



## Highlights of the Regional Policy Dialogue on Agricultural and Trade Policy Reforms in Eastern and Central Africa

**Dear esteemed stakeholders,**

Enabling policy environment, functional markets and transformative institutions is one of ASARECA's key thematic areas. The thematic area aims at supporting and advocating for establishment of: (i) a transformative enabling policy and regulatory environment; (ii) functional and structured regional input and output markets; and (iii) transformative regional institutions and institutional arrangements.

ECA countries are at varying levels of agricultural and trade policy formulation. While some countries have made commendable progress in agricultural and trade policy formulation, others continue to struggle with the same. Cross border trade in agricultural commodities within Africa also remains low.

Unfortunately, there is scanty public information on agricultural and trade policy formulation and related challenges within ECA as well as up-to-date information on barriers to cross border trade in agricultural commodities. This complicates policy harmonization efforts geared towards agricultural sector transformation and improving cross border trade in agricultural commodities and inputs within ECA. The situation further frustrates efforts towards achieving the African Continental Free Trade Area.

It is against this background that ASARECA organized the regional policy dialogue on agricultural and trade policy reforms within ECA.

**Dr. Enock Warinda**

**Executive Director-ASARECA**



---

Overall, it was noted that political instability; overlapping memberships to Regional Economic blocs; uncoordinated macro-economic policies; poor compliance to international standards (SPS) for agricultural products cut across member states.



### **Highlights of discussion during the Regional Policy Dialogue on Agricultural and Trade Policy Reforms in Eastern and Central Africa**

#### **About the Policy Dialogue**

The Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) held a three-day Regional Policy Dialogue on Agricultural and Trade Policy Reforms in Eastern and Central Africa (ECA) from 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2021 in Entebbe, Uganda.

#### **ASARECA in the policy arena**

ASARECA is a not-for-profit sub-regional organization of the National Agriculture Research Systems of fourteen countries namely: Burundi, Cameroun, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Kenya, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. ASARECA is mandated to coordinate and convene human, physical, financial and institutional capital to implement Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D) initiatives in Eastern and Central Africa (ECA).

Enabling policy environment, functional markets and transformative institutions is one of ASARECA's key thematic areas. The thematic area aims at supporting and advocating for establishment of: (i) a transformative enabling policy and regulatory environment; (ii) functional and structured regional input and output markets; and (iii) transformative regional institutions and

---

institutional arrangements.

ECA countries are at varying levels of agricultural and trade policy formulation. While some countries have made commendable progress in agricultural and trade policy formulation, others continue to struggle with the same. Cross border trade in agricultural commodities within Africa also remains low.

Unfortunately, there is scanty public information on agricultural and trade policy formulation and related challenges within ECA as well as up-to-date information on barriers to cross border trade in agricultural commodities. This complicates policy harmonization efforts geared towards agricultural sector transformation and improving cross border trade in agricultural commodities and inputs within ECA. The situation further frustrates efforts towards achieving the African Continental Free Trade Area. It is against this background that ASARECA organized the regional policy dialogue on agricultural and trade policy reforms within ECA.

### **The dialogue in the lens of the CAADP-XP4 Programme**

The dialogue was aimed at discussing agricultural and trade policy reforms in the sub-region. It was supported through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme CAADP ex-pillar IV (CAADP-XP4) Programme. The CAADP-XP4 Programme is funded by the European Union (EU) and managed by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The Programme directly contributes to Pillar 2 of the EU Development Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture (DeSIRA) initiative aimed at spurring a Science-led and Climate-Relevant Agricultural Transformation in Africa through supporting organizations in charge of the governance of research at national and regional levels to contribute effectively to food and nutrition security, economic development and climate mitigation.

### **Participants**

Participants at the dialogue were drawn from agricultural and trade policy makers from ASARECA member states. The included the private sector; farmers' organizations; youth groups and policy makers from the Ministries of Agriculture; National Agricultural Research Institutes; Ministries of Trade; National Revenue Authorities; National Bureau of Standards; the African Union Commission; and the Regional Economic Communities (EAC, COMESA, IGAD and ECCAS).

### **Issues discussed**

Through a combination of presentations, panel discussions, plenary sessions and Q&A sessions, the participants specifically discussed:

1. Recent and ongoing agricultural policy reforms within ASARECA member states, related challenges and possible solutions.
2. Recent and ongoing trade policy reforms with implications for trade in agricultural commodities and inputs in ECA.
3. Mechanisms to address barriers to cross border trade in agricultural commodities and inputs in ECA.

All these deliberations were aimed at enhancing the capacity of ASARECA member states to comply with quality standards for cross border trade in agricultural inputs and commodities.

Overall, it was noted that political instability; overlapping memberships to Regional Economic blocs; uncoordinated macro-economic policies; poor compliance to international standards (SPS) for agricultural products cut across member states. It was agreed that to solve this, there is need to review and harmonize regional trade policies and standards; harmonize certification and regulations for seed to be adopted by all member states; strengthen customs administration procedures to facilitate cross border trade; and put in place programs and measures to eliminate trade barriers and facilitate free movement of goods and services.

---



### Key highlight on agricultural policy reforms focusing on challenges and possible solutions

#### The dialogue took note of the following:

1. Only one country in the sub-region (Rwanda) is on track in implementing the 10% budget allocation to agriculture. There is need therefore other countries to benchmark on what Rwanda is doing right. There also need for a policy on how to generate the 10% of the national budget allocation to agriculture. Policy reforms need to be accompanied with resource mobilization. ASARECA should keep highlighting to the Council of Patron Ministers the need to honour their commitments to the Malabo Declaration.
  2. In addition, ASARECA should keenly follow through the tracking of progress of countries towards achieving the CAADP and SDG2 of ending hunger by 2030.
  3. ECA countries are at different levels of reforms and implementation. There is need therefore to prioritise and focus on policies that are faster to draft, approve and implement. It was agreed that one of the priorities would be harmonising policies and standards to get countries to the same level.
  4. Policies should be used as a tool to achieve the Malabo targets for accelerated agricultural transformation.
  5. There is need to harmonise strategies of RECs to the extent possible, (COMESA, IGAD, AU, EAC) to avoid duplicity. The similarities and differences between these bloc regional agreements should be clearly outlined. Countries like Tanzania which belong to more than one economic bloc should examine the effect of being a member of more than one REC.
  6. There is need for ASARECA to support its member states to develop implementation strategies for the country policies/laws. This could entail identifying and making available policy experts to support weaker countries in designing key laws.
  7. The challenges of food security, quality control, and standards are cross-cutting. Standards need to be implemented uniformly at farm level in all member countries.
  8. Policies should be designed to attract the right investment by the public and private sectors.
  9. Most ASARECA countries have weak farmer organizations which cannot champion for policy reforms. The East African Farmers Federation should up the game of advocating for the farmers.
  10. Farmers face the challenges of compliance to standards and SPS; third party risks; covid-19 restrictions; politically
-

motivated bans on movement of goods; lack of statistics for production of goods; lack of contracts; high cost and lack of access to a certified warehouse; limited access to finance; lack of insurance; price control by states; unregulated border control on imports of agricultural products; thefts of high value crops e.g. coffee/avocado.

11. Inadequate access to information by smallholder farmers. There is need to simplify quality standards for farmers and consolidate market information. Standards need to be packaged in a way that farmers understand/consume. Farmers need information on available markets and bilateral agreements for supply of given commodities and be involved through their organisations in decisions affecting their work.
12. Policy reform should target increasing the use of agriculture mechanization, CSA approaches, fertilizers, and adoption of new agriculture technologies.
13. Policy reforms are needed to encourage participation of the middle class and professionals into agriculture. A policy backed with incentives to attract the middle-class should be put in place.
14. As regards financing agriculture, there is a cross cutting absence of agriculture banks, which could contribute to reduced imported agricultural products.
15. ECA countries have different laws on ownership of land, which makes investments in agriculture by nationals as well as foreigners a challenge.
16. In oil exporting countries like Republic of the Congo, where investments are focused on oil production, sectors like agriculture and fish are acutely disadvantaged. There is need for affirmative action to fast track investments in Agriculture.
17. There is need to enhance the participation of the middle-class and attract professionals in formal employment into doing agriculture as a business because they have the potential to transform the economy. A policy and subsidies or incentives to attract these middle-class can be put in place.
18. There is need to design real and practicable modalities for mainstreaming youth into agriculture, especially agri-business. Through value chains, the youth might actually get motivated to practice farming.
19. ASARECA should convene member countries to align their investment priorities to the 15 Action areas identified at the UN Food systems summit 2021 and sync with alignments currently taking shape in donor institutions.
20. ASARECA needs to develop profiles for the different products in the member countries towards standardisation and traceability.
21. IP rights need to be harmonized to enable the innovators to benefit from their work.



## Highlights on Trade Policy Reforms & Mechanisms for Addressing Barriers to Cross Border Trade in Agricultural Commodities in ECA

### The dialogue took note of the following:

1. Regarding the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), all countries in Africa except Eritrea have signed the agreement. 38 out of 54 countries have deposited their ratification instruments with the AU Commission secretariat.
2. Countries that have signed into AfCFTA can export to EAC (customs union using one common external tariff) and COMESA (free trade area), the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite and Free Trade Area (FTA). This is expected to boost industrialization, transfer of technologies, free movement of people and elimination of non-trade barriers. There is need to sensitise stakeholders, especially the business community and customs officials to understand the AfCFTA rules of origin and how to implement it before implementation of the agreement starts. There is also need to follow the free trade agreement with removal of visa restrictions on the continent.
3. While more research needs to continue on the benefits and losses from AfCFTA, least developed countries need to design investment policies to attract investors, industrialize, boost production and value addition to benefit from the free trade area.
4. There is need to harmonize and subsidise agricultural inputs, including irrigation equipment, cold storage facilities, and packaging materials to encourage movement of agricultural goods across borders.
5. The many sanctions and political instability in Eritrea has hindered the country from signing into various RECs except COMESA. Eritrea needs to engage AU to lobby the international community to lift sanctions that hinder trade.
6. Governments need to increase on the facilitation for extension workers to enable them effectively monitor the quality of agricultural products and proliferation of agrochemicals.
7. Across countries, there is lack of information needed to make investment decisions such as on the number of smallholder farmers. This calls for a central repository for data for use by multi-stakeholders. Relatedly, there is need for aggregation of farmers into cooperatives to target larger markets at regional level.
8. Poor nations like South Sudan face a very high cost of production of crop seeds. There need therefore for partnerships with companies in the region.
9. There is need to adopt digitization to cut down on corruption and make the customs clearance process shorter, reduce loss of documents.



## Highlights on Compliance to Quality Standards for Cross Border Trade in Agricultural Inputs and Commodities

### The dialogue took note of the following:

1. There is strong cross border trade of livestock between IGAD countries and the centre of excellence "IGAD Centre for Pastoral Areas and Livestock Development (ICPALD)" set up in Nairobi to facilitate trade.
2. There's need to simplify the standards to ease understanding by users. Over 500 standards have been harmonized in the EAC to facilitate trade.
3. There is need to adopt use of ICT such as the e-single window system to automate processes to make them fast and transparent.
4. Mutual recognition agreements with standard bodies such as the one for Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda are important in quickening the clearing process.
5. Incentives for informal trades to transition to semi-formal trades should be introduced through the use of generic TIN numbers at customs.
6. There is no SPS protocol for agricultural products in place in ECA. For example, Kenya requires phytosanitary certification for maize, which is not usually issued. When the commodities are tested, high aflatoxin levels are seen and goods are rejected. ECA should hasten the process to harmonize the Standard Operating Procedures for standardizing phytosanitary testing procedures.
7. EAC harmonized fertilizer policy and fertilizer bill were validated in September 2020 and are under consideration by EAC policy organs.
8. EAC harmonized pesticide management guidelines are in place to facilitate pesticide trade mutual recognition procedures for veterinary products.
9. The EAC has harmonized standards for agricultural commodities (Catalogue of EA standards 2020) contains over 50 standards for quality of the products. 5ppp aflatoxin 1 levels for cereals and grains is the standards for the EAC and 10pppp for aflatoxin 2. Nine policy briefs are in place to guide. At least 12 aflatoxin testing kits will be procured and put at each one border post in EAC. Harmonized SOPs for testing for aflatoxins are in place for inspecting cereals at the different border posts Currently for maize, beans and rice.
10. A regional strategy for risk reduction of highly hazardous pesticides is being developed.
11. Likewise, the Pest Risk Analysis (PRAs) for seven priority crops have been developed.



*Copyright © \*2019\*ASARECA\*, All rights reserved.*

Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa  
(ASARECA)

Plot 5, Mpigi Road | P. O. Box 765, Entebbe, Uganda

Tel: +256 414 320 556, +256 414 321 885

Email: [newsletter@asareca.org](mailto:newsletter@asareca.org)/Website: [www.asareca.org](http://www.asareca.org)

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

*Disclaimer. Reasonable care has been taken to ensure that the information provided in ASARECA Newsletter is accurate. However, ASARECA does not vouch for the accuracy of information*

*provided on websites to which the Newsletter links. Opinions shared on external sites and ASARECA Newsletter as well as articles, editorials, news, comments and reviews, reflect the individual views of the authors and should not be construed to be those of ASARECA or its partners.*

\*|IF:REWARDS|\* \*|HTML:REWARDS|\* \*|END:IF|\*