

1<sup>st</sup> April 2020

Dear EAGC Members,

**UPDATE ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, ITS EFFECTS ON THE GRAIN SECTOR AND MEASURES BY EAGC TO FACILITATE CONTINUED TRADE IN GRAINS**

Greetings from the Secretariat.

This bulletin is an update on the EAGC Communique on the Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Grain Sector shared on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020, which is accessible [here](#).

In the past week, the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has unfortunately continued to gather steam in ten EAGC Mandate countries in Eastern Africa. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, all Eastern Africa countries have recorded increases in new infections with 2 fatalities recorded, 1 each in Tanzania and Kenya.

The grain sector has also come into sharp focus for food security reasons as governments across the region enforce stricter social distancing and quarantine measures, which have subsequently jeopardized food supply chains for processors and the purchasing power of millions of low-income households in urban and peri-urban centers who rely on a daily wage for their sustenance.

This update thus covers the following:

- A. New measures taken by governments in Eastern Africa
- B. Updates on cross-border trade situation
- C. Changes to EAGC services and interventions

**A. New Measures taken by Governments in Eastern Africa**

Since our last update, new measures have been instituted by governments across East Africa to combat the pandemic. Below are highlights on these measures focusing on those that directly or indirectly affect the grain value chain:

**East African Community Common Position of COVID-19 response**

EAC Partner States are coordinating their response of the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate its impact on the Community. In their Joint Statement dated 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Ministers responsible for Health in EAC Partner States provided the following directive with respect to movement of goods and persons:

- a) All Partner States to continue implementing mandatory quarantine for 14 days for all travellers to the region, and avoid imported cases by implementing strict screening procedures at all border points;

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- b) All Partner States to implement 100% exit and entry screenings by applying the multilayer mechanism to avoid some loopholes, such as transit Passengers;
- c) All Partner States to establish a surveillance system to monitor crew health and enable contact-tracing;
- d) All Partner States to facilitate free movements of goods and services in the region;
- e) All Partner States to ensure that trucks / vehicles carrying goods:
  - i. have only 2 - 3 crew members per vehicle to facilitate smooth border crossing in the region;
  - ii. crew members are in good health, screened and if found be at high risk or positive for COVID-19 disease, the truck will be decontaminated before its allowed to continue to its final destination and the crew members will be quarantined for 14 days according to the set national guidelines;
  - iii. in the event that the crew are quarantined while in transit, truck owners / operators make necessary arrangements for backup crew to ensure that goods are delivered to the intended destination;
  - iv. truck drivers to declare their final destinations and are urged to stop only at designated points along the transport corridors so as to limit chances of spread of COVID-19 virus during transit;
  - v. the crew for cargo planes and vessels be determined by the specifications of the aircraft or ship and set international guidelines. The crew will be quarantined at a government designated hotel for the period of their stay;
- f) All Partner States to support local companies, to ensure the local production and availability of key consumables / products used in COVID -19 response including Hand sanitizers, medical products, soap, among others.

## Uganda

### New measures introduced in the past week include:

- A two-week lockdown in all urban centres with the exception being those working in essential services
- Allowed the non-agricultural gathering points to continue but with SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) put out by the Ministry of Health. Such are factories, hotels, large plantations, markets, taxi-parks, etc.
- Agricultural activities by farmers will not be subject to the new measures, meaning that they can continue unaffected.

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The measures communicated previously, such as closure of land borders for movement of persons, restrictions of all forms of public transport and strict limitations of pedestrian traffic. However, cross-border trade in goods is still permissible provided trucks and other cargo vehicles are accompanied by crews of not more than 3 persons.

### **Tanzania**

No new measures have been announced since our previous Communique on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The government continues to encourage social distancing and improved personal hygiene although tough restrictions on internal movement of people have not been instituted. Like other East African countries, Tanzania has instituted mandatory quarantine for all internal arrivals through all gazetted ports of entry.

From a trade perspective, cross-border trade in goods continues. However, trucks are required to have maximum 2-3 crew.

### **Kenya**

The major new measure introduced in Kenya is a night-time curfew between 1900hrs and 0500hrs with effect from 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020. This adds onto existing measures restricting public gatherings and mandatory quarantine of all international arrivals in government-designated facilities at their own cost.

From an agriculture perspective, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives has established a COVID-19 Government Coordination & Food Supply Working Group to help the Government of Kenya to develop strategies and guidelines that will ensure the general public continues to have access to safe and affordable food amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The Working Group includes EAGC, the Cereal Growers Association, the Cereal Millers Association, the Ministry of Health and the Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development.

### **Rwanda**

No new measures announced during the past week. Strict social distancing measures are being enforced including a 14-day lockdown, closure of Kigali International Airport and mandatory quarantine for international arrivals. Movement of people even between cities and districts remains highly restricted, but trade in goods remains permissible both domestically and across borders.

### **South Sudan**

South Sudan has not announced any new measures in the past week. Existing measures include closure of Juba International Airport except for emergency and cargo flights and restrictions on cross-border traffic with exception being cargo vehicles.

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## Ethiopia

The country's flag carrier, Ethiopian Airlines, expanded its list of suspended destinations to over 80 cities in 30 countries as the country attempts to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Flights to all EAC countries have been suspended until further notice.

Domestically, 4 regions, which are crucial for grain production and trade, these being Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) regions have suspended public transport and are restricting movement of people. Oromia, in which lies the capital Addis Ababa, is under a state of emergency.

The country has also closed all its land borders. Unlike EAC countries, it is not yet clear whether cross-border movement of goods is still permissible.

## Malawi

Despite no COVID-19 cases being reported in Malawi, the Government is already taking precautionary measures as it braces itself for a possible outbreak. These include restricting the number of passengers in public transport, which has unfortunately led to inflation of transport fares. There are also reports of suspension of passenger services to neighboring countries, although the degree of enforcement is yet to be determined. The Government is also encouraging social distancing and diligent personal hygiene measures although enforcement is less strict compared to some countries in East Africa.

From a trade perspective, cross-border trade in goods continues unaffected. In Lilongwe, the capital city, the City Council has scheduled market clean-ups and disinfection with effect from 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020 in an attempt to prevent COVID-19.

## Burundi, Zambia and DR Congo

For these countries, we will continue to monitor the situation in respect to grain trade facilitation and inform our members in the upcoming communiqués.

## B. Updates on cross-border trade situation

East African countries by and large remain open to cross-border trade as demonstrated by the Joint Statement by the EAC Ministers of Health. However, the COVID-19 situation has significantly constrained the speed at which such trade takes place, mostly because of disease control measures being instituted by EAC countries at their borders.

### Uganda/Kenya borders

Long queues have been observed at the borders. At Malaba border, the queue of trucks reached 26km with an estimated 1,040 trucks on Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020. These delays are caused by the screening process instituted at the border by Kenya.

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Furthermore, the night-time curfew in Kenya from 1900hrs to 0500hrs has reduced border operating times to 14 hours as opposed to 24 hours. With an average of only 23 trucks cleared per hour, thus equates to 322 trucks cleared per day at Malaba. The delays in clearing goods at the border is affecting operations of grain millers in Kenya who rely on imported commodities to keep their factories operational.

Flow of trucks into Uganda from Kenya is smoother with shorter queues reported. This is largely due to less screening of truck crews by Ugandan authorities hence faster clearing of trucks.

### **Kenya/Tanzania borders**

During the time of the year, the Namanga border is particularly crucial for cross-border trade in grains as it is the main gateway for grain imports from Tanzania destined for millers in Nairobi and Thika. Long queues of trucks have been reported particularly at Namanga border. All trucks crossing into Kenya are being escorted by Kenya Police; in doing so, trucks are held at the border in order to reach a critical number for the police escort. There are also reports of fumigation of truck cabins at Namanga border. However, such measures have not been observed at Tarakea-Oloitoktok borders.

### **Tanzania/Rwanda borders**

There are currently no restrictions for goods/trucks crossing between Tanzania and Rwanda at Rusumo border. However, trade in grains between the two countries at this point in time is relatively low because Rwanda has ample stocks of grains from its Season A harvest (January-February) while stocks are currently relatively low in Tanzania.

## **C. Changes to EAGC services and interventions**

The EAGC Secretariat continues to closely monitor developments in COVID-19 pandemic. During the past week, the Secretariat has re-arranged some of its services and interventions to comply with government directives on the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes include the following:

- i. Postponement of some training courses under the Grain Business Institute to minimize gathering of people in confined spaces.
- ii. More effort being directed towards trade facilitation for our Members while minimizing physical contact, making extensive use of telephone calls and internet-based communications.
- iii. Continued support to suppliers on grain transportation and logistics. We are working with reliable Shipping and Logistics Companies who are providing grain transportation and border clearance service.

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- iv. Working with financial institutions to avail trade finance solutions that will address the prevailing liquidity constraints affecting the grain suppliers as a result of COVID-19. Currently, we are offering out members with an inventory financing product under G-Soko collateral management.
- v. In our efforts to facilitating trade, EAGC is closely engaging with government bodies on a real-time basis. In Kenya, **EAGC has been appointed to the COVID-19 Coordination and Food Supply Working Group** to help ensure the least trade-restrictive measures are being implemented in order to ensure continued grain trade and secure food supplies.
- vi. Regular communication to Members on developments regarding the COVID-19 pandemic to inform the business decisions.
- vii. Continued monitoring of border situation in collaboration with other business member organizations in order to expedite and coordinate our responses to any challenges being encountered by our Members during cross-border grain trade.

With these measures, the **Secretariat has successfully facilitated maize deliveries from Tanzania to millers in Kenya in the past week, as well deliveries of green grams locally from farmers to processors within Kenya.**

**We thus continue to urge our Members to continue to make use of our trade facilitation services through our G-Soko and G-Hub systems for grains and inputs respectively to support their business operations during the current crisis. We further encourage our Members to bring to our attention any disruptions they experience in either domestic or cross-border trade through Secretariat contacts at the end of this Communique (Annex 1).**

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented health emergency for all countries and sectors in the world which will continue to severely disrupt businesses, food security and public health in our region. We encourage our Members, Stakeholders and Partners to remain calm, take appropriate measures to protect their health and safety, and work together through EAGC to address challenges that arise on an almost daily basis. The Secretariat continues to closely monitor developments to update Members and remains at your disposal for any support that you may require during difficult period.

**Thank you and God Bless you.**

**Gerald Makau Masila,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
EASTERN AFRICA GRAIN COUNCIL**

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**Annex 1: EAGC Contact Addresses for you to reach us for assistance**

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