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

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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

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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

- Market integration (intra-regional trade)
- Climate change (mitigation and adaptation)
- Agricultural Productivity
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

Objectives from selected policies

3. Climate change Policy EAC (2011)

Policy areas

Increase agricultural productivity
- Implementation of GAPs
- Increasing yields: efficient use of fertilizers and seeds
- Reduce pre- and post-harvest losses (i.e., quality inputs)

Boost intra-regional trade
- Reduce/eliminate NTBs
- Harmonization of standards, trade policies and procedures
- Prevent and control transboundary pest and diseases in crops (i.e., aflatoxin)
- Enable market access

Enhance climate change resilience (adaptation and mitigation)
- Better management of land and soil resources
- Efficient use of water resources in agriculture (irrigation)
- Promote forest conservation and agro-forestry systems
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.
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 respond 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”

“Some of the VSSs are not practical or tailored to the region’s context, and regional ones need to be updated”…

“Bans and protectionism diminish trade, and the capacity of VSSs to operate in the region”

“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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