

Govt, private sector partner to defeat non-tariff barriers

By Samuel Balagadde

Government institutions, the private sector, Trademark East Africa and transit cargo transporters have teamed up to find ways of mitigating non-tariff barriers to trade.

Transporters say they have for long been complaining about delays on the roads partly caused by traffic Police checkpoints, numerous weighbridges and poor road infrastructure in some parts of the country.

During a joint meeting that took place at Pope Paul Hotel in Ndeeba recently, the transporters complained that some policemen connive with some Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) staff to intercept vehicles under the pretext that they are non-compliant. They said they then take them to court where they are fined, but the receipts they get after paying reflect only a fraction of the money. They, however, did not mention names, but said one policeman now operates at a weighbridge as a UNRA official.

The transporters also alleged that some weighbridges belonging to UNRA do not tally with those at loading terminals at customs



A truck being checked at Busitema weighbridge. Transporters say some policemen disguise as UNRA staff

bonded warehouses, and manufacturing plants, though they are all calibrated by the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS).

Byron Kinene, the chairman of the Regional Lorry Drivers and Transporters Association (RLDTA), said even transit cargo trucks with Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) customs seals get intercepted over 'excess loading'. This, he said, is done although URA first ascertains the tonnage before putting its seal on a truck.

However, Nathan Birungi, the UNRA axel load control manager, said they are putting in place measures to eliminate the problems. One of the measures is introduction of the high speed weigh in motion bridges which would automatically direct a suspect vehicle to where it would be checked. The bridge automatically scans the vehicle

Transporters say some weighbridges belonging to UNRA do not tally with those at loading terminals

as it moves and leaves the one without a query to continue on its way.

Currently, vehicles have to be stopped at weighbridges for checking which is time consuming.

He, however, said the current permanently fixed weighbridges as well as the mobile ones are to be standardised to eliminate the variations.

Birungi also said the axle load regulations under the Traffic and Road Safety Act are being amended to introduce instant penalties for offenders. This, according to him, will reduce the court appearances for offenders.

Geoffrey Balamaga, URA's manager for transit cargo monitoring, said currently the tracking system for transit cargo has reduced on the time transporters spend on the way through checkpoints. The system also addressed the problem of tampering with goods which have URA seals by highway robbers and unscrupulous traders who want to divert cargo.

Edith Karara from the

National Road Safety Council, said in collaboration with development partners and the private sector, they are enhancing skills among transit cargo drivers to become more professional. This way, she says, a lot of problems would be eliminated.

"Some of the problems transporters face on the road that sometime result in non-tariff barriers are generated by drivers' ignorance and non-adherence to traffic and road safety requirements," Karara said.

Anatoli Muleterwa of the community policing said transporters should report to the Police when they feel aggrieved.

He, however, said some transit goods drivers are not security conscious and end up spending nights with prostitutes, rendering the cargo at risk of being robbed.

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Fitch affirms AfDB's Triple 'A' rating

Leading global rating agency Fitch Ratings has affirmed the African Development Bank's (AfDB) long-term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'AAA' with a stable outlook and its short-term IDR at 'F1+' (best quality grade, indicating exceptionally strong capacity to meet its financial commitments).

In a statement released on August 4, the agency said the 'AAA' rating primarily reflects extraordinary support from AfDB's shareholders, which provides a three-notch uplift over the bank's intrinsic rating. "AfDB enjoys strong support from its 80 member states, which includes 26 non-African countries with high average ratings. Callable capital subscribed by member states rated 'AAA', the largest of which are the US, Germany and Canada, accounts for 21%

of the total. This fully covered the bank's net debt at end-2016, underpinning the 'AAA' assessment of shareholders' capacity to support," the statement said.

In the assessment, Fitch maintains that fast growth in AfDB's lending in the last two years has translated into a rapid increase in its indebtedness, noting that the bank's management has indicated that if there is no clear evidence of a capital increase within the next two years, it will have no choice, but to curb lending growth to preserve the bank's solvency metrics.

Fitch asserts that the relatively high risk profile of borrowers is mitigated by the preferred creditor status (PCS) that the bank enjoys on its sovereign exposures.