

The *hidden Covid hand* that cut **cargo clearance period**

KRA has come up with the Integrated Customs Management System that is set for full roll out on June 30.

By Philip Mwakio
Pmwakio@standardmedia.co.ke

When the coronavirus pandemic struck, the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) was left with a huge dilemma: how to reduce paper work needed for cargo clearance, and while at it, shorten the clearance period.

Such a move was imperative because of pandemic transmission control measures that discouraged physical interactions.

After days of pondering on a solution, KRA came up with the Integrated Customs Management System (iCMS) that is set for a full roll out on June 30.

The system has reduced cargo clearance period from 24 hours to just under 10 minutes, according to players in the logistics sector.

Silvester Kututa, the Chairman of Express Shipping Line (ESL), one of the firms that has been piloting bulk cargo sea release module, said in an interview that the fast-tracking of automation of customs clearance processes is timely.

The system also allows clearance of goods before vessels come ashore, ena-

bling importers and clearing agents to deliver cargo immediately they are discharged at the points of entry.

"So far, we have lodged about 112 manifests (vessels) through KRA iCMS portal successfully," Kututa said.

Former acting Commissioner of Customs and Border Control Pamela Ahago said in an earlier interview the need to enhance efficiency in cargo clearance processes prompted KRA to develop an integrated system with friendly interactive capabilities to eliminate redundancy and automate both the manual and semi-annual processes.

She explained that vessel documentation time has come down from 48 hours to 24 hours. The new KRA system replaces the over a decade old Simba system, which had some serious technological shortcomings.

Ms Ahago also said the new system has filled the security gaps that had been experienced in Simba system.

iCMS was first launched in March 2019 at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA). It has since been adopted at Moi and Eldoret international airports.

Of importance was its implementation at the Port of Mombasa in November last year where bulk cargo especially motor vehicles are now being cleared.

So far, KRA figures show some 21 government agencies have been integrated



Containers lay at the port of Mombasa awaiting clearance. Kenya Revenue Authority's automation plans have paid off with cargo clearance time now being shorter than the pre-Covid period. [PHOTO BY GIDEON MAUNDU/STANDARD].

into the iCMS.

Kenya TradeNet System, operated by KenTrade, the online cargo clearance platform, is also now fully integrated to the iCMS and has now registered over 12,500 system users and 35 Partner Government Agencies (PGA).

The new system, according to Kututa has increased transparency since importers and exporters can now track the flow of their goods and identify bottlenecks as one can track and see the choke points.

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