

EABC will

The new executive director and chief executive of the East African Business Council spoke to **Luke Anami** on his plans for the organisation.

Q&A

John Bosco Kalisa

What is your first major assignment as the EABC chief executive officer?

My first major assignment is to review the East Africa Business Council strategic plan to ensure it is well aligned with the needs and aspirations of its members.

The second priority will be to engage our strategic partners — such as East African Community secretariat, the East African Legislative Assembly, EAC partner states, private sector led apex organisations and donors — so as to understand their strategic priorities and how we can work together to strengthen the private sector in the region.

Third priority is to strengthen the EABC National focal points in order to ensure that they are able to provide the required services to our members in the respective countries.

The fourth one is to revive and strengthen our Technical Working Group with EAC secretariat to enable us to have structured engagements with governments and CEOs in the region.

The last but not least is to prepare fundraising strategy and mobilise funds to support our members in building resilience and recovery from the effects of Covid-19.

EABC has held a number of forums calling for intra-trade among the EAC partner states. What plans has the EABC put in place to increase intra trade among the EAC partner states?

It is true that intra-regional trade has been declining and this is largely due to the prevalence of several non-tariff barriers and technical barriers to trade. The EABC has put in place an advocacy policy and strategy to enable it to engage with the partner states to remove these Non-tariff barriers (NTBs) that hinder intra-regional trade. EABC has also established a technical working group with EAC Secretariat where there will be constant dialogue to remove those emerging new NTBs.

Non-tariff barriers are a threat to the private sector within the region. What are some of the methods you plan to

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mobilise funds to support members recover from Covid

employ to reduce the NTBs?

As mentioned before, constant engagements with government officials coupled with legal clinics and strong advocacy anchored on qualitative and quantitative research will be some of the tools I will deploy to remove the NTBs.

The EAC is yet to agree on the fourth band of the Common External Tariff (CET). What does the private sector in the region want? A 32 percent or a 35 percent as the fourth band and why?

Currently, there are on-going discussions which are likely to be concluded soon in terms of tariff bands — whether it is 30 percent or 35 percent, what is critical is the appropriate band that would promote regional value chain and spur industrialisation. I think the negotiators/crafters are looking at the appropriate band that takes that into consideration.

What efforts have/ will you put in place to ensure the EAC partner states adopt mutual recognition of the Covid-free certificate, besides regional and co-ordinated approach to deal with Covid-19 pandemic?

EAC partner states have done extremely well in putting in place appropriate measures, guidelines and protocols that ensure essential goods and services

continue to move across borders.

Efforts are being made by our head of states in collaboration with our development partners to ensure enough vaccines are procured and everyone is vaccinated. The discussions are also ongoing to harmonise fees and charges with the view to adopt a regional Covid-19 free certificate.

In all these initiatives the EABC is consulted and provides input in terms of what would be appropriate and feasible for the region.

The EAC third pillar, the Monetary Union, is yet to take effect. What measures does the EABC propose to ensure a monetary institute takes off on July 1 as envisaged by the EAC?

The integration is a gradual process and it is always prudent to have proper consultation and engagement before you move from one stage to another. Positive strides have already been made in harmonising macro-economic indicators and convergence criteria have been agreed.

I am sure the new secretary-general will fast-track some of those areas and commitments.

EAC has delayed in taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA



EXPERIENCE

John Bosco Kalisa, who officially assumed office on June 18, succeeds Peter Mathuki who is now the Secretary-General of the East African Community.

Mr Kalisa is an economist, an expert in international trade policy and law, taxation, commerce and economics having studied at leading universities in Pretoria, South Africa and Kigali, Rwanda.

He previously worked with TradeMark East Africa as the country director of South Sudan, promoting private sector development and competitiveness.

He has also worked with the Rwanda Private Sector Federation and the Rwanda Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.

market. What plans do you intend to put in place to ensure all EAC partner states ratify the AfCFTA agreement?

I don't agree that EAC has lost the opportunity; EAC is ahead of other RECs in terms of ratification of the agreement as well as putting in place a strategy to drive the AfCFTA.

In this strategy the private sector is expected to play a critical role in the implementation of the AfCFTA.

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