

CEDP: Business Registration and Licensing Reforms



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Business registration now a hustle-free service



URSB staff attending to clients at the World Bank Open Day, in May 2017.

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Business registration in Uganda has until recently been a nightmare for many business owners and investors. The process was characterized by slow, manual and bureaucratic procedures.

All the files were manually handled and kept together. This means that if you wanted your file retrieved it could take a whole week or more. In addition, registration was only done at the headquarters of the Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB) Kampala.

"The business registration process in the past got to a point where it was not only tedious but also frustrating," says Mr Vincent Katutsi, the director business registration at URSB.

"We had a whole floor full of files which were old and dusty. Several were tattered due to poor storage," he adds. This was in addition to complaints of damaged and misplaced documents, which left many entrepreneurs and investors frustrated.

The registration chaos was beginning to tarnish the image of URSB, and importantly, impact on the ease of doing business in the country.

According to the Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU), the tedious process of business registration contributed to rendering Uganda unattractive for business.

The PSFU Executive Director, Mr Gideon Bada-gawa, says: "Disorganization at URSB that made registration difficult and expensive directly affected the private sector's ability to create jobs, generate revenue to the government and drive the project."



File search prior to digitization.



File Census and re-organization supported under the project.

in business."

He adds: "To attract funding from a financial institution, your registration papers will be required and in order to start operation, you must have a license. So, delay in any of these directly affects not only the time lines but also the bottom lines."

However, the cries of the private sector, the country's biggest employers, were answered, thanks to the Competitiveness and Enterprise Development Project (CEDP), a five-year government of Uganda, World Bank funded project to carry out reforms in business registration and licensing processes at URSB.

CEDP is being coordinated by the Private Sector Foundation Uganda and implemented by seven government agencies, including Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, Ministry of Tourism, Wild Life and Antiquities, Uganda Tourism Board, Uganda Wildlife Authority, Uganda Registration Service Bureau, the Uganda Hotel Tourism and Training Institute and the Private Sector Foundation.

Already, the project's impact is being felt especially in the private sector. Days when mere registration of a business would take you weeks or months are in the past.

In fact, registration of a business now takes a day or hours depending on its nature. It is also hoped that with the ease of registration and streamlined processes at URSB, the huge informal sector will see no reason why they should not register their businesses and be able to access the wider global and regional markets.

With an efficient registration and licensing bureau, formalization of businesses is easier, access to finance more predictable and those who

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Takes four (4) hours to register a business as opposed to 30 days in 2012.
- Takes a click of a computer today to view a file, compared to 3 days of file retrieval in 2012.
- Name Search can be conducted online through <http://brs.ursb.go.ug/brs/prof/bnf/searchname>
- The number of businesses registered has increased from 201,613 in 2010 to about 505,600 in June 2017
- Non-tax revenue collected by URSB has increased from UGX5.88Bn in 2010 to UGX32.5Bn in 2016/17
- Business Registration records have been digitized Customer service center on 0417338100 and Toll Free 0800 100 006 has been established to provide real time feedback to clients.
- URSB ICT infrastructure overhauled and linked to regional offices.

have an eye for the export market can easily do so once their businesses are registered and licensed.

Already, the number of days to register a business has reduced from 33 days to under four hours, with Mr Katutsi believing that it is only a matter of time before the whole exercise is conducted in a matter of minutes.

Mr Jeremiah Ssenkibirwa, who owns Black Mode Fashion House, a company in Kampala, says he registered his company within 4 hours. He commends the services offered by URSB staff, saying they are quick and have eliminated the need for middle men.

As a result, the number of businesses and companies registered has increased from 201,613 in 2010 to about 505,600 as of June 2017.

Efficiency registered in the two and half years of the project has also seen the monthly Non-Tax Revenue collected by URSB increase from UGX 5.8bn in 2010 to more UGX32.5bn in 2016/17.

Business registration records have so far been digitized under the electronic document system electronic document system.

Ms Priscilla Nalwoga, a presenter at Power FM, who was found certifying her business registration documents at URSB offices in Kampala, says the services are quick and efficient, right from start to finish.

"I have found their services to be efficient, quick and to the dot. The last time I came to certify documents here, it took me 24 hours - but this has changed. I love the customer care right from the person who gives out the coupons to the last person, the banker. It is a very good service for Ugandans," says Nalwoga.

According to URSB Post Office branch Registrar Juliet Scovia Apolot, operations at the Bureau have all been simplified even for them who operate from branches and regional offices.

"A lot has changed here. We have got good feedback from the public and that makes us believe that we are on the right track," she says.

With the progress attained so far, Ugandans can now open up businesses, with the knowledge of who their competitors are, the number of business in that particular sector and location among other interesting details, a business needs to know.