

The EAC is unstoppable

By **HON NUWE AMANYA MUSHEGA**

FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL, EAC (2001-2008)



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holds Law Degrees from the University of Dar es Salaam and Queen's University in Ontario, Canada. He was accepted and studying for his Doctorate at the London School of Economics, before abandoning to take part in the National Resistance Movement in his native Uganda in the mid-80s. Following normalisation in Uganda he had a distinguished career in government serving in the ministerial roles of Defence, Local Government, Education and Public Service between 1986-2001. He served as Secretary General of the EAC from 2001-06.

Interaction between the people of Eastern Africa existed long before the arrival of the European colonial powers in the 19th century. It was formalised and strengthened during the colonial period, and was then given further a shot in the arm following the independence of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, when the three countries formed the East African Community (EAC) in 1967. Interaction between the three continues, with joint action in such key areas as infrastructure and trade; initiatives that in recent years have increasingly been shared with the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia, Southern Sudan, eastern Congo, and others.

Although the EAC is formally an arrangement between the five countries of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, the bigger reality as far as investors in the region are concerned, is that the EAC is the gateway to a vast market that covers eastern Congo, southern Sudan, southern Ethiopia and beyond.

The importance of the EAC is largely explained by geographic factors, principally access to the sea. For example, it is very difficult to transport goods from Matadi on the Atlantic Ocean to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is much easier to through the EAC by using the Indian Ocean ports of Mombasa in Kenya, or Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania. The same applies to southern Sudan and the eastern part of Zambia.



Integration
can raise living
standards

The size of the EAC market is about 130 million people, but the real number of people available to the investor, whether local or foreign is well above 150 million people. At the same time, this is an area with abundant resources, a variety of climates, from warm coastal to temperate, and high altitude. The EAC has a long coastline, fresh water that can feed agriculture, along with rivers of all sizes that can be used for leisure resorts to develop a bigger tourism industry.

The main purpose of regional integration is to generate wealth, thus raising living standards and the quality of life of the region's people by creating a sizeable market that will attract and retain sustainable levels of domestic and foreign investment. These goals are being further enhanced by cooperation in the areas of defence and security that will ensure a peaceful and secure environment, macro-economic stability, thus boosting trade in professional services such as medicine, engineering, accounting, law, education, cooperation in international affairs, and being able to negotiate as a single bloc with potential investors, while at the same time developing communications, transport, energy, and other infrastructure.

A functioning regional assembly and an East African Court of Justice has already been set up, and is manned by the best brains in the region. There is also effective synergy between political forces, private sector, bureaucrats, and civil society to further enhance the integration process.

A working customs union is in place and a common market to enhance the free movement of people, goods, capital, services and information are on course. History has shown us that small states' boundaries are a fetter to their populations, and that they limit prosperity and trade.

The EAC is a large economic bloc with a large range of resources, human and natural, and will unlock the region's potential to create and sustain wealth, raise the quality of life, and boost the pride, self confidence, respect, and dignity of our people. We invite investors to be part of this process. For Africa to prosper we need more blocs like the EAC, that are able to focus on real issues, and produce an educated, skilled, proud and hard-working population for their own good and that of future generations. The real world shows no mercy for small, weak, and unorganised states. The EAC is on course and unstoppable. It may be delayed but not derailed. It is already making a difference.