

# COMESA-EAC to remove trade barriers in horticulture trade

Regional leaders have committed to expediting the removal of trade barriers that hinder smooth business operations between countries across Eastern and Southern Africa. This decision emerged during the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa-East African Community (COMESA-EAC) Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA) workshop, held in Nairobi.

Trade Principal Secretary Regina Ombam, through a speech delivered by Caroline Chore from the Ministry of Industry, emphasized the need to urgently identify and address non-tariff barriers (NTBs). These barriers, described as rules or practices complicating cross-border trade, have been impacting the horticultural sector, an essential income source comprising small farmers, agribusinesses, and exporters.



Industry Principal Secretary Juma Mukhwana highlighted that a structured approach is necessary to tackle these challenges. Failure to do so could continue to curtail trade, lower productivity, and impede economic progress. The Nairobi meeting convened key stakeholders, including government officials, farmers, and exporters, to discuss critical issues affecting the fruit and vegetable sector, particularly inconsistent regulations across countries.

The impact of these checks, although vital, can be detrimental if mismanaged, resulting in lengthy delays detrimental to farmers dealing with perishable items like avocados, onions, and potatoes. Dr. John Mukuka, head of Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), pointed out that hidden trade barriers are causing delays, inflating costs, and reducing farmers' income.

Mukuka noted, "Exports between Comesa countries dropped by 11 per cent in 2020, with many traders encountering long waits, sometimes up to 12 days, for paperwork and

checks." Despite resolutions existing on paper, actual ground-level challenges persist, impacting trade efficiency.

ACTESA strives to standardize farming inputs, pest control, and food safety norms across the region to aid farmers and consumers. This effort aims to streamline sales processes for growers and is expected to be completed within six to 12 months. While many African farmers and exporters are exploring markets like the EU and China, Mukuka advises focusing on bolstering regional trade first.

Despite current intra-regional agricultural trade being only 10 to 15 per cent compared to over 50 per cent in the EU, strengthening internal trade could provide a solid foundation for future expansion. Shared market implementation through customs improvements could create opportunities for farmers and enhance regional competitiveness globally.

Source: [The Standard](#)

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