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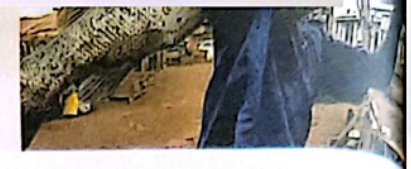
each of the three months to December, respectively, according to Bank of Uganda data. The earnings reflect improved demand, regional market recovery, and stronger compliance with export standards.



Aviation. |

How Museveni's order unleashed a tough period at Uganda Airlines

DOROTHY NAKAWEESI

When President Museveni directed the appointment of Jenifer Bamuturaki as chief executive officer of Uganda Airlines in July 2022, the decision did more than override an ongoing recruitment process.

It crystallised years of unresolved governance weaknesses and ushered in what has become one of the most turbulent chapters in the short history of the revived national carrier.

At the time of her appointment, Uganda Airlines had already committed Shs98.1m to PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to conduct a global search for a substantive CEO.

PwC had advertised the job, attracted more than a dozen applicants and set July 8, 2022, as the deadline for submissions. Two days before that deadline, the process was abruptly discarded.

Works minister Katumba Wamala, citing an April 24 directive from President Museveni, instructed the Uganda Airlines board to appoint Bamuturaki as substantive CEO. The PwC-led search, procured through a competitive process involving KPMG, Ernst & Young, and others, was effectively rendered useless and abandoned.

The directive had come against a backdrop of chronic leadership instability. Since its relaunch in 2019, Uganda Airlines had never appointed a substantive CEO through a completed competitive process. Every chief executive - Ephraim Bagenda, Cornwell Muleya - and later Bamuturaki, served in an acting or contract capacity, with renewals stretching from six months to a year.

Bamuturaki's appointment proved, especially difficult because it reopened old internal wounds. Before becoming CEO, she had served as the airline's marketing and commercial director, a tenure marked by bitter power struggles with then-CEO Cornwell Muleya.

Their rivalry spilled beyond boardrooms into formal complaints sent to State House. In one brief to President Museveni, Muleya accused Bamuturaki of insider trading, incompetence and unethical conduct, painting a picture of deep factionalism at the heart of the airline.



Key figures

Shs98.1m

At the time of Bamuturaki's appointment, Uganda Airlines had already committed Shs98.1m to PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to conduct a global search for a substantive CEO.

Shs230.8b

While Bamuturaki's tenure has been turbulent, she has managed to narrow the airline's losses from Shs325b in 2023 to Shs230.8b in June 2025.

Citing a presidential directive, Works Minister Gen Katumba Wamala appointed Jenifer Bamuturaki substantive Uganda Airlines CEO in July 2022, overriding an ongoing PwC-led search process. PHOTO / FILE

Ironically, Bamuturaki had earlier been forced out of Uganda Airlines after completing her probation, only to resurface later as acting CEO following Muleya's suspension and eventual dismissal.

Mr Muleya's exit would later become one of the airline's costliest governance failures. Although he was subsequently charged with corruption and mismanagement-related offences, courts ruled that his dismissal had been procedurally flawed. He went on to win Shs500m from Uganda Airlines for wrongful termination.

Aviation expert-turned-politician Capt Francis Babu says the leadership struggles that Uganda Airlines has gone through were expected.

"It was just a matter of time before the hide-and-seek came to an end," he said, without expounding on his comment, but his comment captures a sentiment widely shared within the aviation sector, that Uganda Airlines' governance contradictions could not be sustained indefinitely.

By the time Bamuturaki assumed office in July 2022, Uganda Airlines was deeply loss-making, heavily reliant on Treasury injections, and facing mounting scrutiny over procurement and governance.

Her appointment did little to stabilise the situation, even as, under her leadership, the airline expanded routes and fleet, including the flagship London route. However, losses continued to mount before showing marginal signs of stabilisation. The airline's losses rose from Shs102b in 2020 to Shs265.9b by June 2022, peaked at Shs325b in 2023, before narrowing to Shs231.6b in 2024 and Shs230.8b in June 2025.

The Auditor General, however, painted a grim picture, with fuel procured without valid contracts, swelling trade payables, grounded aircraft due to spare-part shortages, weak cash controls, and growing liquidity stress.

The troubles extended into an investigation by the Police Criminal Investigations Directorate and the State House Anti-Corruption Unit that suggested existence of procurement flaws, aircraft acquisition and financial management.

Amid these mounting troubles, Bamuturaki had been offered just one year on her contract, with expiry due in July 2026, not the customary two or three years.

To some insiders, it looked less like renewal of trust and more like a carefully managed transition, buying time to steady operations, reopen recruitment, and avoid another abrupt leadership vacuum.

Indeed, board chairperson Priscilla Mirembe Serukka, said that whereas Bamuturaki was still in office, the search for a CEO "needed to start early to enable" the recruitment of the new CEO by July.

Bamuturaki has herself since announced her impending departure, encouraging staff to apply for the position.

An advert has also been published, even as Works permanent secretary Waiswa Bageya had earlier said that government was in the process of procuring a recruitment firm to conduct the search.

In hindsight, Bamuturaki appointment did not create Uganda Airlines' problems. The airline had been struggling with governance gaps, acting appointments, and political interference long before July 2022.

But by overriding an active PwC-led recruitment process and by installing a CEO already enmeshed in past internal conflicts, the presidential directive entrenched instability rather than resolving it.

Two-and-a-half years later, as the search for a substantive CEO resumes yet again, Uganda Airlines stands as a cautionary tale of how political shortcuts, however expedient, can prolong turbulence instead of ending it.

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