



**CONVENIENCE:** President Museveni (third left), Tanzania's President John Magufuli and Rwanda's President Paul Kagame flip through through the dummy e-copies of the East African passport that is to be introduced in January 2017 making cross border movement much easier.

# One passport for whole region

Known as the new generation EAC e-passport, the new passport was launched during the 17th ordinary Heads of State Summit in Arusha Tanzania on Wednesday 2nd March 2016.

A regional passport is obviously not a new development in the EAC. The novelty this time is about the new features and the usage associated with the new generation e-passport.

Prior to the recent developments, the East African Community launched the East African Passport in November 1998 with the aim of simplifying the movement of people within the EAC region. Thus, since 1998, citizens from the EAC countries have been able to access a special EAC travel document, which allows them to travel with ease within the regional bloc. It is also a document that emboldened East Africans as one people. Its use was however limited, because it was not recognised internationally, meaning that it was not accepted as a travel document outside of East Africa.

In 2004 the EAC Council of Ministers directed the EAC Secretariat to convene a meeting of Immigration Experts to design a New Generation EAC Passport and to recommend strategies to make it an International travel document. This was the beginning of a journey to the development of an EAC e-passport. Thus, the EAC Partner States Chiefs of Immigration started discussions to upgrade the passport in terms of enhanced security features and to make it usable for international travel; i.e. travel both within and outside the EAC. Some of

the constraints identified at the time were that the East African Passport did not have adequate security features; and was therefore not capable of being issued with the new passport issuing systems as required by other States and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).

The meeting of Immigration experts considered the new generation passport design taking into account the current standard requirements recommended by ICAO for travel documents. The new design and the technical specifications were meant to enhance the security of the document and upgrade the EAC e-Passport to an internationally accepted travel document.

Thus effective January 2017 issuance will commence of the e-passport in the EAC Partner States. It will be fully digitised and incorporating biometric security, making it fully compliant with international best practise, and therefore accepted at border controls all over the world. This is the departure from the old EAC Passport.

Currently, all the EAC member states apart from Burundi use second-generation passports that rely on digital imaging, watermarks and Ultra-violet (UV) imaging as security features. Biometric passports, sometimes called e-passports or digital passports contain additional security features through implanted micro-chips containing facial and biometric information of the traveller. The e-passport will thus have an electronic chip holding the same information as the old model passport,

alongside a biometric identifier, digital photograph of the holder and security features to prevent unauthorized use and forgery. Once implemented it will have the following benefits;

- Secure identification of the traveler
- Protection against identity theft
- Eliminate passport data skimming
- Regional identity of EAC Partner state citizens; proud to be East African.

Owing to these security features the new passport will make it easier to negotiate visa-free access to other countries, enhancing both trade and travel from the region. At the same time, the common passport reaffirms the right of EAC citizens to live and work in each other's countries

A roadmap has been agreed upon at the regional level. Our colleagues at the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control) will roll out a programme for issuance of the new passport and for the recall of the National passport. The process will be replicated across all the partner state until December 2018 when all National passports of individual partner states are expected to be phased out.

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## The East African Common Market

The Common Market is the second Regional Integration milestone of the East African Community (EAC), which has been in force since 2010, in line with the provisions of the EAC Treaty. It follows the Customs Union, which became fully-fledged in January 2010.

A Common Market is however not a new phenomenon for East Africa. The East African region operated one under the former East African Community (1967-1977) which was very successful and only collapsed with the old EAC.

To accelerate economic growth and development, it means that the EAC Partner States maintain a liberal stance towards the four Freedoms of movement for all the factors of production and two Rights between themselves. These Freedoms and Rights include:

- Free Movement of Goods
- Free Movement of Persons
- Free Movement of Labour / Workers
- Right of Establishment
- Right of Residence
- Free Movement of Services
- Free Movement of Capital

Underlying the EAC Common Market are operational principles of the Community, namely:

- Non-discrimination of nationals of other Partner States on grounds of nationality;
- Equal treatment to nationals of other Partner States;
- Ensure transparency in matters concerning the other Partner States; and
- Share information for the smooth implementation of the Protocol.

The five-member EAC, which in 2010 started implementing a common market in capital, goods, and services, uses a scorecard approach to measure progress (violations of the protocol provisions in services are made public on the EAC website, which is far more informative on progress at integration than websites for other African RIAs).

The EAC is also promoting competition in telecommunication by banning roaming charges within the region and issues single tourist visas for northern corridor countries (Rwanda, Kenya, and Uganda). The EAC is the only RIA where the ratio of actual to potential intra-regional trade has risen following integration.