

9th April 2020

Dear EAGC Members and Stakeholders,

WEEKLY UPDATE ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FOR THE GRAIN SECTOR IN EASTERN AFRICA

Greetings from the Secretariat.

This Communique forms our weekly update to EAGC Members and Stakeholders on developments in the grain sector in Eastern Africa in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Previous editions of the Communique, issued on 24th March and 1st April 2020 are accessible [here](#).

The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues to spread in Eastern Africa with Malawi and South Sudan announcing their first cases of the disease within their borders. The number of fatalities has also increased particularly in Kenya where 6 people have now succumbed to the disease.

As the situation becomes more precarious, some new measures have been introduced by governments which may impact movement of people of goods. On a positive note, there have been some positive developments in the past week with respect to cross-border movement of goods. This Communique thus provides updates on the following:

- A. New measures taken by governments in Eastern Africa
- B. Updates on cross-border trade situation
- C. Market Developments
- D. EAGC support to grain trade

A. New Measures taken by Governments in Eastern Africa

Regional COVID-19 response

There were no new regional measures instituted in the past week. All countries in the region have pledged to keep borders open for movement of goods. There is generally a concerted effort to maintain open borders as all countries recognize the value of trade in this difficult period.

Uganda

No new measures were introduced in the past week. A two-week lockdown in all urban centres introduced earlier is still in place. Essential services such as markets, factories and plantations remain open for business but are expected to operate in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures published by the Ministry of Health. Cross-border trade in goods is still permissible provided trucks and other cargo vehicles are accompanied by crews of not more than 3 persons.

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Tanzania

No new measures have been announced in the past week. The main control instituted by the Government is mandatory quarantine of persons arriving into the country. Beyond this, the Government is encouraging social distancing and improved personal hygiene but restrictions on movement of people have not been instituted. The relatively lax measures have raised concerns among some stakeholders but have so far worked with the country having much fewer cases than Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda.

From a trade perspective, cross-border trade in goods continues subject to screening measures for truck crews.

Kenya

Kenya is the most affected country in Eastern Africa with the highest number of cases and fatalities. As such, the Government has further tightened restrictions of movement of people within the country. On 6th April, the Government banned all movements **into and out of the Nairobi Metropolitan Area (Nairobi City and surrounding peri-urban areas such as Thika, Kiambu, Rongai, Ngong, Kitengela and Athi River) and the Counties of Mombasa, Kwale and Kilifi.** These areas have been essentially cut off from the rest of the country because almost all the cases of COVID-19 are localised in these locations; this measure is thus expected to prevent spread of the disease further upcountry. Movement **within** these confined areas is still permitted subject to the existing night-time curfew effective between 1900hrs and 0500hrs.

From an agriculture and food perspective, the Ministry of Agriculture has published general guidelines to County Governments for managing food supply chains amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (available [here](#)). These guidelines target farmers, traders and market vendors, and transporters of food produce. The Government Coordination & Food Supply Working Group – of which EAGC is a Member – is currently developing more detailed Standard Operating Procedures to guide County Governments on implementation of the guidelines.

Rwanda

The Government of Rwanda has extended the lockdown for a further 2 weeks until 19th April as cases of COVID-19 continue to increase. Noting the impact of the lockdown on food access particularly for the urban poor, Rwanda is the only country in Eastern Africa that has put in place a government-run social protection plan to deliver food to 20,000 vulnerable households. This is a very positive development that should improve the effectiveness of the lockdown while protecting food security of the urban poor who otherwise rely on earning a daily wage for their sustenance.

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South Sudan

No new measures have been announced in the country. 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.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia announced a nationwide State of Emergency on 8th April 2020 to curb the spread of COVID-19 following two fatalities attributed to the disease. It is not yet clear how this move will affect daily life in the country. On a positive note, however, it has been confirmed that the country's borders are open for cross-border movement of goods. Existing measures such as suspension of all flights, suspension of public transport in Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) regions - are still in place.

Malawi

The country reported its first cases of COVID-19 in the past week. The government has thus taken measures to enforce social distancing by banning all gatherings of more than 100 people (e.g. weddings and funerals, places of worship and political rallies) and closure of all schools. The military has been deployed to enforce such measures.

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 5th April 2020 to prevent COVID-19.

Burundi

Burundi also reported its first cases of COVID-19 in the past week. The government has put in place measures for screening and quarantining of travellers arriving in the country, while shops, offices and bus terminals have been instructed to put up facilities for handwashing. From a trade perspective, no major disruptions have been reported.

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 communiques.

B. Updates on cross-border trade situation

East African borders remain open for cross-border trade. While COVID-19-related measures have previously hampered cross-border trade, there are signs that the situation is gradually improving as bottlenecks at the borders are being eased.

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Uganda/Kenya borders

Significant improvements have been reported in Malaba and Busia borders. Long queues of trucks, which at one point reached 26km, have been more-less cleared. This transformation has been prompted by the Government of Kenya putting in place measures to ensure the borders operate for 24 hours a day, up from the previous 14 hours a day because of the night-time curfew. This improvement should drastically improve supply of food commodities from Uganda to Kenya with the latter being the biggest food importer in Eastern Africa.

Kenya/Tanzania borders

There is some improvement at Namanga border although there are still delays being reported. Clearing times at the border have now reduced to an average of 2-3 days compared to an average of 5 days' clearing time reported previously. The working hours for Customs on the Kenya side of the border have been extended by 1 hour to 20:00hrs from 19:00hrs because of the night-time curfew in Kenya. However, trucks entering Kenya are still being escorted by police.

Tanzania borders with Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia and Malawi

There are no major challenges being experienced at Kasumulu-Songwe (Tanzania-Malawi), Tunduma-Nakonde (Tanzania-Zambia), Rusumo (Tanzania-Rwanda) and Kabanga-Kobero (Tanzania-Burundi) borders. While COVID-19 screenings have somewhat increased time spent at the border, this has been negated by low cargo traffic to these countries caused by typical seasonal patterns (harvests in Burundi and Rwanda reducing need for imports of food from Tanzania) and low cargo volumes at the Port of Dar-es-Salaam which serves these inland countries. The net effect is a relatively smooth cross-border trade experience at this moment.

C. Market Developments for Food Commodities

Markets for staple foods such as maize and beans are moving seasonably as they are mostly stable or slightly declining. This is because the harvest of stocks for regions harvesting in the first quarter of the year, such as parts of Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, was already completed by the time COVID-19 cases first appeared in Eastern Africa, meaning that food supply has so far not been disrupted by the disease.

However, prices have generally been higher than 12 months ago, but this is most likely due to disruptions in harvest operations caused by unusual rainfall during the harvest period. This is having significant impact of quality of grains such as maize being delivered to millers with high levels of aflatoxin, moulding and moisture content reported by millers. In one case, a Miller in Mombasa rejected 100% of deliveries to their factory due to aflatoxin contamination. Consequently, supplies reaching millers are constrained particularly in Kenya, thus forcing upwards the price of foods such as maize flour.

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To ease supply concerns, the Government of Kenya has authorised importation of 4 million 90kg bags of maize (360,000 tonnes) from international markets before May. These imports will support expected imports from neighbouring Tanzania and Uganda during the second and third quarters of the year.

The Government of Tanzania has also pledged to main an open-border policy for grain trade despite the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a welcome development as it guarantees movement of food across the region and a market for farmers considering the country is a surplus producer of almost all staple food grains.

D. EAGC support to grain trade

The EAGC Secretariat continues to closely monitor developments in COVID-19 pandemic. The Council is currently implementing the following trade facilitation measures:

- i. Directing more efforts towards trade facilitation for our Members while minimizing physical contact, making extensive use of telephone calls and internet-based communications.
- ii. Supporting Members on grain transportation and logistics using pre-qualified service providers.
- iii. 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.
- iv. Regular communication to Members on developments regarding the COVID-19 pandemic to inform the business decisions.
- v. 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.

In the past week, EAGC has supported our two Members in Tanzania and Kenya to acquire state-of-the-art aflatoxin testing equipment worth approximately US\$ 11,000 to improve quality control as they aggregate and market grain commodities. At the same time, EAGC supported two farmer groups in Nandi County in Kenya to acquire 15.5 tonnes of DAP fertilizer from Yara® delivered on Tuesday in time for planting through our Grain Trade Business Hubs (G-Hubs), saving the two farmer groups approximately US\$ 800 in the process. With supply of inputs likely to be disrupted due to COVID-19, the G-Hubs will become increasingly important for farmers to secure farm inputs in good time and minimum costs.

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A consignment of fertilizer - acquired at discount through EAGC G-Hubs being delivered to farmers in Nandi County

Noting that many of our Members are likely to experience liquidity challenges during this period, EAGC calls our affected Members to contact the Secretariat through the contacts indicated below to discuss potential financial solutions to support their business operations. In recent weeks, EAGC has successfully supported Members to secure over US\$ 500,000 worth of short-term and low-cost credit facilities to support their cash-flows.

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).

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

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