract

Somalia’s livestock sector is central to livelihoods, export earnings, and food security, yet weak control of veterinary drugs and limited enforcement of animal-health laws continue to undermine animal health, trade credibility, and public safety. Inappropriate access to veterinary medicines, especially antimicrobials, increases the risk of treatment failure, residues in animal products, and antimicrobial resistance. Although Somalia has legal and policy frameworks for animal health, implementation remains constrained by fragmented governance, limited inspection capacity, inadequate laboratory support, and weak oversight of drug importation, distribution, and use. These gaps are compounded by informal drug markets, insufficient veterinary supervision, and the practical pressures faced by pastoral communities seeking rapid treatment for sick animals. Strengthening regulation is therefore not only a technical veterinary issue but also a One Health priority with implications for livestock productivity, export performance, and human health. This letter argues that Somalia should finalize and enforce veterinary drug control measures, license and monitor all actors in the drug supply chain, restrict high-risk antimicrobials to prescription use, and invest in surveillance, training, and compliance systems. Without stronger enforcement, Somalia risks continued economic losses and growing health threats; with effective governance, it can better protect its livestock economy and public health.

Full Text

Somalia urgently needs stronger control of veterinary drugs and firmer enforcement of animal-health laws because weak regulation now threatens livestock productivity, export credibility, and public health. The country has already recognized these gaps in policy and strategy, but implementation remains uneven, leaving a major source of national income exposed to preventable disease, poor drug quality, and antimicrobial resistance (*Somalia National Action Plan (NAP) on Combating Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) | UNEP Law and Environment Assistance Platform*, n.d.)

Somalia’s livestock sector is not a marginal part of the economy: the national livestock strategy describes it as the backbone of livelihoods, food security, and export earnings, while also warning that weak animal-health systems and repeated export interruptions have constrained growth. The same strategy links poor animal health governance to import bans and notes that Somalia still needs reliable health certification, stronger veterinary oversight, and better enforcement of existing laws. This is highly relevant today because the Ministry of Livestock, Forestry and Range reports that its animal-health and public veterinary services are responsible for disease surveillance, licensing, certification, public veterinary health, and regulatory compliance, yet these functions require operational capacity and enforcement power to be effective. In 2025, the ministry and partners validated a draft veterinary drug control policy and law, underscoring that Somalia itself now sees drug regulation as a pending priority rather than a solved problem(*Jamhuuriyadda Federaalka Soomaaliya Wasaaradda Xanaanada Xoolaha, Dhirta & Daaqa Terms of Reference for The Consultancy Service to Develop Veterinary Drugs Control Policy*, n.d.)

The core problem is not merely the presence of veterinary drugs, but the absence of a consistently enforced regulatory chain around importation, distribution, prescription, sale, and use. Somalia's Veterinary Law Code establishes a competent veterinary authority and includes measures for animal disease control, including quarantine, yet the strategy document still emphasizes that a more comprehensive framework and effective institutional arrangements are needed for implementation and enforcement. That gap matters because poorly controlled access to antimicrobials in animals increases the risk of misuse, under-dosing, counterfeit products, and selection pressure for antimicrobial resistance. Regional evidence from the Horn of Africa shows similar problems where weak supervision, thin staffing, and weak linkage between private providers and regulators allow illegal drug markets to persist. Global evidence also shows that access to veterinary medicines without strong stewardship and regulation tends to produce poor treatment outcomes, drug residues, and resistance risks that spread across animal, human, and environmental health systems(Jaime et al., 2022)

Several factors drive the weakness. First, Somalia's livestock services have long depended on a fragmented mix of public offices, private veterinarians, paraprofessionals, community-based animal health workers, and informal drug sellers, often with blurred roles and weak supervision. Second, federalism has complicated governance, because regulatory responsibilities are distributed across federal and state institutions that do not always share the same capacity or enforcement reach. Third, insecurity, limited staffing, and scarce laboratory and inspection capacity reduce the ability of authorities to monitor imports, verify product quality, or investigate violations. Fourth, the pressure to keep animals alive during drought, long-distance trekking, and market movement encourages ad hoc drug use, sometimes outside formal veterinary advice, which is understandable but risky. In practice, this creates a market environment in which weakly regulated medicines can substitute for proper diagnosis, vaccination, quarantine, and husbandry(Hassan et al., 2024)

The consequences are broad. For livestock keepers, inappropriate drug use can mean treatment failure, higher costs, and preventable losses. For traders and exporters, weak control undermines the credibility of Somalia's animal-health certification and can contribute to market disruptions or import restrictions. For consumers, it raises concerns about residues in meat and milk and about zoonotic and food-safety risks. For the health system, it contributes to the wider AMR burden that Somalia has already identified in its national AMR action planning. The issue is therefore not only veterinary; it is a One Health problem with direct implications for trade, livelihoods, and public safety(Hassan et al., 2024).

Comparative experience from other livestock-dependent countries offers a clear lesson: drug control works better when veterinary services combine licensing, traceability, inspection, prescription rules, and active field enforcement. Somalia's own livestock strategy points in this direction by recommending monitoring of proper drug quality and use, better veterinary and extension services, and stronger government oversight of certification and compliance. The 2025 draft policy process also suggests that Somalia is moving toward prescription-only antibiotic use, traceability systems, and a dedicated regulatory unit, which are exactly the types of tools used in better-functioning systems. However, policy

design alone will not solve the problem unless it is paired with routine inspection, sanctions for violations, and reliable reporting from the field (Masiga Julius Kajume Chris Daborn Nairobi, 2006)

Priority action should begin with finalizing and enacting the veterinary drug control law and giving the competent authority a clear mandate, budget, and enforcement powers. Somalia should license importers, wholesalers, pharmacies, and animal-health providers, while making prescription-only access mandatory for critical antimicrobials and other high-risk products. The state should also build a simple national traceability system for veterinary medicines, linked to batch registration, customs control, and field inspection. In parallel, authorities should strengthen laboratory support, pharmacovigilance, and residue monitoring so that substandard or falsified products can be detected early. Finally, enforcement must reach the district level: veterinary officers, customs officials, and law-enforcement bodies should coordinate inspections, while professional associations and community animal health workers receive refresher training on prudent drug use and reporting obligations.(Masiga Julius Kajume Chris Daborn Nairobi, 2006)

Somalia cannot protect its livestock economy with laws that exist only on paper. Stronger control of veterinary drugs, backed by credible enforcement of animal-health laws, is essential to safeguard animal health, preserve export markets, and reduce antimicrobial resistance before the costs become even harder to reverse(*Jamhuuriyadda Federaalka Soomaaliya Wasaaradda Xanaanada Xoolaha, Dhirta & Daaqa Terms of Reference for The Consultancy Service to Develop Veterinary Drugs Control Policy*, n.d.)

Declarations

Ethical Approval

This study did not involve any human or animal subjects, and thus, did not require review by an Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Author Contributions Statement

M.A.H. conceived the study, conducted the literature review, analyzed the evidence, and drafted the manuscript. A.M.F. contributed to the study design, data interpretation, and critical revision. S.N.M. assisted with literature collection, reference management, and manuscript editing. S.M.A. contributed to data interpretation, language editing, and manuscript review. A.T.T. supervised the study, provided methodological guidance, and critically reviewed the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

None

Clinical Trial Number

Not applicable.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable. This study did not involve human participants, human data, human tissue, or animals; therefore, ethics approval and informed consent were not required.

Consent to Publish

Not applicable.

Author Contribution

M.A.H. conceived the study, conducted the literature review, analyzed the evidence, and drafted the manuscript. A.M.F. contributed to the study design, data interpretation, and critical revision. S.N.M. assisted with literature collection, reference management, and manuscript editing. S.M.A. contributed to data interpretation, language editing, and manuscript review. A.T.T. supervised the study, provided methodological guidance, and critically reviewed the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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