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**Adopting voluntary sustainability standards to increase food security through the production and trade of staple crops:
the case of the eastern African community**

By

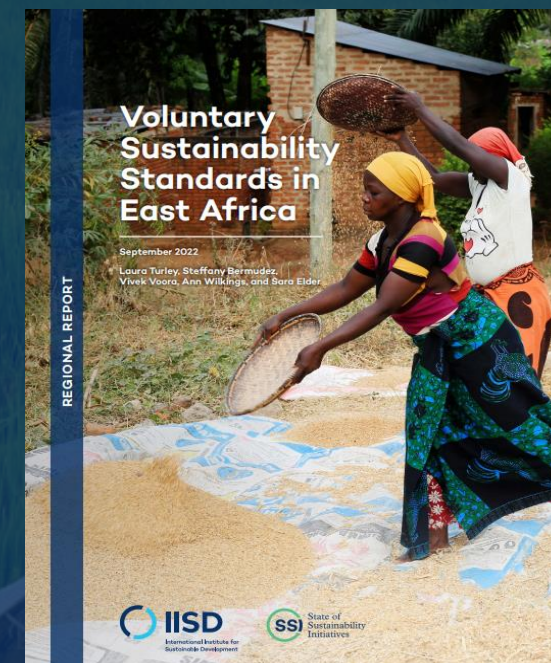
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Adopting Voluntary Sustainability Standards To Increase Food Security Through The Production And Trade Of Staple Crops: The Case Of The Eastern African Community

Findings from the report: “Voluntary Sustainability Standards in East Africa” published by the IISD in September 2022

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11 October 2022



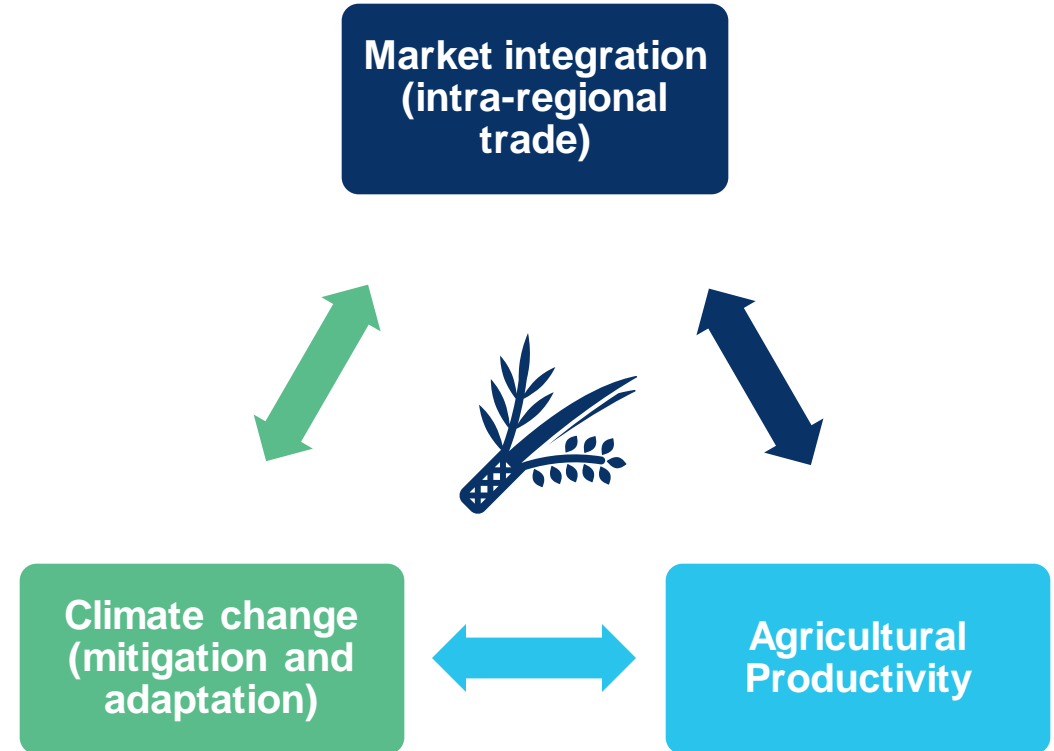
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Agriculture - the backbone of the economy in East Africa

Key facts and challenges

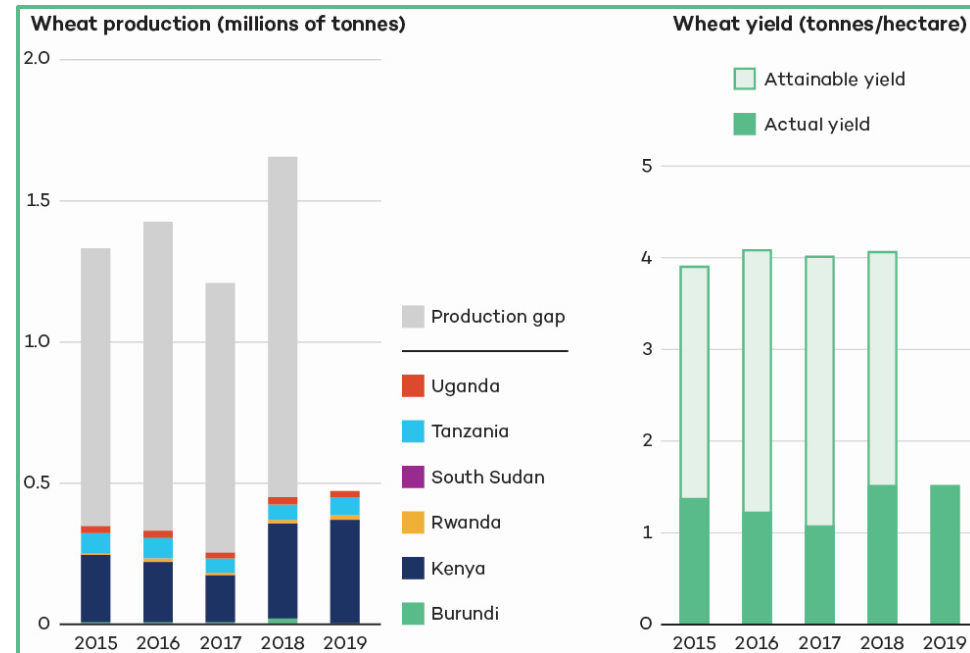
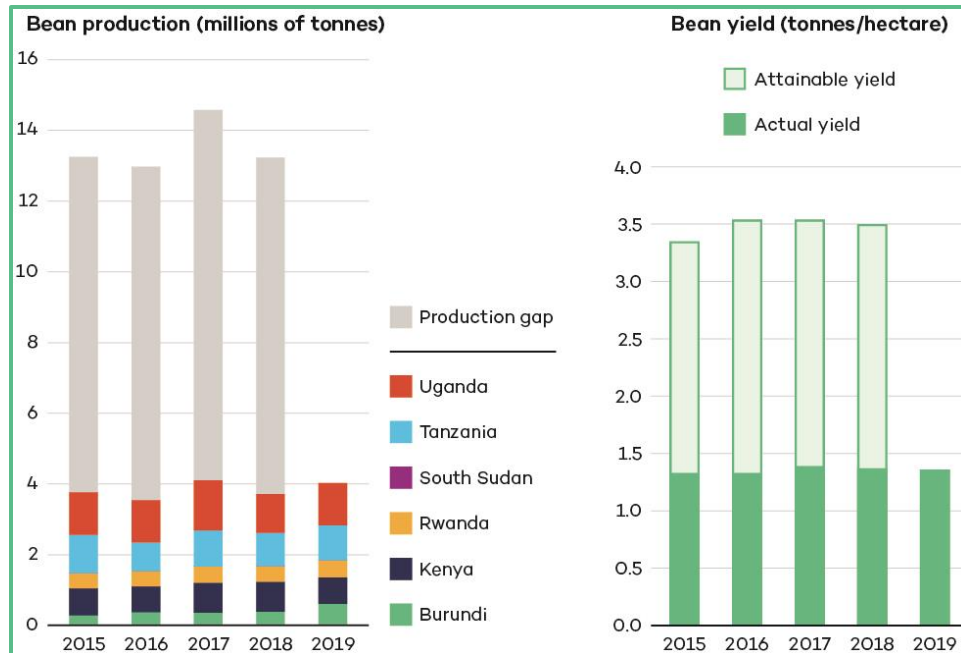
- Agriculture is a priority sector for improving rural livelihoods and enhancing intraregional trade. It employs as much as **80% of the population** and represents **25% of GDP** in the region.
- EAC countries depend on **cash crops for export markets** (Coffee, tea, cotton, tobacco and horticultural products)
- **Staple crops** are an important source of food security and income. They are also the most traded in the region. (maize, beans, rice, wheat)



Three main challenges across agriculture in East Africa

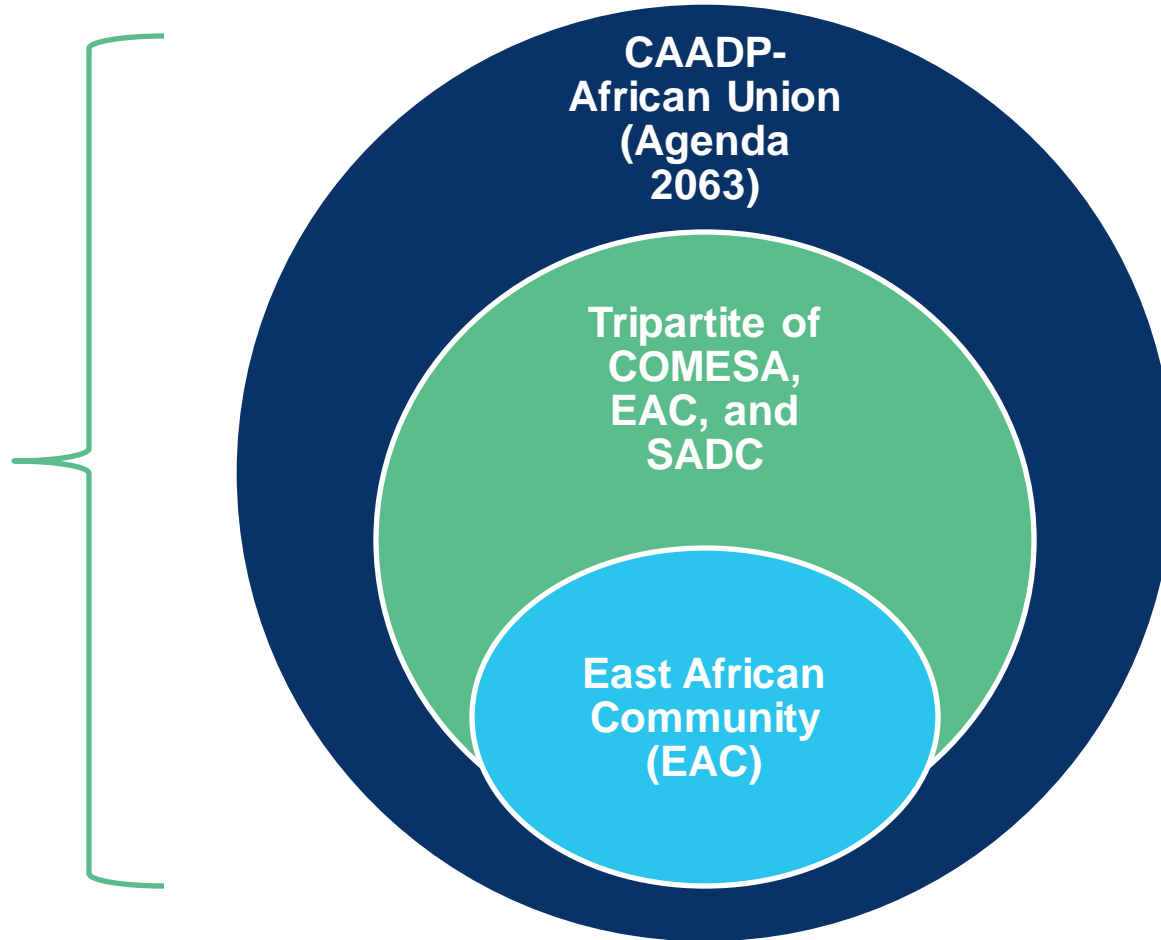
High Potential to Increase Yields and Trade of Staple Crops within the EAC

1. EAC staple crop yields are 3x **below their potential** and are **vulnerable to climate change**
2. Imports are needed for **food security**, especially in the rice & wheat sectors
 - Greatest bean consumption per capita
 - Wheat consumption is growing in cities
 - Maize is the most consumed crop in the EAC.
3. Improving yields **could improve food security and potential exports-** prospects for development



East African Community: Policy environment

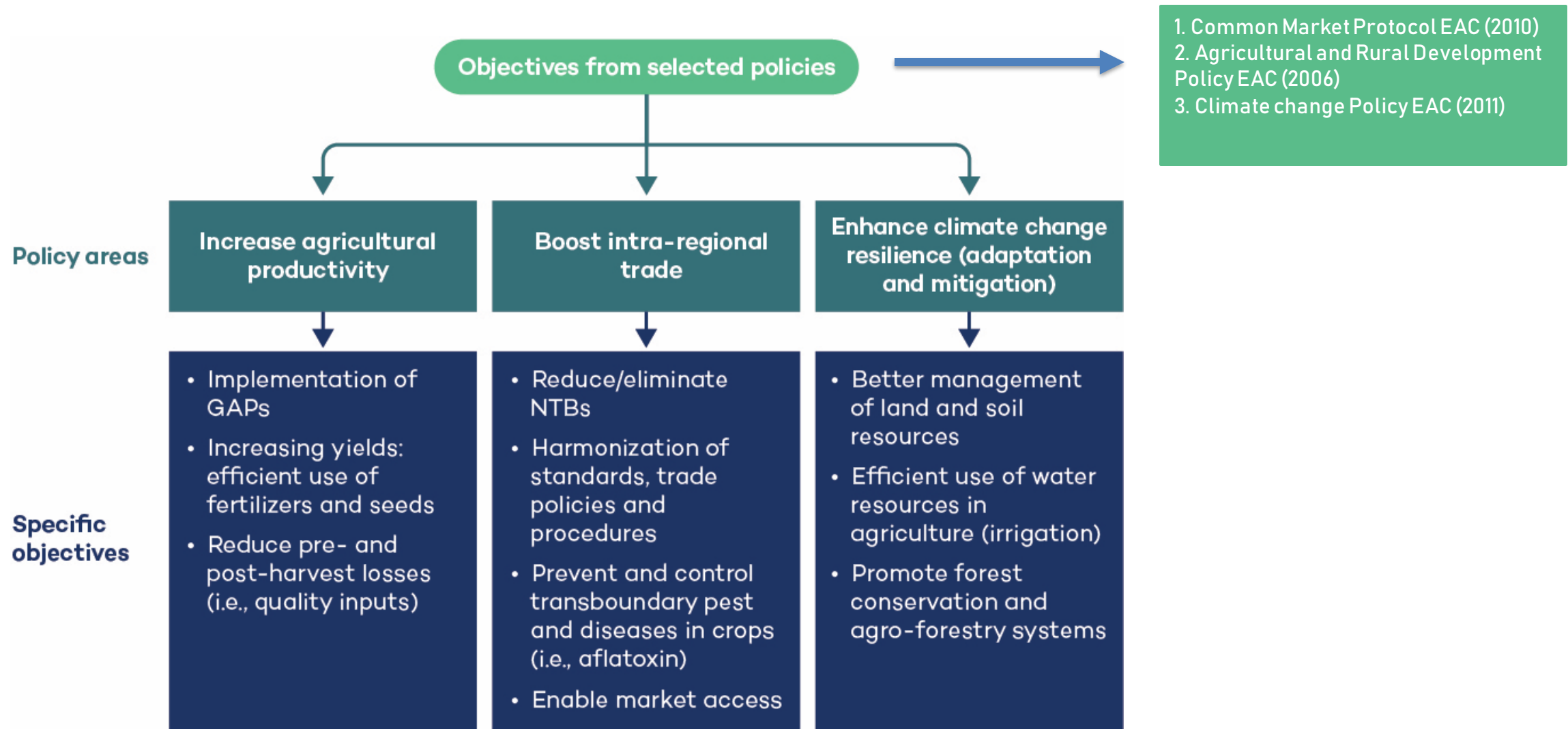
Many policies implemented at different levels of integration in the region/continent influence agriculture and trade in East African countries



Regional integration –is crucial to remove obstacles to trade, promote diversification and add value to food systems in the EAC

Challenges in agriculture are similar across the country members of these trade blocs

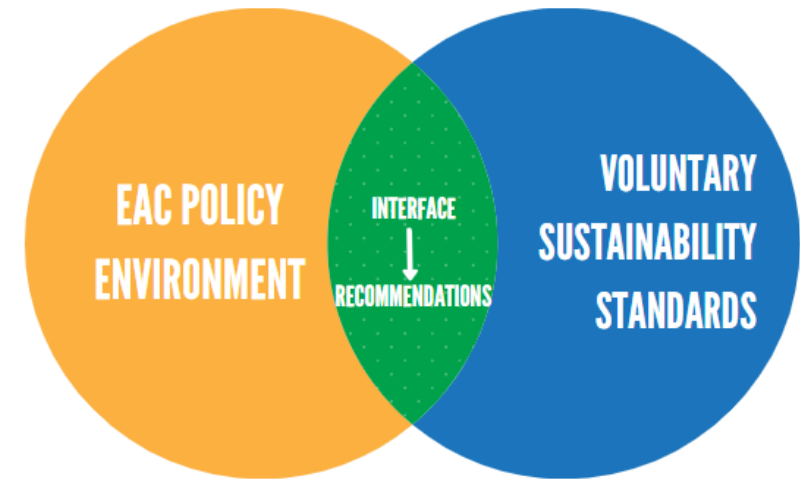
EAC Agricultural Policy Objectives



How VSSs can be scaled up to support these objectives?

VSSs operating in East Africa / Benchmarking

- **VSSs characteristics:** Criteria, capacity building, verification systems/assurance
- **Over 50 VSSs operating in the EAC** country members (mostly in cash crops)
- Some of them are **international**, others are developed in for the **region**
- **Benchmarking:** Global G.A.P, EAOPS, and Sustainable Rice Platform



Benchmarking results: Positive alignment between VSS criteria and policy goals (medium to high)



Agricultural productivity: Key messages

All the three VSS analyzed include requirements to :

- ❖ Access **improved agricultural inputs** (fertilizers, crop protection products) and provide training to farmers on their use
- ❖ Improve **product handling and storage** (i.e alignment with preventing aflatoxin contamination).
- ❖ Most promote the **responsible use of seeds and varieties** (traditional vs improved) and compliance with national regulations

VSS Content Criteria	East Africa Organic Products Standard (EAOPS)	Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP)	GLOBALG.A.P. IFA Standard
Implementation of good agricultural practices			
Does the standard require sustainable management and use of natural resources?	✓	✓	⊘
Does the standard address conditions of employment?	✓	✓	⊘
Does the Standard Body provide training and knowledge opportunities for farmers?	✓	✓	✓
Does the Standard address high quality agricultural inputs?	✓	✓	✓
Does the Standard specific climate adaptation activities?	⊘	✓	✓
Does the Standard address legal land title and use rights?	⊘	⊘	⊘

Intra-regional Trade – Key messages

All three VSSs have criteria related to:

- ❖ **Integrated pest management and disease control**
- ❖ The selection **and targeted application of chemicals.** (Prevention over presence of residues in product and enable market access)
- ❖ Requiring producers to **comply with relevant local and national laws and regulations** (supports harmonization and trade)

They can improve by demonstrating alignment with product-specific standards for enhanced trade (i.e. SPS standards)



Picture: Processing maize grains at the Farmer Training Centre in Vianzi village, Tanzania

Climate Change Resilience – Key messages

All three VSSs have criteria related to:

- ❖ Promoting best practices on **soil health** (composting, use of organic fertilizers) and waste management
- ❖ **Using water resources efficiently** (water reuse-recycling, harvesting); and water extraction and irrigation
- ❖ Promoting best practices on integrating **agro-forestry practices** and supporting **ecosystem restoration and rehabilitation**

They can improve by encouraging farmers to develop strategies to response to emergencies (e.g floods and droughts)



Crosscutting Observations

Other ways that Voluntary Sustainability Standards may support the goals of EAC agricultural policy:

- ❖ Providing training opportunities for farmers
- ❖ Generating interest and demand in verification systems
- ❖ Facilitating farmers networking and commercial relationships
- ❖ Providing platforms for multi-stakeholder dialogue

Other challenges that need to be addressed for VSS to be scaled-up in the EAC:

- ❖ Start-up costs and exclusion of smallholders
- ❖ Lack of awareness of VSS activity and benefits
- ❖ Low demand for VSS-compliant products



Picture: Maize farmer in Kinyanze Village, Mvomero district, Tanzania

What we hear in the region...

From interviews and workshops with stakeholders across EAC country members, including farmer's representatives, VSSs, governments, and the private sector.

"VSSs are important to track and mark progress on **climate resilience**"

"**Recognition** and **implementation** of VSSs is critical to boost intra-regional trade"

"VSSs can **improve quality** of produce and reduce pest and diseases"

"Bans and protectionism **diminish trade**, and the capacity of VSSs to operate in the region"

"Some of the VSSs are **not practical or tailored** to the region's context, and regional ones need to be updated"...

"Local VSSs are less **costly, accessible** to farmers, promote **friendship** and **capacity building**"

"VSSs present opportunities for marketing and trading, but users (farmers, processors) do not know what they are about, **knowledge is critical** for supporting compliance"



Pictures: IISD workshop in Kigali, Rwanda - September 2022

Recommendations

For policy makers

- Prioritize **accessibility to certification** for farmers
- Demonstrate **political commitment to VSS**, and formalize recognition/support
- Provide **targeted support for agricultural VSSs** (by providing grants to farmers for certification; generating demand through public procurement; investing in research and pilot projects)

For VSSs

- Build VSS proof-of-concept through **pilot projects**; share results widely
- **Expand training opportunities** to other participants in agricultural value chains, e.g. national bureaus of standards, border control officials, transport professionals, buyers

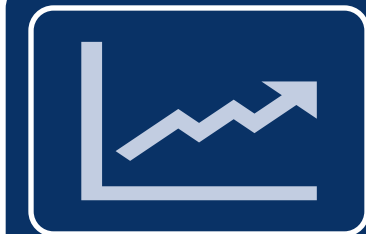


Conclusion: Key Messages



There is high potential to increase yields and trade of these staple crops within the EAC- key to improve food security and potential exports

This must be done sustainably and in line with policy goals.



VSS can contribute to advancing EAC agricultural policy goals to:

- increase agricultural productivity (medium alignment)
- enhance intra-regional trade (medium alignment)
- build climate resilience (strong alignment)



Yet, official recognition/ strong political support, low demand for VSS-compliant products within EAC, and entry costs for farmers are issues to address

Thank you!
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