4th September, 2020

Dear EAGC Members and Stakeholders,

UPDATE ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FOR THE GRAIN SECTOR IN EASTERN AFRICA – WEEK 22

Greetings from the Secretariat.

This Communique is a continuation of our regular updates to EAGC Members and Stakeholders on developments in the grain sector in Eastern Africa in the face of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Previous editions of this Communique are accessible here.

The number of COVID-19 cases in the EAGC Mandate countries has risen to 127,829 confirmed cases as COVID-19 has generally continued to increase in the region, a 36% increase in cases from our last weekly report.

Majority of the new cases have been reported in Rwanda and Uganda while Kenya and Zambia which have previously been hotspot countries have recorded a reduction in case.

Many countries continue to relax restrictions on movement and mass gatherings and are opening up their airspaces to international travelers with easing of quarantine measures for returning residents and visitors. Cross border interventions taken in the past weeks are gradually improving movement of cargo along the corridor including removal of unnecessary roadblocks, and addressing issues such as bribery and the long queues at the border points.

Figure 1: Monthly progression of COVID-19 Cases in Eastern Africa. Source: WHO database as of 3rd Sept 2020
A. Recent Measures taken by Governments in Eastern Africa

Regional COVID-19 response

No new measures have been instituted in the past one week. However, the EAC Regional Electronic Cargo and Driver Tracking System (RECDTS) launched at various border points has gradually helped to unlock truck delays across borders. The innovation has also eased document processing at the borders. The platform has enabled each member state and road users to report incidents that hamper ease of movement to the Northern Corridor secretariat.

The platform which has been developed during the Covid-19 period after truckers reported increased border delays, includes a one-day regional online meeting held every Tuesday, which digitally connects the Northern Corridor stakeholders, allowing them to share their experiences in real-time. The tracking system is expected to be the key to the region’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic by helping in sharing of EAC COVID-19 Test certificate for cross border truck drivers/crews electronically on the platform.

Tanzania

Tanzania has not introduced new containment measures in recent months. However, schools and higher learning institutions are being encouraged to follow professional advice on hygiene and physical distancing, including wearing masks, social distancing and being alert to Coronavirus symptoms.

While international travel resumed several weeks ago, direct flights between Tanzania and Kenya have been effectively suspended following the non-renewal of Kenya Airway’s license to ply the Nairobi to Dar es Salaam, Kilimanjaro and Zanzibar routes until further notice.

Malawi

- The government has resumed commercial domestic and international flights effective 1st September after months of restriction.
- New guidelines to prevent and respond to COVID-19 were gazetted by the Government on 7 August.
- Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events (MoDMAPE) is working on a successor National COVID-19 Response Plan, expected to be ready by 21 August, with support from the UN cluster coordination structure.
The following pandemic control measures remain in place in the country:

- Public transport between Kigali and other districts is prohibited
- Private transport between Kigali and other districts will continue but movements must be in adherence with health guidelines
- Public offices will continue not exceeding 30% of existing staff while other employees continue working from home on a rotational basis
- Private businesses will continue not exceeding 50% of existing staff while other employees continue working from home on a rotational basis
- Malls and markets will operate at 50% capacity with vendors working on rotational basis.
- Kigali City Market, was reopened on September 3. The market was closed on August 17 alongside Nyabugogo market-kwa Mutangana after it was established that the traders on both of them had loosened, which caused widespread of COVID-19.
- Domestic and international tourism will continue; however, tourists must have valid reservations and possess valid negative COVID-19 test results. A COVID-19 test costs $50 USD per person
- Tourism activities will continue. Visitors participating in domestic tourism activities outside Kigali must possess proof of a confirmed booking while departing Kigali and a negative Covid-19 test taken within 72hours of the visit
- Passengers arriving at Kigali International Airport must present a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken within 120 hours prior to departure and should comply with health guidelines.
- Land borders will remain closed, except for goods and cargo as well as returning Rwandan citizens and legal residents. Returnees will be subjected to mandatory quarantine at their own cost.
- Movement of goods and people within Rusizi shall continue but movements between Rusizi and other districts remain prohibited
- Motorcycles are allowed to carry passengers except in areas under lockdown
- Applications for permissions to host essential public events should be addressed to info@rcb.rw with a copy to the relevant local authority. Events are required to respect the 30% venue capacity. Only sit-down events and gatherings are permitted.
- Organizers of approved essential events will ensure that all confirmed participant are tested for Covid-19 within 72hrs of attending the event at their own cost.
Kenya

Measures currently taken by the government are as follows:

  - Both levels of government, together with Ministry of Agriculture and Development Partners to build resilient food systems by investing more in technology with respect to food production.
  - Both levels of governments together with Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Irrigation, to mainstream climate change within annual budgets to promote community resilience during pandemics.
  - Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and County Departments in charge of Statistics to generate quality and usable data for evidence-based planning and budgeting.
  - The Cabinet Secretary for Interior and Coordination of National Government in conjunction with the Chairperson of the Council of Governors, shall, in three weeks, convene an inclusive National Consultative Conference to review the national and county Covid-19 response and together with all stakeholders, chart the country’s post-Covid-19 future.
  - The countrywide night-time curfew between 21.00hrs to 04.00hrs remains in place.
  - The Ministry of Sports, Culture & Heritage and the Ministry of Health shall jointly issue guidelines on the gradual resumption of sporting events
  - Lifted the ban on the sale of second-hand clothing, otherwise known as ‘mitumba’. Operation details and protocols to be shared by the Government
  - The closing time for restaurants and eateries varied by one hour from 7pm to 8pm, effective 27th August, 2020.
  - The maximum number of persons permitted to attend funerals and weddings, in accordance with the recommendations of the Inter-Faith Council, has been reviewed upwards to 100, with all in attendance abiding with Ministry of Health Protocols.
  - The closure of bars and nightclub is continued for a further 30 days.
  - The prohibition against the sale of alcohol by licensed hotels with residence has been lifted. In the next 30 days, bar owners, in consultation with the Ministry of Health shall develop self-regulating mechanisms as part of their civic responsibility to their clientele, in order to allow their resumption.
  - The National government will strictly enforce Ministry of Health protocols on public gatherings, and particularly funerals.
Uganda

The government has introduced a testing fee of USD65 per test for certain categories of individuals and organizations, as a recovery mechanism that will enable the Ministry of Health to acquire more kits for continued access to testing services effective 1st September.

✓ Categories of persons to pay for the testing are:
  ✓ Truck drivers at different points of entry
  ✓ Individuals seeking to know their Covid-19 status
  ✓ Organizations (private and public) that wish to test their staff
  ✓ Ugandans returning from abroad
  ✓ Visitors arriving in the country

The government has eased restrictions on sections of businesses such as retail shops located outside the arcades, malls, food markets, stand-alone shops and SACCOs on condition that SOPs must be observed.

The government announced proposed stimulus measures to provide liquidity to private firms as follows:

✓ Defer payment of Pay-As-You Earn (PAYE) tax by those sectors which are most affected until September 2020;
✓ Waiver of interest on tax arrears
✓ Expedite payment of outstanding VAT refunds
✓ Payment of domestic arrears for goods and services supplied to Government by the private sector
✓ Through the Bank of Uganda, the bank has put in place provisions to cushion businesses against credit costs, including extension of loan repayment periods, repayment freezes, and reduction in commercial banks reserve funds to inject liquidity.
✓ Boosting funding to Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI) in FY 2020/21 to continue with innovation research and incubation of business start-ups.
✓ Provision of additional UGX 300 billion immediately to boost agricultural production and productivity for seedlings, fertilizers, irrigation, storage facilities and value addition with maize and oil seeds among the target crops.
B. Updates on cross-border trade situation

Tanzania/Rwanda border

No new measures have been instituted in the last week.

- The Rusumo border is still open to cargo movements but operating at minimal capacity.
- Delays have been reported at the borders owing to revised custom clearance procedures and the testing of truck drivers and their assistants for COVID-19.
- Trucks transhipment which is effective at the border and the mandatory hiring of a second driver based in Rwanda is also contributing to the border delays and increasing transport costs.
- However, Rwandan trucks are still allowed to cross into Tanzania without transfer of goods onto Tanzanian trucks.

Uganda/Kenya borders

Truck drivers at the border points have entered into a strike following a directive by the Government of Uganda to have the drivers pay USD65 for testing which is compulsory at the border points. The Covid-19 test certificates are valid for two weeks. Queues of up to 25km have been observed at Busia border while a 50 km traffic snarl up has built up, stretching from Malaba to Manyanja market. The 3-day snarl up has triggering talks between Kenya and Uganda relevant authorities to resolve the crisis.

There are reports that some transporters are favored and trucks released in violation of first come first served basis. In some cases, border officials are accused of rent-seeking behaviors where they slow down cargo clearance, to create artificial traffic to solicit bribes from truck drivers.
Border operations are relatively normal. Simple checks for COVID-19 (i.e. temperature checks) are the only additional control measure instituted at the borders. Truck drivers and their crew are required to have COVID-19 test certificates to be allowed to cross the border.

Tight controls remain in place at the Mutukula border as mass-testing for COVID-19 for all trucks entering Uganda from Tanzania is still ongoing.

Tanzanian truck drivers getting to Uganda are subjected to two weeks quarantine.

No new measures have been instituted in the past week. However:

- Truck drivers crossing the borders are required to have COVID-19 test certificates proving they have tested negative for the virus.
- However, there are reports that Kenya has reinstated the 14-day mandatory quarantine for Tanzanian drivers crossing into Kenya. This has led to congestion of trucks at the borders, which in turn has exacerbated rent-seeking behaviours by border officials taking advantage of traders and keen to expedite border clearance.
C. EAGC support to structured grain trade

EAGC also continues to facilitate trade in grains, farm inputs, equipment and services through the G-Soko and G-Hub systems as follows:

i. Continued monitoring and regular reporting to Members on developments regarding the COVID-19 pandemic to inform the business decisions.

ii. Logistical support for grain trade using pre-qualified service providers.

iii. Emergency working capital arrangements with partner financial institutions ease liquidity constraints affecting the grain suppliers as a result of COVID-19.

In the past one month, EAGC has facilitated over 600MT of maize trade from Uganda to Kenya and is currently supporting one of its Members to purchase 200MT of maize weekly. EAGC publishes a weekly Trade Catalogue which shows the various commodities available from trade in Eastern Africa.

EAGC reminds its Members and Stakeholders to make use of its trade facilitation services and bring to its attention any disruptions they experience in either domestic or cross-border trade through Secretariat contacts at the end of this Communique (Annex 1).

Thank you and God Bless you.

Gerald Makau Masila,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
EASTERN AFRICA GRAIN COUNCIL
Annex 1: EAGC Contact Addresses for you to reach us for assistance.

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