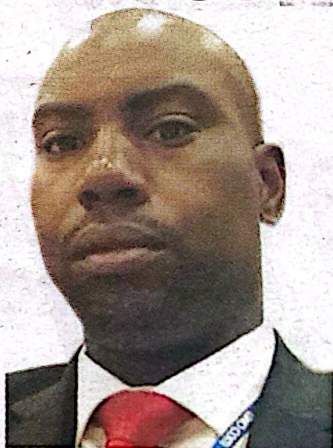


Smugglers won't win – Kateshumbwa



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HIS VIEW

DICKSONS KATESHUMBWA, URA COMMISSIONER FOR CUSTOMS

Raging war on smuggling. Kateshumbwa, who took office effective July 1, 2015 replacing Richard Kamajugo, said the Authority is doing everything possible to eliminate smuggling in Uganda.

Smuggling involves importing or exporting goods by wrong or unlawful means with the objective of evading taxes.

Uganda Wildlife Authority law enforcement officers collect ivory impounded at the Entebbe International Airport recently. Aviation police Commandant Lodovick Awita, said the ivory was worth Shs1.1 billion. He also noted that the smugglers also had five boxes containing pangolin scales worth Shs2 billion. PHOTO BY MICHAEL KAKUMIRIZI

Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) has surpassed its half year revenue collection targets by Shs47 billion. Taxes collected from customs (International trade taxes) contributed massively towards that feat after performing above target. *Daily Monitor's Ismail Musa Ladu* caught up with the URA commissioner for customs, Dicksons Kateshumbwa, and asked him how he has managed to turn things around following his appointment.

How would you sum up your time as commissioner customs since you took office?

Fairly ok. The target for customs and the whole institution is high. I did not have much time to settle down but to hit the ground running. My first task was to enhance compliance. My emphasis was on ensuring we get it right within the organisation—providing timely services. It was all about quickening clearance and facilitating business.

How did you do that?

I made minimum changes. Kampala management, for example, was overseeing more than 120 warehouses. I increased supervision and made it as close as possible. We have increased working hours for some of our units till late in the night. We have strengthened risk management division by establishing a centre at customs to manage risk. We can now see all incoming cargo in real time and we have personnel ensuring that goods are being declared correctly and quickly cleared.

What achievements have you registered so far?

We have decongested Malaba border point. You will never find “kilometres of trucks” - so many vehicles on our side of the border waiting to be cleared as it used to be. Development at Busia border is impressive and so is Mirama hill -Ugandan- Rwandan border.

What challenges are you facing?

We have bits of issues with our network stability. However, we are always upgrading it and looking at making it stable. Currently, stability has significantly improved, considering that it was worse. Actually internet infrastructure remains the biggest challenge, and that is something that is a little bit beyond our control. The capacity and connectivity issues are handled by a third party and this is something we are dealing with.

Smuggling is the other problem. This is crucial because its form keeps changing. Smuggling is rampant because of different domestic rate (taxes) applied in the region. Because of that people keep looking for where the advantage is. For example, most smuggled mobile phones are from Rwanda because it does not charge taxes on them.

We shall exchange information with neighbouring partner states and enhance tracking of cargo. Central in our plan is tax education.

Smuggling in all forms including; mis-declaration, undervaluation, outright smuggling and concealment is not only morally wrong but also criminal. But we are doing all we can to deal with all forms of smuggling. We are not about to let smugglers win this fight.

Each station will be held responsible for any unnecessary delay. We are also directly dealing with individuals who, for any reason, delay clearance of goods.

Anything worth talking about since you assumed office as commissioner customs?

International trade taxes performed above target. We had a target of Shs2.3 trillion and we collected Shs2.4 trillion. This is good because we have been experiencing a bit of inconsistency here over the years. Despite decline in volumes of goods, we surpassed our targets. We believe we can do better than this.

Single custom territory (an initiative meant to ease clearance and collection of revenue) continues to register successes. We have deployed staff in all the key areas.

What are your plans going forward?

We are looking at bringing clearance time further down. Now clearance between Mombasa and Kampala is slightly under five days. We shall also strength intelligence, do more in risk management and compliance.

What demands does the World Trade Organisation (WTO) place on the custom department following the meeting held in December last year in Nairobi?

Customs are supposed to reconstitute some of its operations. For example integrating its system with the regional countries, something we are already doing, sharing information and jointly tracking goods on transit, among other things. If we do all this, the country's ranking in the doing business report will improve and in turn make us an attractive destination for investment.

It is through trade and public involvement that we can develop our country. Paying taxes will help us develop our together.