**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

Lawyer and Kira MP-elect
am glad that the Constitutional Court h
democratic institution... we don't argue

EDITORIAL

# Time to open up trade in East Africa

After the reestablishment of the East African Community and signing of the treaty in 1999, the people of the region were once more excited that a moral formal flow of goods and services among the regional bloc members will start.

But despite several protocols and commitments, the various non-tariff barriers (NTBs) have rendered the community powerless. However, a new commitment to break off all barriers to trade between Uganda and Tanzania has been signed and given a deadline. With the East African Community setting a firm deadline of June 30, 2026 for the removal of all non-tariff barriers (NTBs), Uganda and Tanzania face a defining test.

For far too long, trade between the two neighbours has been constrained by bureaucracy, regulatory friction, and administrative bottlenecks that undermine the very spirit of regional integration. The latest bilateral engagements between Kampala and Dar es Salaam signal renewed determination.

**The issue:** Trade

**Our view:** The June deadline should, therefore, be treated as another diplomatic milestone and the success of Uganda-Tanzania trade relations will not be measured by talks and negotiations...

The trade between Uganda and Tanzania is deeply imbalanced. In 2025 alone, Tanzania exported goods worth about Shs10 trillion to Uganda, while Uganda managed just Shs1.1 trillion in exports to Tanzania.

Such an imbalance is a reflection of structural inefficiencies and obstacles that disproportionately affect Ugandan exporters. Disputes over import charges on products like sugar, milk, steel, and electric poles, alongside delays at border points and inconsistent regulatory requirements, continue to choke what should be a thriving two-way trade relationship.

Non-tariff barriers are less visible, often arbitrary, and harder to predict. For traders, especially small and medium enterprises, they translate into higher costs, longer delays, and lost opportunities. That explains why informal trade thrives much more than formal trade, eroding revenues for both countries.

The irony is that both Uganda and Tanzania are key pillars of the East African Community, a bloc founded on the principles of free movement of goods, services, labour, and capital. Yet, the persistence of NTBs undermines these very foundations.

Good enough, recent bilateral talks have acknowledged this reality, with both countries committing to eliminate all outstanding barriers.

Removing NTBs is about unlocking shared prosperity. A smoother flow of goods would lower costs, boost competitiveness, and expand markets for producers on both sides. It would also complement ongoing infrastructure investments—from transport corridors to energy projects—that are designed to deepen economic ties. More importantly, it would empower the ordinary trader: the farmer exporting maize, the manufacturer selling steel products, the small business moving goods across the Mutukula border. These are the real engines of regional trade, and they stand to benefit most from a barrier-free environment.

The June deadline should, therefore, be treated as another diplomatic milestone and the success of Uganda-Tanzania trade relations will not be measured by talks and negotiations, but by trucks that move faster, goods that cross borders seamlessly, and businesses that are growing. Once that has been achieved, the rest of the regional members should pick a leaf and open up their markets for seamless trade.

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