

# Revenue authority graduates 317 clearing agents

By Edward Kayiwa

The Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) has graduated 317 customs and freight forwarders, as it endeavours to professionalise the sector, ease the cost of doing business and improve service delivery across the region.

According to the commissioner for customs, Dickson Kateshumbwa, the graduation brings to 1,688 certified operatives, clearing approximately 76% of all incoming cargo, over the last one year.

He said these will play a critical role in facilitating international trade, especially as the Africa Free Continental Trade Area (AfCTA) comes into force next year.

"We shall have all trade doors open when AfCTA fully kicks off and we, therefore, need a professional team to advise traders on international trade

issues. Therefore, we want them to first understand the dynamics of the business before advising anyone," he said.

Freight forwarders are entities that organise shipment of goods for individuals or corporations from the manufacturer to a market, customer or final point of distribution.

Kateshumbwa said the current reforms requiring certification of all players in the clearing and forwarding industry are meant to ensure that it remains in the hands of professionals. He added that it is currently growing at about 10% per annum.

"We cannot continue to operate in an environment that is not regulated and, therefore, it is now mandatory for all practitioners to be certified. Secondly, the old system was manual, but we are now digitalising and now, clearing agents must continuously seek new

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■ The six months course is offered to individuals already practising or intending to practice in the freight forwarding industry throughout the East Africa region.

knowledge through training because the business is evolving every day," he said.

According to the EAC customs organisation, the East Africa customs and freight Forwarding training is mandatory for all customs agents and is jointly implemented by the region's revenue authorities and their national freight forwarding associations.

"This is why we have also made it mandatory for all clearing firms to

subject their employees to continuous professional development trainings, to keep their professional standards globally competitive," he said.

He advised the clearing firms to adhere to set performance guidelines, both locally and across the region to remain competitive.

The East Africa Customs and Freight Forwarding Practising Certificate is a joint training programme of the East Africa revenue authorities and the national freight forwarding associations affiliated to the Federation of East Africa freight Forwarders Association.

The six-month course is offered to individuals already practising or intending to practice in the freight forwarding industry throughout the East Africa region.

The programme started in 2007 with support from the USAID with

assistance from trademark East Africa, to equip practitioners with skills, ethics and integrity required for the job last year, the taxman gave new guidelines to clearing and forwarding firms mandating them to have all their employees in uniforms or marked overalls, with displayed identification whenever conducting official duties.

The guidelines also prohibit the clearing firms from exceeding an average monthly clearing time of two days, to eliminate any chances for fake agents to manipulate innocent clients and rob them of colossal sums of money

All bonded warehouses were also ordered to install computerised stock management systems that are accessible by their customers, and submit their monthly stock taking reports by 5th of the following month.