

NEW FIRM TO ISSUE DRIVING PERMITS UNVEILED

By Faridah Kulabako

Effective December 1, Ugandans applying for driving licences will do so through a new company, the Uganda Security Printing Company (USPC).

This follows the signing of a contract between the works ministry and USPC at the Ministry of Works offices in Kampala on Thursday.

USPC takes over from Face Technologies, which has been providing the service on behalf of government since 2003.

Speaking during the signing ceremony, the works and transport ministry permanent secretary, Bageya Waiswa, challenged the new service provider to provide a better system that will reduce the turnaround time of issuing a driving licence from the current one hour to about 30 minutes.

"You are taking over at a time when the issuance of driving licences is one of the best services in the country, receiving tremendous reviews. Our expectations is that you take this service to the next level, way above where it is, in line with the Service Level Agreement," he said.

Waiswa said that while the contract takes immediate effect, the issuance of driving licences commences on December 1, 2020.

To ensure a successful launch on December 1, Waiswa said the ministry, together with USPC, will immediately undertake several activities,



Bageya Waiswa (left) the ministry of Transport and works permanent secretary after signing the contract

including pre-inspection of the hardware and do a complete data migration from the Uganda Computerized Driving Permit (UCDP) to UDLS.

It will also undertake a final user acceptance testing of the new software, card testing at an accredited ISO laboratory, gazette the new driving licence, recruit staff, train and sensitize people and undertake a decommissioning process with Face Technologies for all the driving licence stations.

Bageya assured the public everything would be as planned.

The director of transport at the works ministry, Benon Kajuna, also alluded to the need to maintain the same level of standards as Face Technologies.

"The moment service

provision deteriorates, Ugandans will ask for value for money," he said.

Kajuna explained that they are now going to appoint a contract management team as required by the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act, to work with USPC to ensure that each clause in the contract is beneficial to Ugandans.

He added that they will also have a service delivery charter to ensure that what is offered to Ugandans is up to standard.

NEW SYSTEM

The USPC managing director, George Mugerwa, pledged to focus on four critical principals, including ensuring the provision of high quality services in terms of processes and product, transparency, be customer-centred and ensure

that they work with a strong team of all stakeholders to achieve intended objectives.

"Our predecessor has set a bar high but we will ensure that we do not perform below that. We shall work towards improving services," Mugerwa said.

According to Mugerwa, USPC will come up with a totally new system and new product with highly enhanced security features that will make it hard for one to forge a driving permit.

Waiswa affirmed this, saying that he looked at the sample card design during negotiations and proved that it is ISO compliant and can be used in EAC, SADC, COMESA regions, among others.

Additionally, Mugerwa said the driving card is strong,

» USPC was established in 2018, spear headed by government-owned Uganda Printing and Publishing Corporation, in a joint venture with Veridos, a German company. Veridos is credited for having the most secure enrolment and personalised systems

with seven layers made from polycarbonate and that their new system is faster compared to what is being used and will reduce the turnaround time to 45 minutes.

Mugerwa said it has been agreed that by November 30, the Face Technologies system would have been cleared so that USPC starts working on December 1.

He explained that whichever permit would not have been processed by November 30, will automatically transit into the new system.

BACKGROUND

The Government took a decision in October last year not to renew the licence of Face Technologies, which ended in May this year, but agreed to grant it a transitional contract to enable it handover to the new firm.

Face Technologies, whose first contract was awarded in 2003 and was supposed to last

only two years, was extended for another 15 years to 2020 by the then works minister John Byabagambi, saying the ministry was facing a number of challenges at the time.

Despite being a private company, the government continued to offer financial support to enhance the services of Face Technologies.

Eng. Byabagambi said the company had been operating at a loss because the collection it gets from the fees is less than 50% of government projections.

The company was also paying high rental charges, estimated at up to sh74m per month.

USPC offices, on the other hand, will be located at the Uganda Railways Corporation Station Building.

The firm is said to have partnered with Veridos, a Germany company, to produce the permits.

Antibiotics resistance now a grave threat to health - experts

By Carol Kasujja

Health experts have warned that if nothing is done, our health security is at stake because of antibiotics misuse. From being miracle lifesavers, antibiotics are becoming ineffective against resistant infections, which can affect anyone of any age, in any country.

Antibiotics or antimicrobials are drugs that are used to treat diseases caused by germs, such as bacteria, viruses and parasites.

Antibiotics resistance occurs when bacteria become resistant to the active ingredients in these medicines. These resistant germs may infect humans and animals, making infections such as, urinary tract infections, septic wounds, sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis and gonorrhoea harder to treat.

Speaking to Saturday Vision, Dr Noel Mategyero Aine, a principal regulatory officer, international affairs at the National Drug Authority (NDA), acknowledged that the problem is growing and getting worse in Uganda.

"The reasons for the rising antibiotics resistance include over-prescribing, misuse by patients who do not follow the advice of healthcare professionals, overuse in farming, poor infection control, among others. For most farmers, when their animals are sick, they follow a trial-and-error approach without visiting a veterinary doctor or taking samples to the laboratory," Dr Mategyero said.

In livestock, Dr Mategyero noted that the bacteria can remain on meat and if it is not handled or cooked properly, the bacteria can spread to humans.

HEADING FOR THE WORST
Currently, it is estimated that 700,000 people world wide die of resistant infections every year and without aggressive action to combat the problem, the number will rise to 10 million lives a year by 2050.

To combat the misuse of antibiotics, Makerere University, in collaboration with NDA, launched an antimicrobial resistance app that will help in monitoring and regulating antibiotics consumption.

During an interview, Dr Lawrence Mugisha, the principal investigator in the research project, titled Developing a monitoring system for quantifying and mapping antimicrobials used in

livestock farming in Uganda, said antibiotics resistance is one of the top three challenges faced by mankind today, after climate change and terrorism.

"We need to combat the misuse of antimicrobials, which is fuelling drug resistance and allowing long-treatable diseases to become killers. We need to understand what antimicrobials are consumed to curb the spread of drug resistance," Dr Mugisha, who is also an associate professor in the department of wildlife and aquatic animal resources at the college of veterinary medicine, Makerere University, said.

"Through surveillance, the country will be able to detect the emergence of antibiotics resistance and collect data on prevalence, which is necessary to guide patient treatment, identify populations at risk, inform policy

development and assess the impact of interventions," Dr Mugisha added.

While launching the app, Prof Barnabas Nawangwe, the vice-chancellor, said the data which will be collected by the app will be used to inform the choice and implementation of antibiotics stewardship interventions at the national level, with the aim of conserving and sustaining effectiveness of existing and new antibiotics agents.

"The app will be able to capture importation, sales and purchase data in real time and display it on IT dashboard in different usage formats accessible to regulators, veterinary drug importers and distributors and farmers," Prof Nawangwe said.

To avoid drug resistance, the public was advised to seek advice from a health professional before taking antibiotics.