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# Uganda trade portal launched

A one stop shop for export, import and transit information

The screenshot shows the Uganda Trade Portal website. At the top left is the logo for the Uganda Trade Portal with the URL [ugandatrades.go.ug](http://ugandatrades.go.ug). To the right is a link for "About us". Below this is a navigation bar with links: HOME, PROCEDURES, MTIC, E-SINGLE WINDOW, and REPORT NTB. The main banner features a background image of an airplane cargo hold being loaded by workers. Overlaid on the banner is the text "FACILITATING TRADE THROUGH TRANSPARENT PROCEDURES". Below the banner is a search bar with a dropdown menu showing "Operation" and "Commodity". There are also links for "Product", "Pre-clearance procedures", and "Clearance procedures". At the bottom of the banner area are three red buttons: "HOW DOES IT WORK?", "FORMS, LAWS & CONTACTS", and "TRADE STATISTICS".



**UGANDA**  
TRADE PORTAL  
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Growing Prosperity Through Trade



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**IMPORT**

Import general goods

Import pharmaceutical products

By Benon Ojiambo

**Y**oram Atuhamize, the managing director of Jora Shoes Company, is one of the entrepreneurs who attended the trade sector review meeting in Kampala recently. During the meeting, Atuhamize learnt of the trade information portal, an information-sharing platform.

Prior to the meeting, Atuhamize, whose company makes between 30 and 60 pairs of shoes daily, was looking for ways to explore other markets, but he did not have any clue of where to start from.

"I was looking for a way through which I can export my products, but now I have found the answer on the trade information portal," he said.

Atuhamize describes learning about the portal as better than being given cash handouts.

"Giving me information that is helpful to my business is better than giving me sh100m," he says.

Like Atuhamize, there are several other people producing commodities that they would like to export to other countries but have no clue where to start from and the procedures involved. This has compromised expansion of their businesses.

However, the woes of producers and traders in Atuhamize's situation could soon be history following the development of the Trade Information Portal by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Co-operatives.

#### About the trade portal

The portal is an electronic platform which enables all interested parties to access information regarding procedures, documentation, fees and other related charges with respect to exportation, importation and transit of goods.

Trade minister Amelia Kyambadde describes the portal as an online one-stop place for all trade information premised on a World Trade Organisation (WTO)'s Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) signed in Bali, Indonesia in 2013. Uganda ratified the agreement last year.

The TFA agreement requires member states to publish their export, import and goods' transit procedures, as well as the responsible people's contacts, online within available resources, establishing contact points to respond to enquiries.

The online system whose development started with a signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives and development partners, TradeMark East Africa (TMEA) in September 2017, was commissioned recently at Kampala Serena Hotel and is officially operational.

The portal, which has been developed with a grant of

# New portal has answers to all your trade questions



The signing of the memorandum of understanding between trade ministry and TradeMark East Africa to develop the trade information portal



Richard Okot Okello, the assistant commissioner for external trade

\$500,000 (about sh1.875b) from United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through TMEA, can be accessed at: <http://ugandatrades.go.ug>.

The portal provides timely and accurate information to all interested stakeholders on procedures, documentation, fees, charges for exportation, importation and transit of goods.

It also provides the related addresses and contact details of the relevant officials.

It also seeks to bring clarity and simplification measures in order to reduce the cost, time and administrative complexity in the export, import and transit of goods, particularly to the micro, small and medium enterprises.

This is aimed at improving the doing of business environment with the ultimate goal of attracting investment in the country.



Trade ministry officials explain how the portal works during a recent exhibition in Kampala

**A user-friendly portal**  
Richard Okot Okello, the assistant commissioner for external trade, explained that the trade portal is designed from the user point of view, through collection of information from different agencies mandated to clear imports and exports.

He said when making regulations, institutions are often thinking about themselves, but not the people or traders who go through the many steps the regulation creates.

"When a trader goes to an institution such as a ministry responsible for business, the

institution tends to think about itself, forgetting that the trader has been to other institutions," Okello said.

"Putting these steps together gives these institutions a feel of what a trader goes through as they seek to export or import commodities," he added.

Okello said they are looking at reducing the steps that a trader goes through when exporting or importing, adding that previously the steps were isolated in different agencies.

#### Harmonisation of steps

The ministry is currently collecting information from the exporters and importers, as well

as institutions that are mandated to aid in the transaction of a particular commodity.

"The information collected from different agencies shall be published online. However, the ministry will also simplify and harmonise the procedures," Okello said.

For example, if there is a procedure that is required by more than one agency, it shall be harmonised and simplified by the trade facilitation committee.

An example is the Uganda Coffee Development Authority and National Drug Authority that deal with exportation and importation of coffee and

**THE PORTAL PROVIDES TIMELY AND ACCURATE INFORMATION TO STAKEHOLDERS ON PROCEDURES, DOCUMENTATION, FEES, AS WELL AS CHARGES FOR EXPORTATION, IMPORTATION AND TRANSIT OF GOODS.**

pharmaceuticals.

Uganda currently has about 160 active export commodities and the portal. So far, the portal has information on eight commodities that include fruits and vegetables, coffee, flowers, cement, maize, rice, poultry products and general goods.

The portal has also collected information on prominent import commodities such as pharmaceutical products and the process of documenting all products is ongoing.

However, for it to be of more benefit, it will take sensitisation of the public about its advantages.

Okello said it is incumbent on them as the authority to sensitise the public and interest the small and medium enterprises to formalise their businesses.

He said they are aiming at using the different trade associations to publicise the portal.



# Access to trade information made easy, Kyambadde says

The evolution of global trade calls for measures that take into account new trends such as technology to ensure that trade is well facilitated. Benon Ojiambo asked trade minister Amelia Kyambadde about the various initiatives which the Government is undertaking to facilitate trade. Below are the excerpts.

**What is trade facilitation?**  
Trade facilitation refers to the process of making movement of goods across borders much easier by simplifying documentation, reducing charges and ensuring that unnecessary delays during goods' clearance at border points are reduced.

This can only be achieved through electronic clearance platforms.

East Africa has been implementing trade facilitation long before the World Trade Organisation (WTO) concluded and signed the Bali Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) in 2013 though Uganda ratified it in 2017.

Article 95 of the East African Treaty provides for harmonisation, simplification of trade documents and ensuring that delays along the East African Community (EAC) borders are minimised.

But it became more serious because much as the international community reduced taxes on goods, there are still issues that are non-tariff in nature that make trade difficult such as access to and availability of information is one of the instrumental factors that increase the cost of doing business that the WTO's TFA seeks to solve.

**There are a number of interventions that you**

**ministry is implementing to ensure that trade is facilitated. What difference is the new Trade Information Portal going to make?**

One of the key articles in the TFA is that countries should put all their trade regulations, procedures, processes and even the contacts of responsible people who handle the specific processes online so that they can easily be accessed by anybody when they want it.

The trade portal is one of the provisions that are being implemented and it brings all the procedures and processes online.

We have instances where people want to export, for example, eggs to Madagascar but they don't even know where to start from.

By default, they first come to the trade ministry where we tell them they need a certificate from the agriculture ministry, but they do not even know where the ministry is located.

However, knowing where the ministry is located is one thing but who to go to, the documentation and the cost involved are also other things.

Availability of such information has always been a big problem yet it is very important in opening markets.

We are in the process of setting up the trade information portal that shall open a wider window in access to information by exporters and importers any time at no cost.

Now that the portal is operational, we shall embark on getting the private sector who do the trading to know how to use it and that shall involve rolling out the entire programme throughout the country.

We are currently collecting information from various agencies mandated to clear both imports and exports. The information being collected is currently 'as is' but the next phase shall be simplifying it

## Kyambadde on competitiveness

The key to global trade at the moment is competitiveness. This means reducing your cost of production, improving the quality of your products and delivering commodities on time sustainably.

At the moment, business is not only what you supply, but at what time you supply and at what cost. Competitiveness is going to be based on cost and efficiency.

However, the challenge is now convincing the SMEs to trade according to the rules and take advantage of these initiatives.

This shall involve massive sensitisation.

because some of the procedures and processes are overlapping.

Some of the laws that give authority to some procedures are outdated and may need review and this shall require some policies to see how best we can have an inter institutional review committee that can look into those rules, policies, documentation with the aim of simplifying them.

**How are the SMEs catered for in this arrangement of accessing information online?**

Our focus is on the exports and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that constitute about 70% of the exporters. We want to see how best we can use this portal to increase exports to address our trade deficit that currently stands at \$2.59b as of June this year.



Trade minister Amelia Kyambadde during the portal's launch yesterday in Kampala. Photo by Ivan Kabuye

We are also implementing the Electronic Single Window that is transactional once you have the information for importation. The electronic single window is used to clear goods online and was developed with the support of Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) through TradeMark East Africa (TMEA).

It enables you to interact with different agencies and download all your documentation like import and export licences and making payments. This allows the trader to cut down costs and time when doing business.

The portal shall also include profiles of all the importers and exporters; sector by sector and product by product to give them direct access to anyone who wants to trade with them.

We also have the one-stop border posts (OSBPs) at Mutukula with Tanzania, Busia with Kenya, Mirama Hills with Rwanda and Elegu with South Sudan that were constructed with support from DFID through TMEA. The OSBPs allow a trader to stop at a single country's side when doing business across to another country, thus reducing the time and costs incurred when crossing the border. For example, when exporting goods from Uganda to Kenya, one will only clear from one of the countries as opposed to clearing from both countries.

This is possible because the

clearance documents are submitted to clearance authorities of both countries through the electronic single window.

**Do we see any impact of the above trade facilitation interventions?**

The interventions have drastically reduced the delays that used to be experienced at the borders when clearing goods. It used to take two days just to clear goods at the border and two weeks to deliver goods from the port of Mombasa to Kampala, but it now takes almost two days. This is partly because of the Non-Tariff Barrier reporting system that ensures monitoring and removal of non-tariff barriers like unnecessary delays at weigh bridges and Police road blocks. This comes along with reduction of cost.

However, the miracle shall come when we start using the railway and with it, transportation of goods from Mombasa to Kampala is expected to take a single day.

We are also coming up with proper policy framework for electronic commerce. We have already done the country assessment. Currently, a number of things in trade are done electronically like clearance, payments, and tracking of cargo.

We are already developing the commodities exchange and the warehouse receipt system that shall be connected to a single electronic platform.

