

## Editorial

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### EAC partner states should take regional integration seriously

LAST YEAR, pressure mounted on member states of the East African Community (EAC) to implement the Common Market protocol.

Employers and workers' associations went as far as to petition the East African Legislative Assembly to lean on member states, especially as far as freedom of goods and services are concerned.

Before the admittance of South Sudan into the bloc, Tanzania and Burundi were still dragging their feet in some components of regional integration.

The other remaining members; Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, embarked on implementing common policies without waiting for the stragglers to make up their minds; they were implementing the principle of "variable geometry". The slow movers will have to catch up.

Both Burundi and Tanzania are still wary of the implication of opening up, citing health, policy and security concerns. Both are reluctant to scrap work permit fees to allow the free movement of labour for the above reasons.

Okay, Burundi has its own financial and political demons, without mentioning the deteriorating security situation. So it needs the little money it can get into its coffers ... but what about Tanzania?

It has one of the most stringent work permit policies. This is probably informed by many Kenyan professionals, who, since the EAC was revived, "invaded" Tanzania's work space, especially the hospitality and service industries.

But that is why capacity building has been a lynchpin in pushing forward integration; so that citizens of the EAC can be competitive. So, closing doors does not bring the bloc closer to integration.

The Common Market Protocol was meant to facilitate trade among member states, but Burundi's growing isolationist policies is worrying.

It first barred passenger buses from crossing the border with Rwanda, stopped informal border trade and even closed one of the borders with its neighbour citing "low traffic".

Now the question remains; are signatories to the EAC integration really serious? It remains to be seen.

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Although a section of Rwandans and financial institutions have adopted cashless payments systems in line with the Government's push for cashless economy, transactions in the country remain largely in cash.



TEACHING Joseph Rwagatare

### Improving quality of education: look to teachers, too

TWO WEEKS AGO, we marked World Teachers' Day. For most teachers it is the one day in the calendar when they feel they matter. There are one or two others, of course.

One is when parents are looking for school places for their children, especially when they have not done well enough to gain automatic placement.

Another is when students need special preparation for examinations in order to gain entry into some of the best schools. Parents look for the best teachers to coach and give their children a competitive edge.

For the rest of the time, we take teachers for granted. We know they are there doing their work and only take notice when our children perform poorly or have disciplinary issues at school, and even then it is only to blame them.

On October 5, Rwanda also celebrated the invaluable role of teachers in our lives. For a number of years now, we have been marking World Teachers' Day differently by recognising and rewarding the best performing teachers in each district, often with computers and cows.

Of course, at the event there is also the usual litany: praise for teachers' selfless service, lament for

their poor conditions, promises to do something about it, demand for quality education, and many more.

But there is no doubt that rewards are increasingly the centre of attraction on the teachers' day.

The rewards may not be big, but they serve an important purpose. They are a sort of motivation to teachers to spur them to better performance. They are also meant to contribute to the improvement of their social welfare.

In the long term this is part of the answer to the question of quality of our teachers.

Quality is a word on everyone's lips. It summarises everything we expect from whoever is providing us with a service or product. In a sense this expectation shows the progress we have made.

We are no longer satisfied simply with what or how much of it we get. The concern now is with the quality of what we get – whether it is education, health care, financial services, manufacturing, etc.

In terms of education, much attention has been on building infrastructure – schools and science laboratories, and equipping them. It has also been on providing instructional materials – books, computers, internet connectivity, digital learning content, and so on.

Another area of focus has been about improving teachers' welfare, especially through Umwarimu SACCO.

These are commendable efforts. However, teachers' quality has not received similar attention. Yes, there are

some efforts like rewarding outstanding teachers as noted above. But more needs to be done.

There are several ways to ensure that we get the right quality of teachers.

One is starting at the very beginning, with the selection of students into teacher training institutions. They should have the academic and intellectual ability similar to those that are admitted into other institutions of higher learning.

That will largely depend on making teaching an attractive career.

The second is to turn teaching into a proper profession, with appropriate standards for membership, performance and discipline. Professional organisations register their members based on the standards they have set. When they can no longer meet those standards, they are suspended or deregistered.

Another is to set up an evaluation system for teachers' performance that actually works. Their skills and knowledge should be regularly appraised to ensure they keep abreast of developments in their respective subjects.

The current evaluation based on inspection is not enough. It is at best irregular. Most times it doesn't happen.

Retention of the best performing teachers must become an important aspect of ensuring that high standards of achievement are maintained.

They are invaluable role models for both students and fellow teachers and their

skills can be tapped into to mentor new teachers or in the evaluation of colleagues.

Teachers with a high achievement record must be given incentives such as promotion to a higher job designation and salary while remaining classroom teachers.

Some countries have experimented with merit pay or performance-linked pay. The Blair Government in Britain proposed that teachers' pay rise would be pegged to performance in the classroom and in examinations.

According to the plan, teachers would be required to set targets for their pupils' performance in tests and examinations each year in consultation with school heads as part of the teachers' appraisal system.

A number of states in the United States of America such as California and Texas also have similar merit pay arrangements.

In Rwanda we have something similar. Teachers sign imihigo with their headteachers, who in turn sign with the district education officials. The only difference is that the attainment of imihigo is not tied to salary raise.

By whatever method it is done, assessing teachers' knowledge and skills is essential if we are to ensure the quality of what they deliver to our students. Whether it is pegged to salary or not is a matter that can be considered. But a method must be put in place.

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