EAGC in collaboration with the East Africa Trade and Investment Hub (EATIH) hosted a one-day bilateral “mini” trade mission at the EATIH Nairobi office on 23rd February 2017. Seven (7) Ethiopian grain exporters met with ten (10) Kenyan buyers to initiate trade deals for Ethiopia’s surplus maize. Beyond maize, the traders discussed the sale of soybeans, chickpeas and beans. Approximately 400,000 MT trade contracts for various grains were signed at the business-to-business (B2B) meeting.

The B2B meeting also helped in charting forward the best practices on payment mechanisms, logistics, trade finance and grading/quality in the grain industry. Though obvious trade partners, Ethiopia and Kenya do not have formal mechanisms in place for stable foods trade, particularly because Ethiopia is not a member of the East African Community (EAC) and until recently infrastructure was lacking.

Trade Attache, Ato Eshetu Yisma, represented the Ethiopian Embassy based in Kenya. The Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce Board President, Ato Elias Geneti, who is also a pulses exporter, also attended.

The February 23 bilateral mini trade mission was a precursor to the larger EAGC/EATIH supported trade forum scheduled for March 7th in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The March trade forum will bring together approximately 30 Ethiopian maize and other food staples sellers with approximately 50 maize buyers from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

Several trade barriers exists and efforts to remove various such barriers are ongoing and will be addressed through trade missions. EAGC envisions to facilitate an efficient, structured, inclusive and profitable grain trade in Africa. Hence, these trade missions are key in EAGC’s mandate in enhancing regional cross-border trade between Ethiopia and Eastern & Southern Africa Countries.

The Hub's support to the EAGC in facilitating the B2B trade mission is part of the Hub's work to promote regional trade in staple foods from surplus to deficit regions to help build an enduring market-based food security system.
The Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency estimates over 1,000,000m MT of surplus white maize to be available for export, a record bumper maize harvest amid a regional drought that poses a major challenge to the region’s food security outlook. To improve the flow of this staple crop across the region and mitigate the ongoing food crisis, the EAGC is partnering with the Hub to promote trade linkages while addressing larger regional trade policy issues.

In 2016, an estimated 40 million people in eastern, southern and Central Africa faced hunger due to similar conditions. Maize in Ethiopia is not a staple food; it is sold as a cash crop. The revenue is used to supplement household nutrition. Hence, the successful trading of the surplus maize in Ethiopia improves the food security situation of Ethiopian farmers while also serving to mitigate the ongoing food crisis in eastern Africa.