

OFFICIAL REMANDED OVER 500,000 ARV DOSES THEFT

By Abdulkarim Ssengendo

The Isingiro Chief Magistrates' Court has remanded a senior health official over the alleged theft of government drugs, including more than 500,000 doses of antiretrovirals (ARVs).

John Baptist Muzahura, 47, a senior clinical officer at Nyamuyanja Health Centre IV, was charged with two counts of theft of government drugs and possession of government stores.

Muzahura pleaded not guilty when he appeared before Isingiro Chief Magistrate

Patrick Bamuhiga. The court denied him bail and remanded him until next Tuesday (December 30), when the case will come up for hearing, including the hearing of his bail application.

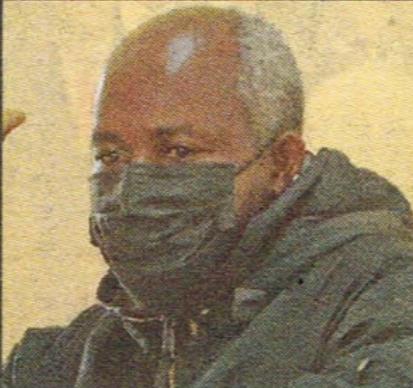
The court heard that on November 15, Muzahura, a resident of Nyamitanga in Mbarara city, allegedly stole boxes of assorted medicines from Nyamuyanja Health Centre IV in Isingiro district. Eighteen boxes of the stolen drugs were found at his home.

The National Drug Authority (NDA) revealed

BETWEEN THE LINES

Prosecutors allege that Muzahura stole the drugs with an accomplice, Bridget Balhubasa, a health information assistant and stores in-charge at the same facility.

that Muzahura was arrested during a special operation conducted on December 15, after he had gone into hiding. Investigators allegedly found over 500,000 doses of ARVs at his Nyamitanga home.



Denied bail: Muzahura

The operation also led to the recovery of 2,680 doses of antimalarial drugs, 11,500 malaria testing kits and other assorted medicines.

All packages bore the inscription: "Government of Uganda for public use only not for sale."

Prosecutors allege that Muzahura stole the drugs with an accomplice, Bridget Balhubasa, a health information assistant who is also in charge of stores at the same facility.

Balhubasa was arrested on December 2, in Kasese district and arraigned before the Isingiro Chief Magistrates' Court. She pleaded guilty to the charges of theft of government drugs. On December 11,

Balhubasa was sentenced to three years in prison.

NDA public relations manager Abiaz Rwanwiri said Muzahura was arrested after investigators tracked him while he was allegedly trying to sell government drugs.

The Isingiro district health officer, Dr Edson Tumusherure, described the incident as the first of its kind in the district and said it should serve as a warning to others.

"I thank the whistleblower who informed the NDA," Tumusherure said.