



**FACTSHEET**

# CROSS-BORDER AGROECOLOGICAL TRADE IN THE EAC

Why is Trade Still Complex for Small-Scale Traders?

## Key Barriers and Policy Actions Needed to Unlock Inclusive Regional Trade in East Africa

### Why this Matters

Cross-border trade plays a vital role in the East African Community (EAC), supporting food systems, livelihoods and regional markets.

#### Agriculture:

-  • Contributes **25–40%** of GDP across EAC Partner States
-  • Employs over **80%** of the population
-  • Accounts for approximately **65%** of intra-regional trade

Agroecological products including; **cereals, legumes, fruits and vegetables** are already traded across borders such as **Busia, Namanga, Rusumo and Mpondwe.**



**Key Issue:** However, small-scale traders and producers continue to face significant barriers when moving goods across borders.

## Trade Is Already Happening—At Scale

Evidence from EAC borders shows significant movement of agroecological products.

### Busia (Kenya–Uganda)

- **146.9** metric tons of maize traded
- **92.6** metric tons of beans
- **35** metric tons of sorghum
- One of the busiest borders:
  - **3,000+** people cross daily
  - **~900** vehicles daily

### Namanga–Tarakea (Kenya–Tanzania)

- **32,538** metric tons of avocados traded annually
- **41,310** metric tons of bananas traded annually

Small-scale traders, women and youth drive much of this trade.



## Shortcomings



### 1. Non-Harmonised Standards and Certification

Agroecological products lack uniform recognition across EAC countries.

This leads to repeated inspections and certification challenges.



### 2. Complex Customs and Border Procedures

Small-scale traders face:

- Lengthy inspections
- Documentation challenges

- Limited understanding of SPS requirements
- Occasional informal charges or delays

These disproportionately affect informal and small-scale traders.



### 3. Limited Infrastructure at Borders

Key gaps include:

- Lack of cold storage
- Poor rural road networks
- Limited grading and aggregation facilities
- Weak logistics systems

This increases losses and reduces competitiveness.



#### 4. Agroecological Trade Remains Invisible in Policy and Data

Most customs systems do not distinguish:

- Agroecological
- Organic
- Conventional products

As a result:

- Trade volumes are under-documented
- Policies rarely target agroecological trade
- Traders receive limited formal support



#### 5. Limited Access to Finance and Market Systems

Agroecological enterprises face:

- Limited trade finance
- Weak market information
- Inadequate business support
- Limited policy recognition

This restricts scaling across borders.

## What Needs to be Done

### 1. Harmonise Regional Standards and Certification



EAC Partner States should develop and implement harmonised standards, certification and traceability systems for agroecological products.

A unified regional framework would reduce repeated inspections, lower compliance costs and improve market recognition for traders and producers.

### 2. Simplify Customs and SPS Procedures



Streamlining customs documentation and aligning Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) requirements across borders can significantly reduce delays and transaction costs.

Mutual recognition of certification and simplified processes for small-scale traders would support more efficient and inclusive regional trade.

### 3. Invest in Border Infrastructure



Strategic investment is needed in:

- Cold storage facilities
- Aggregation and collection centres
- Grading and testing infrastructure
- Efficient logistics systems

Improved infrastructure at key border points can reduce post-harvest losses, improve product quality and strengthen regional market access.

#### 4. Improve Trade Data, Documentation and Recognition



Customs and trade information systems should disaggregate and formally recognise agroecological products within regional trade data.

Better documentation will improve visibility of the sector and support evidence-based policy and investment decisions.

#### 5. Strengthen Regional Coordination and Policy Alignment



A coordinated regional approach involving EAC institutions, Partner States, traders and producer organisations is essential.

Aligning trade, agriculture and investment policies with agroecological trade objectives can create a more enabling environment for inclusive regional markets.

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