

BY CHRIS KIWAWULO
IN NAIROBI

East Africa is shifting from a political federation to a confederation as a way of ensuring that integration does not hit a dead end, a Kenyan official has revealed.

Judy Njeru, the assistant director for political affairs at Kenya's Ministry of East African Community (EAC) affairs, told journalists that they changed to confederation because they found the federation to have many challenges.

Njeru noted that the confederation was agreed on during the 31st council meeting of ministers from partner states recently, after findings from a sub-committee of ministers.

Njeru said partner states would be free to do what works for them under the confederation.

"The confederation is a gradual and an incremental collaboration in specified areas with partner states pooling their sovereignty in certain areas. Political federation issues require policy decisions, including loss of sovereignty and these have to be agreed upon by governments of each member state," she noted.

Njeru made the revelation while presenting a paper on the East African political federation during an EAC media training and capacity building workshop at Hilton

EAC shifts from political federation to confederation

Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya on Thursday.

GIZ sponsored the three-day workshop, which started on Wednesday ended yesterday. It attracted over 30 journalists and editors from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi.

The EAC secretariat, Njeru said, does not have powers to force partner states to implement EAC council decisions, but the secretariat can write to the member states reminding them of unimplemented council decisions.

"Uganda, for instance, wanted quick federation and all the East African states to become one, yet other countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda) wanted to retain their sovereignty. Eventually, we agreed with Uganda that we retain our sovereignty," she observed.

Citing its implementation by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Njeru said political confederation would succeed among East



Njeru (left) and Alfred Kitolo, the director productive services at the Kenya EAC ministry at the workshop

African states because the secretariat was riding on the already signed federation principles.

Njeru said EAC member states were comfortable with political confederation as opposed to federation because each country handles its internal issues differently, citing financial administration and human rights matters.

"We came up with confederation after we realised that the federation had a lot of problems."

The proposed political federation had anticipated having one president and regional assembly.

Earlier, during the opening of the workshop, the EAC secretary general, Amb. Liberat Mfumukeko, noted that the

community was the only bloc in Africa that had a dream of walking the entire integration journey.

"As a result of a lot of work done by colleagues in the customs directorate, EAC is now implementing a single customs territory, which means goods are cleared only once at the entry point. This has resulted in reduction of the period taken to clear goods from over 20 days to three or four in the central corridor; and from 21 days to four days for Mombasa to Kampala; 18 days to six for Mombasa to Kigali," Mfumukeko noted.

This was contained in Mfumukeko's speech read by the EAC senior public relations officer, Simon Owaka.

Out of the 15 borders earmarked as One-Stop Border Posts (OSBPs), Mfumukeko said 11 have been completed and 10 were operational. He pledged continued facilitation of journalists with information regarding the EAC integration.

Mfumukeko replaced Amb. Dr. Richard Sezibera in April.

While opening the workshop, Betty Maina, the principal secretary in Kenya's Ministry of EAC Affairs, said since its revival in early 2000, the community has registered several benefits.

She cited harmonisation of intra-regional trade and removing roadblocks, using national identity cards to travel across borders and abolition of the work permits.

However, most of these developments are yet to be operationalised by Burundi and Tanzania. Maina said EAC is looking forward to actively engage reporters with a view of enhancing EAC issues among the citizens of the member states. However, media experts challenged the EAC secretariat to become more proactive in media engagement if the community is to become a global force to reckon with.

Dr. Christopher Kayumba, a media don and consultant from the University of Rwanda, noted: "Media coverage of EAC issues is event-based, mainly revolving around the