The Director in the State Department for East African Community Affairs, Musa Okwemba, addressing stakeholders at Busia Vocational Training Centre grounds.

Busia Jumuiya Market set to boost cross-border trade

BY SALOME ALWANDA AND RODGERS OMONDI (KNA)

Preparations for the establishment of the Busia Jumuiya Cross-Border Market are at an advanced stage, with the national government expressing confidence that the facility will transform Busia into a regional commercial hub and boost cross-border trade within the East African Community (EAC).

The announcement was made during a sensitisation forum for cross-border traders on the EAC trade regime held in Busia.

In a speech delivered on her behalf by the Director in the State Department for EAC, Musa Okwemba, Principal Secretary for East African Community Affairs Dr Carolyne Karugu said the government was implementing a directive to establish Jumuiya markets at Kenya's border points to facilitate trade among EAC member states.

"I am pleased to note that preparations for the commencement of the Busia Jumuiya Cross-Border Market are at an advanced stage. This project will significantly transform Busia into a regional commercial hub. The Busia Jumuiya Market will serve as the pilot centre.

These markets will support MSMEs to undertake cross-border trade in modern and well-equipped facilities," the statement read.

"The deployed officers are assisting in coordinating implementation of EAC commitments, facilitating resolution of cross-border trade challenges, improving inter-agency coordination, and ensuring businesses benefit fully from regional integration," she said.

Dr. Karugu further highlighted several trade facilitation instruments developed by the EAC to ease cross-border business for traders.

Among them are the EAC Simplified Guide for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which provides practical information on import and export procedures, customs requirements, duties and taxes, border procedures, and available support services.

She also cited the EAC Simplified Trade Regime (STR), the annual EAC MSMEs Trade Fair, One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs), and ongoing efforts to eliminate non-tariff trade barriers across the region.

Busia County Executive Committee Member for Trade, Olekachuna Omuse, welcomed the sensitization forum, saying it would help traders better understand the opportunities available under the simplified trade regime while encouraging the use of official border crossing points.

"We need to reduce the porous borders by enabling our traders to understand the Simplified Trade Regime, which will encourage them to embrace official crossing points rather than porous borders. This will be achieved through capacity building. There is also a need to establish an information centre at the border so that all traders receive the same information, reducing misinformation that often causes unnecessary suffering while conducting business in neighbouring countries," he said.

> "I am pleased to note that preparations for the commencement of the Busia Jumuiya Market are at an advanced stage.

Omuse also highlighted ongoing investments aimed at promoting value addition and expanding trade in Busia County.

"We are among the 12 counties selected to host an Export Processing Zone and the County Aggregation and Industrial Park (CAIP). These projects will promote consumption of locally produced goods through value addition. The projects are about 90 per cent complete through investments by both the county and national governments. We need our traders to prepare themselves so they can benefit from government funding and opportunities in value addition," he added.

Despite welcoming the government's initiatives, traders used the forum to raise concerns over challenges that continue to affect cross-border trade.

Kenya International Freight and Warehousing Association (KIFWA) Busia Liaison Office Secretary General, Peter Ojera, said inadequate infrastructure and congestion at the Busia One Stop Border Post have increased the cost of doing business.