

## 82% of NTBs in COMESA are Operational and Easy to Monitor

*But Behind-the-border type of NTBS are more complex.*

Source: News24, twitter.com



At least 82% of the reported Non-Tariff Barriers in the COMESA region are those imposed on imports and exports of goods and services and are largely operational by design. According to trade experts, these type of NTBs are easy to identify and monitor.

Thus, from an analytical perspective, the relatively high rate of resolution of NTB cases in COMESA, which is over 95%, does not necessarily imply that the mechanisms established to eliminate NTBs are effective. Rather it shows that mechanisms in place capture more of the operational as opposed to the behind-the-border types of NTBs.

The behind-the-border measures are mainly imposed internally and include domestic legislations covering health, technical, product, labor, environmental standards, internal taxes or charges, and domestic subsidies.

According to the COMESA Director of Trade, Dr Christopher Onyango, the latter category is much more complex and difficult to identify and have in recent times become major sources of NTBs.

He was speaking at the opening of the virtual 8th Meeting of the COMESA NTBs Focal Points which took place last week, 8 - 10 July 2020. Its objectives were to deliberate on the revised COMESA Non-Tariff Barriers regulations,

the 2nd draft of the Working Procedures on implementation of COMESA NTBs regulations and to consider the outstanding Intra-COMESA NTBs.

He said several strategies and mechanisms have so far been put in place to reduce the occurrences and eliminate NTBs since the establishment of COMESA, particularly following the advent of the FTA regime. However, the NTBs have remained prevalent and continue to constrain the growth and expansion of intra-COMESA trade and investments.

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In the COMESA region, some NTBs have remained unresolved for long, some dating back to 2000.

"In as much as willingness and commitment of parties involved may be critical, the effectiveness and capability of the mechanisms and institutional structures to resolving all types of NTBs require sustained review," Dr Onyango explained. "Regulations should take into account the nature, forms and categories of various non-tariff measures, domestic policies, laws and regulations and the diversity of economic sectors. But even more importantly, the regulations and procedures should be inclusive, taking into account small scale enterprises, youth and women as important players in the integration process."

Although all member States have established NTBs Focal Points, several countries are yet to formalize and operationalize their National Monitoring Committees. These are considered critical to the implementation of the regulations and elimination of NTBs, even most important is sharing experiences and developing capacities to identify, categorize and report them as they occur.

Dr Onyango underscored the importance of sustained capacity building and information sharing to strengthen the ability to capture emerging issues and finding lasting solutions to NTBs. Going forward, he said COMESA Secretariat will endeavor to elevate capacity building and research in the efforts to strengthen NTB mechanisms and effectively support their elimination from the region.

The meeting was attended delegates from by Burundi, Djibouti, D.R. Congo, Comoros, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

# COMESA Region has Increased Staple Crop Production



Source: www.cristova.com

Most countries in the COMESA region have recorded an above average yield in the production of staple foods for the 2019/2020 farming season, and this is expected to reduce hunger among the 560 million people.

According to COMESA Seed Expert Dr John Mukuka, the increase is due to the fact that 90% of the 80 million smallholder farmers involved in the production of staple foods in the Member States, now have access to affordable, quality and improved seed. However, the production of the same staple food crops for the coming season of 2020/21 is likely to drop due to the impact of COVID-19.

"It is estimated that agricultural production is likely to contract between 2.6% and up to 7% in the region due to COVID-19. This might result in increased prices of food (especially staples such as wheat, maize and rice) due to mainly disruptions to the agriculture and input supply chain," he said.

This data on staple food production has been collected from selected member countries under the COMESA Seed Harmonisation Implementation Plan (COMSHIP) in collaboration with the Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute (IAPRI) in Zambia and FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS).

Zambia produced 3.4 million Metric Tonnes (MT) of maize, representing 69% more than the 2018/19 season which was slightly above 2 million MT. In addition, the country recorded 20,000MT of sorghum, 35,000MT of rice,

45,000MT of millet, 50,000MT of sunflower and 300,000MT of soyabeans among others.

In Burundi, the 2019 aggregate cereal production was about 326 000 MT, similar to the 2018 output and about 10 percent above the average of the previous five years.

The 2019 cereal production in Egypt is forecast at 22 million MT, about the same as in 2018, but about 6 percent below average due to decline in rice production.

According to the data, Eswatini harvested an estimated 95 000 tonnes of maize in May 2019 which was 16 percent below the previous year's high level, but still 10 percent above the five year average.

In Ethiopia, harvesting of the 2019 main "Meher" season crops is well underway and production prospects are generally favourable. In western key producing areas of Benishangul Gumuz, western Amhara and western Oromiya regions, the June - September 2019 "Kiremt" rains were up to 30 percent above average, with a positive impact on yields.

In Madagascar, paddy yields are forecast to be below average in 2020 in the paddy producing districts in Anosy and Ihorombe, as a result of erratic rainfall and seasonal totals that have been below average, hindering crop development.

In Malawi, production of other cereal crops, mainly rice and sorghum, was also estimated at above average levels as favourable weather

conditions boosted the area planted and yields. Overall, cereal production in 2019 is estimated at 3.7 million tonnes, 12 percent above the five year average.

In Rwanda, the cereal production at about 733 000 tonnes, about 3 percent up from 2018 and 12 percent above the average of the previous five years.

In Mauritius, the production of paddy, the principal cereal produced in the country, increased on a yearly basis, mostly on account of favourable weather conditions that boosted yields. In addition, the yield of vegetables and fruits are estimated to be 35 percent above the level of the corresponding period in 2018.

In Tunisia, the preliminary forecasts for the 2019 cereal production point to a bumper cereal crop of almost 2.2 million MT, over 55 percent above the 2018 weather-stricken harvest and over 40 percent above the average. For the 2019 harvest, about 700,000 hectares were planted with wheat and 620,000 hectares with barley, compared to 620,000 and 525, 000 hectares, respectively, planted in 2018.

In Zimbabwe production of cereals in 2019 was below average level of 944,000 MT due to unfavorable weather conditions. To increase imports, the government lifted the ban on imports of Genetically Modified (GM) grains in December 2019, introducing a rule that provides for grains to be put into quarantine before being milled into flour.





# Phase II of Tripartite Capacity Building Programme Begins as AfDB Provides \$1.1m for Implementation

**C**OMESA Secretariat has received \$1.1 million funding from the African Development Fund (AfDB) for the implementation of the Tripartite Capacity Building Programme Phase II. The funds will support COMESA, East African Community (EAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and their Member States to operationalize the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA), a major milestone for Africa integration.

The programme has two key areas which includes improving the capacity to implement the TFTA agreement and improving transparency in trade to tackle non-tariff barriers.

Key outputs from the second phase will be the development of guidelines, procedures, regulations and manuals required to operationalize the Agreement in areas such as rules of origin and dispute settlement.

The programme will support the establishment of online databases for non-tariff measures in Tripartite Regional Member countries, building on the pilots under Phase 1. This is expected to



improve transparency in trade, speed up the resolution of non-tariff barriers (NTBs), deter arbitrary application of regulatory measures that hinder trade, and improve awareness of traders about legitimate regulatory requirements, which provides a foundation for them to improve their capacity for compliance.

The programme will also enhance awareness of traders and the business community on the market access opportunities available under the

Agreement.

Launched in 2015, the TFTA consolidates the markets of the three Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to address the challenge of fragmented markets and proliferation of non-tariff barriers, which inhibit cross border trade. Together, COMESA-EAC-SADC covers a USD1.3 trillion market representing 56% of Africa's Gross Domestic Product and approximately 740 million consumers in 29 countries.

## Study on the Sustainability of Trade Information Desk Underway

**T**he World Bank funded Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (GLTFP) has launched a three-months study to develop appropriate strategies of maintaining and sustaining the Trade Information Desk Offices (TIDOs) at the border points.

The objective is to enable the TIDOs to continue facilitating cross border trade beyond the timelines of the main project which ends in December 2021.

The study is expected to produce a comprehensive report detailing a proposed framework and options for sustainability of the TIDOs. This will include an indicative estimate of the maximum amount of money that small-scale cross-border traders may be willing to pay as fees for the TIDOs services at each border.

For each sustainability option recommended, a roadmap of concrete steps and responsible authorities will then be taken to COMESA Member States for validation through a regional

workshop before operationalizing the proposed solutions.

GLTFP Coordinator Mr. Thomas Barasa said the issue of sustainability of projects and programmes is important to COMESA and the World Bank.

"The Bank and the (COMESA) Secretariat would like to see the TIDOs continue operating way after the GLTFP has closed. This will ensure that small scale cross-border traders continue their trade without any disturbances," Mr Barasa added.

He said the study will be undertaken in a participatory manner involving all stakeholders using physical and modern ICT tools such as online meetings.

Being part of the wider World Bank Great Lakes Regional Initiative, the GLTFP aims at increasing formal small-scale cross border trade flows in the region, leading to high

revenue collection for governments at the targeted border posts.

One of the core activities of the project is the provision of information and sensitization support to cross border traders, especially, the small-scale category as well as the collection of data on small scale trade.

Through the TIDOs, desk information officers sensitize the traders and collect vital information on small scale cross border trade which would otherwise be missed by the officially designated border agencies like customs officers.

Presently, the TIDOs are operational at 12 selected borders in the three project countries. On the DR Congo-Uganda border are: Mahagi/Goli, Kasindi/Mpondwe and Bunagana/Bunagana. On the DRC-Rwanda borders are Goma/ Petite Barriere Rubavu, Bukavu/Rusizi and at the Kamanyola/ Bugarama border points respectively.



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