EALA MPS TO BE PAID BY RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES

By Nelson Kiva

The East African Community (EAC) heads of state have endorsed a raft of new tough reforms, including a decision that members of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) will be paid by their respective national assemblies.

The leaders agreed with the EAC Council of Ministers' position that having legislators paid by their respective countries, rather than from the central EAC budget, will reduce the financial burden on the regional bloc.

The decision was reached during the 25th Ordinary EAC Heads of State Summit held in Arusha, Tanzania on Saturday.

The summit was presided over by President Yoweri Museveni, who assumed the EAC chairpersonship from his Kenyan counterpart, William Ruto. The summit was under the theme; *Deepening Integration for Improved Livelihoods of East Africa Community Citizens.*

The implementation of the decision will be effective December 2027, after the end of the tenure of the current assembly.



President Ruto (right), the outgoing EAC chairperson hands over instruments of power to President Museveni, the new EAC chairperson, during the 25th Ordinary EAC Heads of State Summit in Arusha, Tanzania on Saturday

TRADE STRIDES

In his progress report, president Ruto indicated that the community had registered positive growth in trade and investment, with the value of trade within the region rising by nearly 22% from $33b in 2024 to $40.3b in 2025.

Another key highlight of the meeting was the launch of the East African Customs Bond under the Single Customs Territory. The Customs Bond was rolled out by partner states in January 2025 after a successful pilot in Uganda.

According to Ruto, the trade facilitation instrument will enhance customs security and ensure the payment of duties and taxes if goods placed under customs control are not properly delivered or accounted for. The EAC has been working towards a political federation, but the timeline has been pushed back several times. Initially, the goal was to establish a political federation by 2015, but it s now expected to be achieved by 2031.

MBIDDE SPEAKS OUT

Mukasa Mbidde, a former EALA legislator and current Democratic Party deputy president, said having members of East African Legislative Assembly paid by their home countries is anti-integration.

"All elective positions at the EAC are now run by their own states. They just converge somehow as an organ to further the integration agenda. But the EALA is the only organ where all the elected officials are elected for East Africa. Now, if they can't be remunerated by the community, I think that is indicative of the dire collapse of the goodwill to integrate," Mbidde said.


Mbidde

Mbidde is concerned that the decision may violate Article 6(b) of EAC on equal opportunities and good governance given that each partner state has got its own welfare structure.

EALA is composed of nine elected members from each of the six EAC partner states, along with eight ex-officio members, who are ministers responsible for regional co-operation from each country.

NEW FUNDING FORMULA

To address the issue of member states defaulting on contributions, the summit agreed on a funding formula starting with the 2026/2027 financial year. It was agreed that 50% of the budget will be covered by equal contributions from all parther states, while the remaining 50% will be based on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) size of each member state.

This replaces the previous proposal of a 65% (equal) and 35% (assessed) formula that sought to balance the burden among member states. The summit also agreed that countries that fail to pay their contributions will not be allowed to produce senior employees for recruitment at the secretariat.

The former permanent secretary at the foreign affairs ministry, Ambassador James Mugume, said he supported the community leaders, who strive for equality when it comes to members' contributions, but asked members to recognise the reality.

"Countries need to have some sovereignty and equality, but at the same time recognising the reality. To be fair, Kenya and Burundi should not be paying the same money. So, I think they have now realised that fairness and capacity to pay are good principles for sustainability," Mugume said.

On state paying its MPs, Mugume concurred with Mbidde that this may undermine the search for integration. "Now it seems like we are going back to strengthen individual countries, which might undermine the issue of unification."

He said there is a risk of EALA MPs being paid more than others, which will create classes when they go to Arusha. By January 2026, the EAC was owed more than $89m (sh327b) in arrears, with Burundi, DR Congo and South Sudan holding the highest debt.

50% of the EAC budget will be covered by equal contributions from all partner states, while the remaining 50% will be based on the Gross Domestic Product size of each member state.

UNITE OR RISK MARGINALISATION

In his address after assuming the EAC chairpersonship, President Museveni cautioned fellow leaders against treating the issue of integration as 'optional'. "In my view, I have always held that it is mandatory to unite or risk perpetual marginalisation."

He added: "*Uhuru* (independence) came, now where is *umoja* (unity)? *Umoja* for economic prosperity through economic integration is necessary in order to create big markets to support the efforts of the African wealth creators, and *umoja* for political integration where possible, to create strategic security for the black race, on land, in the air, and at sea."

He observed that some of the efforts for economic integration have moved, recalling his efforts alongside former Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi and former Tanzanian presidents; Hassan Mwinyi and Benjamin Mkapa to revive the EAC in 1999.

"I salute Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, Somalia and DR Congo for joining the EAC. Let us fully implement the charter of the community and the roadmap as president Ruto was reporting," Museveni said.

He reminded the audience: "For the case of East Africa, we the Pan-Africanists, have never relented. Ever since the student days in the 1960s, we have been struggling for that integration, supporting our elder pan Africanists; Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Abed Karume, Kenneth Kawunda, Arap Moi, among others. With *Mzee* (Mwai) Kibaki, *Mzee* Mkapa, president Paul Kagame, president Pierre Nkurunziza, we called for the first tracking of the federation in 2014."

Despite Africa attaining independence, Museveni said discord is still widespread. He, however, indicated that, despite lost opportunities through disunity, the continent has a chance to catch up if it takes the right decisions.

According to Museveni, the economic stagnation and suffering of the African population resulting into nasty situations, such as young people dying in the Mediterranean Sea while migrating to Europe in search of opportunities, is due to the narrowness of the money economy of Africa that does not create the necessary jobs.

"The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the whole of Africa today is $3.6 trillion. The GDP of the US is $31.82 trillion. The GDP of US is bigger than that of Africa by more than 10 times. China's GDP is $20.6 trillion and India is $4.18 trillion. Even little South Korea has a GDP of $1.86 trillion," he noted.

EXPERT COMMENTS

Prof. Philip Kasaija Apuuli from the department of political science at Makerere University, said Museveni has a lot on his plate and asked him to leverage his experience to normalise relations among partner states.

"Right now, there are partner states which are not seeing eye to eye. By virtue of the fact that President Kagame (Rwanda) and President Félix Tshisekedi (DR Congo) never turned up for that meeting, that in itself will tell you something. You cannot have an integration process where you have misunderstandings between members," Apuuli noted.

The summit called on the parties involved in the conflict in eastern DR Congo to immediately cease hostilities and observe ceasefire while committing to peaceful resolution of their differences.