EAC under President Museveni: Time for federation

President Yoweri Museveni's assumption of the East African Community (EAC) chairmanship on March 7 presents a renewed opportunity to advance the vision he has long championed; a truly united EAC. Could this finally be the moment for East Africa to become one?

Museveni has consistently said fragmented African states remain weak, while a united East Africa can be "a centre of gravity for the black race," capable of industrialising, defending itself and negotiating as equals with superpowers.

With eight partner states and a population exceeding 340 million people, the EAC already rivals the population of the US and is more than double that of Russia, giving it enormous demographic weight if economic integration deepens. The untapped mineral and energy riches could make the region wealthier than many G20 nations per capita if processed locally, alongside a demographic trajectory that will create the largest youthful market on earth.

Evidence shows that deeper regional integration has become an economic and geopolitical necessity. With President Museveni now chairing the EAC, the opportunity to advance this long-standing vision has arrived. Consider, first, the sheer scale of East Africa's human capital.

The EAC's total population, by 2050, will surge to 647 million, a 69% increase from the 2023 levels. That single bloc will outnumber the combined populations of the US and Russia today by more than 150 million people. It will represent nearly a quarter of Africa's entire population and constitute one of the three largest youthful markets on the planet. This is a demographic dividend that no other region can match. While Europe and east Asia



WILFRED ARINDA NSHEKANTEBIRWE

age rapidly, East Africa's working-age population will explode, providing the labour force, consumers and innovators to drive the next industrial revolution, if we integrate.

Economically, the EAC's combined nominal gross domestic product is projected at roughly $400b-430b this year. East Africa is forecast to grow at 5.8% this year, the fastest rate on the continent and well above the African average of 4.0%.

Intra-regional trade, though still only 12-15% of total trade, is accelerating fast: in quarter three of financial year 2025/2026 alone, total EAC merchandise trade reached $40.3b (up 21.9%), while intra-EAC trade hit $4.8b (15% growth).

Earlier in quarter one of 2025/2026, intra-EAC trade had surged 53.6% to over $5b. Gravity-model studies confirm that full protocol implementation, plus linkage to the African Continental Free Trade Area, could add another $1.9b in annual exports.

A single customs territory would slash the 100+ non-tariff barriers that still choke traders and cut transport costs by up to 30% via the completed Standard Gauge Railway corridors and the northern corridor.

DR Congo alone holds over 70% of the world's known cobalt reserves, the critical mineral for electric-vehicle batteries and the green energy transition.

Uganda's oil production (230,000 barrels per day via the oil pipeline, coming online mid-to-late 2026) will generate $1b-2.5b in annual revenue. Tanzania and Kenya add vast natural gas reserves, while South Sudan, Burundi and Rwanda contribute gold, tin, tantalum, tungsten and coltan. Across the bloc, we sit on 30% of Africa's mineral wealth, significant oil and gas deposits and land capable of feeding hundreds of millions.

Read the full version at www.newvision.co.ug

The writer is the LC5 male youth councillor of Rubanda district