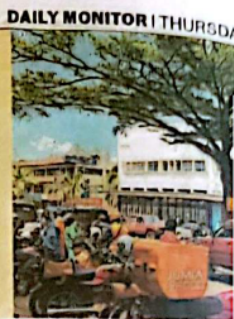


EACB wants EAC to ease e-commerce:

The East African Business Council has urged EAC partner states to align national laws with regional e-commerce strategies. The council also called for stronger consumer protection measures and targeted support for micro, small, and medium enterprises to facilitate smoother e-commerce across East Africa.



Aviation. |

DOROTHY NAKAWEESI

When Priscilla Mirembe Serukka was appointed chairperson of the Uganda Airlines board in 2022, it came as a surprise.

The national carrier had experienced some early volatilities and was facing intense scrutiny over financial performance, operational challenges, and governance concerns. Thus, her selection, although "terrifying", signaled a new chapter for the airline whose revival in 2019 had started with bumps.

She has since navigated the complex path of building a competitive airline in a highly demanding aviation industry, having stepped into the role at a time when expectations were high, and pressure was mounting for the airline to prove its commercial viability.

Serukka is an experienced corporate governance specialist, development professional, and former regional director for an international NGO in Norway.

With decades of leadership experience across East Africa, she has expertise in institutional management, oversight, and strategy. Her vision for Uganda Airlines centres on strengthening governance, improving operational efficiency, expanding revenue streams, and reducing the airline's reliance on government funding.

In this interview, Serukka reflects on the challenges and lessons from her first year leading the board.

You have been chairperson of Uganda Airlines for more than two years. How has it been?

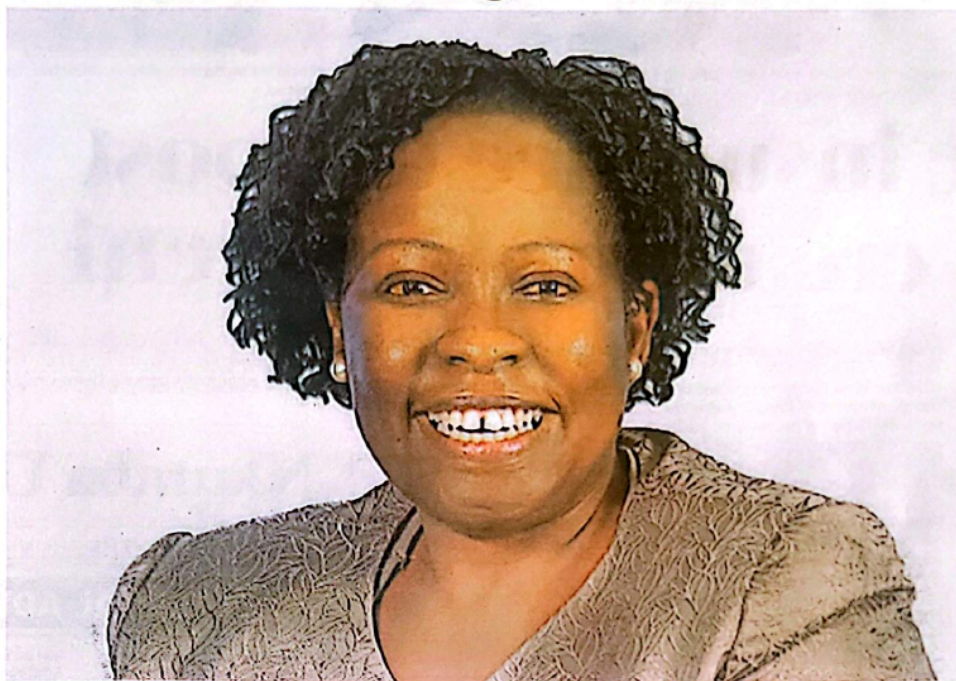
It has been an interesting experience. I did not expect to become the board chairperson. We were called for interviews, and after a few days, I saw that the board had been nominated and I was appointed chair. I was shocked and, honestly, a bit terrified because I had been reading about the challenges the airline had gone through.

It has not been easy. This was my first time working with a state enterprise. Previously, I worked mostly with private institutions. My earlier career included about eight years at defunct UCB, after which I moved into development projects.

One challenge is that the corporate governance principles we expect are sometimes difficult to implement in state enterprises. There are many stakeholders involved, and the processes can be different. Another challenge is that the chief executive officer is appointed by the head of state, which creates a unique governance dynamic. While the board is responsible for oversight, its level of control can sometimes be limited.

Overall, it has been a steep learning curve. I am not an aviator, although I have travelled extensively. I have had to learn a lot about aviation through reading, training, and engaging with experts.

From shock appointment to steering reforms: Serukka's two years at Uganda Airlines



What have you learnt so far?

One of the most important lessons is the importance of communication and documentation. Everything must be properly recorded because aviation is highly regulated and unforgiving.

It is also important to maintain a good reputation and keep promises to customers. Once customers lose trust, it takes a lot of work to bring them back. There is intense competition, even within regional routes. Airlines must work very hard not only to gain customers but also to retain them.

Planning is also critical. Running an airline requires serious strategic planning and long-term thinking. The aviation industry is also not an eight-hour job. It is almost a 24-hour responsibility, because issues can arise at any time.

Safety is another major priority. I have taken training in safety management systems to better understand aviation safety requirements. We also learn from other successful airlines through benchmarking, studying what works well and what can help us improve.

Another important lesson is that most airlines do not make prof-

its in their first four or five years. Opening new routes requires significant investment before revenue begins to come in.

But most importantly, negative publicity can also affect customer confidence and reduce bookings.

There are claims that Uganda Airlines has a very large skill gap. How true is this?

Uganda had gone many years without a national airline, so many critical aviation skills were not readily available locally. Some Ugandans returned from abroad to help, but we still need more professionals with experience in managing and turning around airlines.

Do you, as Uganda Airlines, have the capacity to run an airline?

Currently, we have an acting chief executive officer, who has been brought in to help with the turnaround strategy.

He has recently begun his work and is expected to help stabilise operations and eventually assist in recruiting a competent permanent chief executive officer. For now, we ask people to watch this space, because many improvements are expected.

The airline still relies heavily on government funding. How do you plan to reduce this dependence?

Priscilla Mirembe Serukka reflects on the shock of her unexpected appointment as Uganda Airlines board chair and the challenge ahead. PHOTO/FILE

In the early funding is required. However, the due this depends on revenue and streams.

One challenge is insufficient because the was not full.

In the future, partnerships will explore various, and even the public is more stable.

You have spending buying airline. What

Buying is just like it provides control. The airline to do less upfront. Leasing is under when added.

What is the advantage such as in the Airway

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'I did not expect to become the chairperson ... I was shocked and, honestly, a bit terrified ... because of the challenges.'