



EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

**JOINT MEETING OF MINISTERS /
CABINET SECRETARIES
RESPONSIBLE FOR HEALTH, TRADE,
TRANSPORT AND EAC AFFAIRS ON
COVID-19 RESPONSE**

**VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE
8TH MAY, 2020**

REPORT OF THE MEETING

(Ref: EAC/HEALTH & EAC AFFAIRS /2/JMHE/2020)

**EAC SECRETARIAT
ARUSHA, TANZANIA
MAY 2020**

1.0. INTRODUCTION

1.1. CONVENING OF THE MEETING

A Joint meeting of ministers responsible for Health, Trade, Transport and EAC Affairs was held on 8th May 2020 to discuss a regional approach to COVID-19 response. The meeting was held via Video conference.

1.2. PARTICIPATION

The Session was attended by Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries from the EAC Partner States' National Ministries responsible for Health, Trade, Transport and EAC Affairs.

The Meeting was facilitated by the EAC Secretariat, CASSOA and the East Africa Health Research Commission.

1.3. AGENDA AND PROGRAMME OF THE MEETING

The detailed Agenda and Programme for the meeting was adopted and is hereto attached as **Annexes A- I and Annex A- II** respectively.

2. REGIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

2.0. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS AND DIRECTIVES OF THE JOINT MINISTERIAL MEETING FOR THE MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR HEALTH AND MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR EAC AFFAIRS

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries noted that the EAC Secretariat convened a joint meeting of Ministers Responsible for Health and Ministers Responsible for East African Community Affairs on the COVID-19 pandemic preparedness and response on 25th March 2020.

In an effort to ensure the safety of all East Africans, the Ministers discussed issues relating to trade facilitation and the movement of goods and services in the region, the need for a surveillance system to facilitate the monitoring of the crew's health and enable contact tracing, strengthening Partner States' capacity on surveillance and information sharing as well as establishing a strong link between the national task forces to facilitate communication between the Partner States and between the Partner States and the EAC Secretariat for the COVID-19 response. The meeting also underscored the need for a regional COVID-19 response plan. The meeting emphasised the need to support local manufacturers in their manufacture of much needed essential supplies such as sanitizers, soap, processed food, personal protective equipment (PPE), including face masks and pharmaceutical products among others.

The Ministers made policy recommendations for implementation at both the regional and national levels and issued a joint statement. The detailed meeting report and joint ministerial statement are hereto attached as **Annex I** and **II** respectively.

Partner States have already initiated the implementation of the decisions and directives of the Joint Ministerial Meeting for the Ministers responsible for Health and Ministers responsible for EAC, in addition to nation-specific measures.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries received a detailed matrix showing current status of implementation of the decisions and directives of the 1st Joint Ministerial Meeting for the Ministers responsible for Health and Ministers responsible for EAC affairs. The matrix showing current status of implementation of the decisions and directives of the 1st Joint Ministerial Meeting for the Ministers responsible for Health and Ministers responsible for EAC affairs is attached as **Annex III**.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries:

- (a) urged Partner States to implement decisions and directives from the Joint Ministerial Meeting of the Ministers responsible for Health and Ministers responsible for East African Community Affairs and report progress in the next joint meeting (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/Decision 001*); and**
- (b) directed the EAC Secretariat to expedite implementation of pending decisions and directives from the Joint Ministerial Meeting of the Ministers responsible for Health and Ministers responsible for East African Community Affairs, and report progress in the next joint meeting, (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 001*).**

2.1. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE EAC REGIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries noted that the Joint Meeting of the Ministers of Health and Ministers of East African Community Affairs had directed the Secretariat to finalise the EAC Regional COVID-19 Response Plan. The meeting was informed that the EAC Secretariat- **EAC Regional Adhoc Regional Coordination Committee (EARCC)** had finalised the EAC Regional COVID-19 Response Plan, which aims to:

- i. Ensure a joint and well-coordinated mechanism to fight COVID-19 in the Region;
- ii. Minimize the number of people who become infected or sick with COVID-19;
- iii. Minimize morbidity and mortality from the COVID-19 pandemic in the region;
- iv. Reduce the burden on our health systems so that they can continue to provide the regular health care East Africans may need;
- v. Help East Africans, especially staff in the EAC organs and institutions, to reduce their own risk and the risk to their families and communities to the Coronavirus infection;
- vi. Ensure that the region has adequate capacity for surveillance, case detection and case management; and
- vii. Ensure the region has timely access to medical therapeutics and Health technologies to effectively manage the COVID -19 pandemic.

The key interventions that the EAC response plan is targeting are as follows:

- i. Risk Communication and Community Engagement: Strengthening sensitization and awareness creation on COVID-19 (risk communication and community engagement on COVID-19);
- ii. Ensure access to Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) materials, Laboratory supplies and Equipment by the EAC Organs and institutions, and the EAC Partner States (Procurement and supply of supplies and equipment);
- iii. Strengthen capacity for COVID -19 surveillance and reporting at all key border points, and build knowledge on safety measures, existing prevention and control strategies and relevant regional guidelines;
- iv. Research and development;
- v. Resource mobilization interventions; and
- vi. Fast-tracking the implementation of Digital COVID-19 Surveillance Tracker tool to facilitate contact tracing, patient's self-monitoring and Information Exchange between the EAC Partner States and EAC Secretariat.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries further noted that the EAC Regional COVID-19 Response Plan Budget is estimated at **USD 97,045,212** and resource mobilisation is currently ongoing for the support of this plan.

The detailed EAC Regional COVID-19 Response Plan is attached hereto as **Annex IV**.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries:

- a) directed the EAC Secretariat to re-submit the EAC Regional COVID-19 Response plan to the Partner States by 11th May 2020 (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/Directive /002*); and
- b) urged the Partner States to submit comments on EAC Regional COVID-19 Response plan within one week from the date of submission of the document (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Decision 002*).

2.2. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE HANDOVER OF MOBILE LABORATORIES PROCURED UNDER THE EAC MOBILE LABORATORY PROJECT TO EAC PARTNER STATES

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries were informed that the Mobile laboratories have been dispatched to Republic of Burundi, Republic of Rwanda, Republic of Uganda, and the United Republic of Tanzania. They noted that the delivery of mobile laboratories for the Republic of Kenya and South Sudan is delayed, and will be affected in the week starting 11th May 2020.

The meeting noted that the laboratory equipment, vehicles and consumables were acquired under the EAC Network of Public Health Reference laboratories for communicable Disease (Mobile Lab Project) with support from the German government through KfW. The laboratories are capable of identifying and isolating organisms or

Biosafety level 3 or 4 (including Ebola, COVID-19, Dengue fever, Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic fever, among others).

The meeting was further informed that during transit, the to the final destinations, the 4-wheel cargo carrier for the Republic of Tanzania and one for Republic of Rwanda were not handed over due to problems developed and hence need to have then fixed before hand over.

The meeting also noted that the carrier for Republic of Rwanda developed a mechanical problem with the transfer system, Toyota Arusha has already ordered for a replacement part from Japan, which is expected to take 4-5weeks to arrive in Arusha. The vehicle will be ready for handover over in June. The cargo carrier for the United Republic of Tanzania was involved in an accident in Dar es Salaam, and is at Toyota Dar es Salaam for repairs. The indicative date when for receiving it will be shared in due course.

Note:

- i. The delivery of the laboratory equipment, vehicles and consumables for the Republic of Kenya which was slated for 20th April 2020 did not take place as earlier planned. This will be at a later date to be proposed by the Republic of Kenya after all clearance is given by Kenya revenue Authority and other relevant bodies for the Labs to be delivered.
- ii. Countries have already initiated plans to deploy the Mobile Laboratories to the field to boost the capacity for COVID – 19 testing especially at cross border points;
- iii. Republic of South Sudan has initiated training of additional 6 staff (theory) on use of the mobile Laboratory for COVID -19 testing, to be finalised with practical sessions once the mobile Lab is delivered to Juba.

A detailed status report on the handover of mobile laboratories is attached hereto as **Annex V.**

The Ministers noted the need to quantify the regional requirement, and the Secretariat to coordinate bulk procurement for all countries. The meeting was informed that the EAC Secretariat will procure additional kits with support from the AfDB, in collaboration with WHO. The Ministers also noted the need for the EAC Secretariat to coordinate development partners implementing COVID -19 responses, and the need for the EAC Secretariat to increase capacity for resource mobilization, while prioritising procurement of COVID -19 test kits.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries:

- a) **took note of the progress made in delivery of laboratory equipment, vehicles and consumables to Partner States; and**

b) directed the EAC Secretariat to deliver the undelivered laboratories and PCR Machines to the Partner States by 30th May, 2020 (EAC/JMHE/CM2/Directive 003).

2.3. PROGRESS ON THE PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY OF COVID-19 TEST KITS, EQUIPMENT AND OTHER SUPPLIES

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries were informed the EAC Secretariat through the EAC Network of Public Health Reference laboratories for communicable Disease (Mobile Lab Project) had received a grant of € 500,000 to support the strengthening of laboratory capacity for COVID -19 response in the Partner States.

The funds are targeted for the:

- i. Procurement of laboratory equipment mainly six extra PCR machines one per Partner State and small autoclave machines for the mobile laboratories as illustrated in **Annex VI**;
- ii. Purchase and supply adequate tests to facilitate scaleup of testing in East Africa, COVID-19 test kits (1000 tests per Partner State);
- iii. Supply of essential PPEs (in addition to those already procured under the Support to the Ebola response);
- iv. Establishment of an online platform to train an additional 90 people on safe IATA shipping of infectious agents; and
- v. Acquiring of smartboards and Zoom to communicate between the mobile laboratories and the Central Public Health Laboratories, and vice versa.

The COVID-19 test kits were shipped to the supplier in Nairobi and these have since been delivered to Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and South Sudan. The meeting noted that the delivery of test kits to the Republic of Burundi and Republic of Rwanda is delayed due to challenges with finding flights to these two destinations. We however expect to deliver these this week.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries noted that the PCR machines have been shipped to Dar es Salaam. This was necessary because it was the easiest destination for Cargo flights into the region. Secondly, the Secretariat avoided applying for end used certificates and clearance for each of the 6 partner States, which would have taken long. The meeting noted that a clearing agent has been engaged to clear the equipment, and have lodged a request for Tax exemption with the relevant Ministry in Tanzania. The equipment is expected to be in Arusha by end of this week, after sorting the equipment, we will make country packages ready for dispatch to the Partner States in the week starting 11th May, 2020.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries:

- a) directed Partner States that have not cleared their COVID-19 test kits to expedite the clearance and deployment of these kits and equipment for immediate use (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 004*);
- b) directed the Ministries responsible for health to provide feedback on the support received, and their utilisation, and submit to the Sectoral Council on Health (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 005*); and
- c) directed the EAC Secretariat to develop a standard reporting template to be used by Partner States for directive b) above (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 006*).

2.4. TRAINING OF PARTNER STATES' AIRPORT STAFF ON COVID-19 PREVENTION AND CONTROL MEASURES IN COLLABORATION WITH CASSOA, CDC, WHO, GIZ, and AMREF FLYING DOCTORS.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries were informed that the EAC Secretariat through the support of the German secured a grant amounting to € 500,000, for the support of COVID-19 core interventions to prevent spread of the disease through airports in the region. The grant shall enable the enhancement of surveillance and prevention of the spread of COVID-19 in and out of Partner States through the airports, by training of Airport Stakeholders.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries noted that the Africa Medical Research Foundation (AMREF) was contracted as the implementing agency for this grant, and will train Airport Stakeholders such as Airport medical service providers, aircraft/airline operators/, security, immigration, customs, cargo and baggage handlers, air navigation services providers and airport rescue and firefighting providers. Thirty (30) key stakeholders in each of the 8 regional airports shall be trained in COVID-19 awareness, prevention and control. This will be a Training of Trainers and they will be equipped with the necessary capacity to develop and roll out specific airport staff trainings in their relevant stations. The training will focus on:

- i. Enhanced awareness on National and Airport Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Plans;
- ii. Enhanced awareness in public health capacities at the airports, (PoEs);
- iii. Enhanced capacity in surveillance and prevention of the spread of COVID-19 in and out of the airports.

A summary status report and detailed concept note are attached hereto as **Annex VII** and **VIII** respectively.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries noted the need for the Civil Aviation Authorities to engage the respective governments in planning for the implementation of this training. The meeting noted the need to tap into Partner States' experience in managing Ebola Haemorrhagic Fever epidemic, while conducting the COVID-19 trainings and interventions.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries noted that the Civil Aviation Authorities are planning to conduct a Training of Trainers (TOT) for Partner States' Airport staff on

COVID-19 prevention and control measures, between 30th May and 25th July 2020, in line with the established guidelines and directives in response to COVID -19 in the respective Partner States.

2.5. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EAC REGIONAL COVID-19 SURVEILLANCE TRACKER

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries were informed that the East African Community in collaboration with its partners was planning to implement a digital COVID-19 Surveillance Tracker in a phased manner, while leveraging on the existing cargo tracking infrastructure. The systems is expected to share truck driver's information leveraging on that is managed and operated by the Revenue Authorities in the region.

The meeting noted that the purpose of this initiative was to implement a real time integrated system that will assist to collect, collate and analyze health data from EAC Partner States and shared across all Partner states and to EAC Secretariat that will help policy makers / decision makers to make informed and well researched decisions, plans and programmes for the benefit of all East Africans.

Key capabilities of the digital COVID-19 surveillance tracker:

The platform to be implemented need to have Three main Phases:

- PHASE ONE: Establish the EAC dashboard that gives summary data of confirmed cases, actives ,recovered Deaths and the number of test conducted and also linking the portal to the EAC main website <https://covidcheck.eac.int/> <https://www.eac.int/coronavirus>
- PHASE TWO: Electronic Information sharing system for Truck drivers/crews and linking it to the Regional Electronic cargo tracking
- PHASE THREE: Individual / Personal / self-assessment/ Digital COVID-19 Surveillance Tracker of citizen's risk of covid-19

A concept note on the functionality of the tracking system, the draft reporting form and a dummy certificate after COVID-test for truck and crew members are attached hereto as **Annex IX, X, and XI respectively.**

The Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries directed the EAC Secretariat to submit the concept note on the proposed Digital COVID-19 Surveillance Tracker to Partner States by 11th May, 2020 for consideration by relevant agencies in Partner States, and Partner States to provide their comments within seven days of submission, (EAC/JMHE/CM2/Directive 007).

2.6. HARMONIZED APPROACH TO TESTING SERVICES ACROSS PARTNER STATES

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretary were informed that the EAC Secretariat had convened a technical meeting for heads of the National Public Health Laboratories on the 4th May 2020, to discuss harmonised approaches for providing testing services, including testing services for truck drivers and crew members to facilitate movement in the region. The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries noted that:

- i. the region had been implementing centralised testing for COVID using the Open PCR and other platforms mainly at the National influenza Centre in Nairobi and KEMRI in Kenya; and the Uganda (Virus Research Institute UVRI) and the Central Public Health laboratories (CPHL) for Uganda;
- ii. the EAC Secretariat was currently negotiating funding support to the region with Africa Development Bank (AfDB), that has a component to support procurement and supply of laboratory equipment, COVID -19 test kits, PPEs and other consumables for the Partner States;
- iii. the existence of many other PCR based platforms including Abbot, and Roche, and the GeneXpert that are available and can be used. The challenge was the lack or shortage of consumables for COVID -19, that need to be procured in bulk if we are to use these;
- iv. Abbot, and Roche both have huge capacity, if deployed near the cross-border points, they offer a possibility of testing a huge number of truck drivers and crew. For this to work all countries need to quantify their requirements for the different platforms and submit for consolidation so as to project / quantify the needs for the region;
- v. both countries (Kenya & Uganda) have already identified GeneXpert machines as one of those platforms that offer an opportunity to decentralise testing further to the periphery of the countries because capacity already exists;
- vi. efforts to secure COVID -19 cartridges for the GeneXpert machines was a huge challenge and required to be explored as a region;
- vii. both the National Influenza Centre (NIC) based at Uganda Virus Research Institute and NIC in Kenya, collaborate with WHO Reference Laboratory in Dhaka, and are accredited there;
- viii. both countries were accredited to the WHO laboratory in Dhaka, Senegal, and emphasised the need for the national Laboratories testing for COVID -19 to send samples to WHO certified laboratories for confirmation of test results (quality control / quality assurance)
- ix. plans are underway to have additional COVID -19 testing centres in both Partner States, that will be accredited according to national programmes, and details will be shared with the EAC secretariat in due course

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries noted that the experts agreed to fast track the decentralisation of testing for COVID as per the National plans, to ensure that the current demand for testing services especially for drivers is met. They also agreed to share information on the designated testing sites in the country for purposes of linking them to the COVID -19 surveillance tracker, under development.

The meeting noted that harmonization of testing and the certification of test results is key to reduce duplication of efforts and ensure authentication and sharing among Partner States electronically.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries:

- a) urged Partner States to undertake standardised COVID -19 testing based on approved WHO methodologies, (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Decision 003*);
- b) urged the Partner States who had not nominated focal points to do so by 15th May, 2020, (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Decision 004*); and
- c) directed the EAC Secretariat in collaboration with the national focal points to expedite the development of the harmonized system for certification and sharing of COVID-19 test results in the region by 26th May 2020, (*EAC/JMHE/ Directive /008*).

3. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE FACILITATION OF THE FREE MOVEMENT OF GOODS AND SERVICES IN THE REGION

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries recalled that the Joint meeting of Ministers of Health and EAC Affairs held in March 2020, agreed that Partner States shall enable movement of goods and services without disruption during the period of COVID 19 pandemic. However, the safety measures including screening, testing, isolation and quarantining where necessary for drivers and crew as instituted by Partner States shall be adhered to.

To supplement the measures instituted by Partner States and have a harmonized approach, the EAC Secretariat developed administrative guidelines on movement of goods and services, hereto attached as *Annex XII*. Inward cross border movement of essential goods has been maintained with some incidences of disruptions at some borders. These have been attended to on a case by case basis. The volume of inward goods into EAC has however dropped due to disruptions in the source countries and slackened business activity in Partner States. The outward flow of exports has also been disrupted due to a number of factors in the region and destination countries. For example, the Tea auctions in Mombasa have been suspended while export of other commodities such as Coffee, Horticulture and Minerals are facing similar challenges.

The meeting noted that the movement of services in EAC had been the most affected with tourism, hospitality, transport, entertainment and aviation industry grounding to a halt. The telecommunication sector has remained robust with increased use of online facilities. The combined effect of reduction in exports and inflows from services sectors is resulting in weakening of the local currencies and exerting inflationary pressure on the economies.

The Small and Medium Enterprises engaged in cross border trade have been the worst affected by the pandemic given the restrictions imposed on travel across borders. This is also eroding economic welfare of the citizens that are directly and indirectly employed under this category.

Further, the meeting noted that International Trade taxes will experience a downward trend during the period and after the pandemic due to low business activity and reduction in import levels. This will also affect Government programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has become an eye-opener in a number of areas that should be harnessed including;

- i. Digitalization of business transactions and trade;
- ii. Enhancing local production of some goods hitherto imported;
- iii. Technological innovations to bolster local capacity to produce some goods;
- iv. Food security and agro-processing;
- v. Enhanced Telecommunications services in particular mobile money transfer services, including removal of roaming charges to facilitate trade;
- vi. Consolidating integration in order to mitigate supply-side constraints, strengthen cross border value chains and facilitate intra -EAC Trade.

The Ministers of Finance and Trade are expected to undertake the following specific interventions to facilitate the availability and access of essential goods to mitigate the spread of COVID-19:

- i. Waive import tariffs on critical COVID-19 related medical goods and raw materials/inputs for the manufacture of such goods;
- ii. Reduce the costs of mobile money transfer services and waiver of roaming charges to facilitate mobile and digital transaction services;
- iii. Review domestic taxation policies on essential COVID-19 related goods and services produced locally;
- iv. Institute stimulus packages and credit facilities to boost local production and support seriously affected Services sectors and SMEs,
- v. Analyse the economic impact and mobilise support from Development Partners for the economic recovery of Partner States;
- vi. Reprioritise strategic sectors that are critical for recovery such as health, manufacturing, food security, trade and services sectors;
- vii. Develop and implement a support facility for exporters to ensure sustainability of export earnings;
- viii. Develop measures to address increasing unemployment in the region due to the COVID-19 pandemic

The meeting noted that:

- i. Partner States have developed national guidelines on COVID-19, which should be annexes to the EAC Administrative Guidelines;
- ii. Partner States have been updating their guidelines on movement of goods and services and are urged to submit them along with comments on the EAC Administrative Guidelines;
- iii. Partner states were experiencing challenges in implementing the guidelines and therefore urged the EAC secretariat to undertake an assessment to document on the challenges on the ground, and propose amendments to be circulated in the revised administrative guidelines.
- iv. There was need for further consultations on the guidelines.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries:

- (a) directed the EAC Secretariat to re-submit the draft EAC Administrative Guidelines on Movement of Goods and Services to the EAC Partner States by 11th May 2020, (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 009*);**
- (b) directed the Partner States to submit comments on guidelines within one week from the date of re-submission of the document, (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 010*); and**
- (c) directed the EAC Secretariat to consolidate the comments from Partner States and convene a regional meeting to review and finalise the EAC Administrative Guidelines on Movement of Goods and Services, (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 011*).**

3.1 UPDATES ON THE BILATERAL MEETING BETWEEN REPUBLIC OF KENYA AND THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA ON MOVEMENTS OF GOODS:

The meeting was informed that on 30th April, 2020, the Republic of Uganda and the Republic of Kenya held a cordial bi-lateral meeting on COVID-19 pandemic response measures to facilitate cross border trade between the two countries and other landlocked countries in the region. The meeting was attended by the Ministers responsible for EAC Affairs, Health and Trade, Permanent/Principal Secretaries and Revenue Authorities Commissioner Generals and other Senior Officials.

The main objective of the meeting was to consider strategies to be adopted by the two Partner States in their efforts to combat the COVID 19 pandemic and specifically the measures put in place to facilitate cross-border trade. Each Partner State provided updates on the strategies adopted in response to COVID 19 aimed at addressing the flow of goods across the borders.

Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries noted that the Ministers Republic of Kenya and the Republic of Uganda, made the following recommendations / way forward:

- i. Only one (1) driver/occupant will be allowed in the truck to cross over to Uganda. The driver should wear a mask and have sanitizers at all times, and must carry adequate dry ration/food/non-alcoholic drinks with them to cater for their respective needs.
- ii. Republic of Uganda will continue undertaking mandatory testing for all drivers before entry into the Country using the WHO approved methodology (PCR).
- iii. Designated rest and stop points/places for the truck drivers along the corridor in both Uganda and Kenya should be communicated to both Partner States and the drivers.
- iv. Uganda to deploy the mobile laboratory at Malaba OSBP to reduce on the turnaround time for results and facilitate quick exit.
- v. Republic of Uganda to explore all administrative and technical means to expedite clearance of cargo and reduce the pileup of trucks in the shortest time.
- vi. Port health staff numbers at both Busia and Malaba to be increased to fasten COVID-19 sample collection and to work 24 hours. Port Health Staff at Malaba will be increased to 60 from the current 40 to speed up the service.

- vii. Both Countries to control cross border movement of people especially through the porous borders.
- viii. Republic of Kenya committed to undertake testing of her drivers. The tests shall be mandatory every two weeks whether the driver is travelling or not
- ix. Republic of Kenya would consult her transporters on the issue of the number of drivers per truck.

The meeting noted that there was an ongoing bilateral meeting between Republic of Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania on the movement of Cargo.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries took note of the bilateral consultations and the progress made by the Republics of Kenya and Uganda in coming up with jointly agreed measures to facilitate smooth flow of goods across their common borders.

3.2 EAC MISSION REPORT: ASSESSMENT OF STATE OF PLAY ON CROSS BORDER CLEARANCE OF CARGO AND TRUCK DRIVERS AT MALABA AND BUSIA DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries noted that a joint meeting of Ministers of Health and EAC Affairs held on 25th March 2020, the Ministers decided to maintain and facilitate cross border movement of cargo and services in EAC during the COVID 19 pandemic. However, there has been reports of pile up of trucks causing long queues on both sides of Malaba and Busia borders. In response to this occurrence, a mission to assess the state of play was undertaken by the Director General of Customs and Trade on 30th April and 1st May 2020 at Malaba and Busia. The primary objectives of the mission were:

- (a) to assess the multi-agency clearance processes of cargo and drivers and their co-ordination while combatting the spread of COVID 19 across borders;
- (b) Identify the challenges faced by the border agencies involved in clearance of goods and crew; and,
- (c) Identify operational interventions to address the traffic congestions;

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries further took note of the discussions on the state of play at the two borders following the COVID 19 pandemic, the operational challenges as well as requirements to cope with the unprecedented demands on border agencies, the mission report recommends the following:

- i. Uganda Port Health staff should be provided with accommodation at Malaba to address the delays in changeover of shifts and transportation;
- ii. The Republics of Kenya and Uganda should provide adequate medical supplies and protective gear to Border Agency staff to safeguard them from infection of corona virus;
- iii. The Health Declaration forms should be harmonized and simplified for ease of filling by drivers. It should contain critical information that enables monitoring, tracking and tracing the drivers;
- iv. Immigration should apply a system of issuing the Immigration forms to drivers prior to arrival at the border to minimize delays at the border (similar to how airlines do it). Drivers can be advised to carry many unfilled forms on their journeys;
- v. The immigration systems should be interconnected under the integrated border management framework to enhance exchange of information and reduce physical documentation;

- vi. The development of digital tracking system for monitoring and tracking drivers as a regional system should be fast tracked by EAC Secretariat;
- vii. An electronic information sharing mechanism across the region on tests undertaken should be adopted;
- viii. A regional Health certificates should be developed and shared online;
- ix. Partner States consider reducing on weigh-bridges as they can be centers of high risk for the spread of the virus;
- x. Testing of drivers before setting from points of departure should be mandatory to deter positive cases from proceeding with journeys;
- xi. The Uganda Port Health should adopt a constant flow process by issuing certificates as soon as each case is finished instead of piling up into batches because this creates crowds at immigration and this may compromise the immigration process;
- xii. URA should institute a monitoring and enforcement mechanism for immediate departure of trucks once they are done with border clearances. This could include a fining the drivers.
- xiii. URA should divert all wet cargo from Kenya through Busia to reduce congestion at Malaba;
- xiv. Continuous capacity building and awareness of border staff should be undertaken. The border staff should sensitive each other of their pro-cesses to promote coordination and efficiency;
- xv. Regional harmonized approach to combating Corona Virus should be adopted. Given the urgency to contain the spread, Partner States who are wish to jointly move faster should do so under the principle of variable geometry so longer as they provide feedback to all parties;
- xvi. The Joint Border Committees on all borders should meet regularly (at least once a week for busy borders) to review the operations at the borders.

The meeting noted the need for the EAC secretariat to implement a sensitization programme to eliminate stigmatization of drivers by communities living along the transport corridors in the region. This includes de-stigmatization of COVID-19 recoverees in the region. The meeting noted the need for the EAC Secretariat to ensure that the support for Risk communication and community engagement is through the relevant Ministries in the Partner States.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries:

- a) took note of the above recommendations with a view of informing possible solutions at other borders in the region;
- b) directed the EAC Secretariat in collaboration with Partner States to implement a sensitization programme to destigmatize truck drivers and COVID-19 recoverees in the region, (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 012*); and
- c) directed the EAC Secretariat to coordinate the activities under the sensitization programmes in the Partner States, (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 013*).

4. IMPACT OF THE COVID -19 PANDEMIC ON THE REGION'S PRODUCTIVE CAPACITIES

The meeting noted that the region's key productive sectors are already experiencing a slowdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as agriculture, trade, manufacturing and industry, tourism, offline retail and catering. The impact of the pandemic on key productive sectors so far identified include the following:

(a) Food crisis in EAC:

- i. Agriculture and by extension agro-processing is a sector that is central to the EAC economy, contributing between 24% and 44% of GDP in the five Partner States (excluding South Sudan), while also accounting for the livelihood of about 80% of the region's population;
- ii. Local agro-food supply chains are experiencing disruptions including reduced access to inputs and services; restricted labour (unskilled workers) movements; transport and roadblocks, credit and liquidity; higher transactions cost and reduced domestic demand due to reduced spending among other measures; and
- iii. The International Food Policy Research Institute's early projections indicate that even under an effective COVID-19 containment scenario, agricultural production is expected to drop by between 2.6-7 per cent and a decline in agri-food exports by 13-25 per cent in low- and middle-income countries consequently causing 14 million to 22 million people in those countries to slip into extreme poverty.

(b) Severe disruptions in manufacturing and industry value chains:

- i. The primary industry (mainly agro and quarrying industries) is suffering from dropping demand and obstructed movement. Post-harvest losses will increase due to limited processing capacities and declining markets and commodity pricing among others;
- ii. The impact on secondary industry reflected in view of the delayed resumption of work and obstructed movement due to control measures. At present, in most EAC countries work is done from home, a number of factories are closed and large numbers of employees prevented from working and consequently less output is being produced. Production is further hampered by the lack of intermediate supplies and the operations of industry are also being affected by disruption in the supply of spare parts/consumable parts and specialized labour should there be machine breakdowns due to cancellation of flights. Small and medium enterprises are especially affected as they have limited ability to absorb the de facto accrued losses. If the outbreak is not contained soon, the weakened consumer demand will be escalated affecting the secondary industry; and
- iii. Tertiary industry is undoubtedly the most affected. The retail, catering, tourism, hotel, transportation and other industries that employ many people may face greater funding and cost pressures due to obstructed movement and resulting dropping demand.

(c) Increased production of face masks in the EAC region

The total regional capacity of local production of masks is currently estimated at about 355,000 for surgical masks and about 600,000 for reusable masks. Thus, bringing the total to about 1 million of masks that can be produced in the EAC region.

(d) Growing popularity of online retail using e-commerce platforms.

This will help make up for the negative impact of the outbreak on consumption, and the proportion of e-commerce transactions in the total retail sales will continue to increase.

(e) Growing popularity of online entertainment.

Online video streaming, games, fitness and similar online activities have continued to gain popularity. When staying at home, people spend more time online.

(f) Increased Telecommuting and distance education.

Major online home working platforms seized the opportunities brought about by self-quarantine and work from home and online classes to boost market share. It is expected that homeworking, online education and paid knowledge platforms will maintain a growth momentum when the outbreak ends, and drive greater development in areas such as communications and cloud services.

Early trends would suggest that local industries involved in boosting food self-sufficiency, and the production of essential health care products, telecommunications technology and inputs for local manufacturing will be the likely winners. Partner States may thus need to promote initiatives that foster immediate mass production of these products. Some firms have started rethinking their business models, with supply shortages from overseas leading to an increase in procurement of inputs from local or regional businesses.

However, regardless of the duration of the pandemic, the following mitigation measures targeted at the aforementioned sectors have to be considered and implemented to soften the impact of the pandemic on productive sectors.

The meeting noted the need for the EAC Secretariat to analyse the priority sectors (update the information and assess capacity in the region).

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries:

- (a) directed Partner States to support local production of essential medical products and supplies including masks, sanitizers, coveralls, face shields, soaps, processed food, ventilators etc, (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 014*);**
- (b) directed Partner States to facilitate farmers to continue farming activities during this pandemic and post COVID-19 period, (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 015*);**
- (c) directed Partner States to support agro-processing and value chains as an import substitution measure, (*EAC/JMHE/ Directive /015*); and**
- (d) requested the Ministries of Finance to establish special purpose financing schemes for small and medium enterprises, to cushion them from the**

negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Decision 005*).

41. IMPACT ON MACROECONOMIC STABILITY

The meeting noted that there are already clear signs of COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the economies of EAC Partner States. For example, tourism and aviation sectors have collapsed and are unlikely to recover soon. Manufacturing and agriculture sector will be affected due to disruption in global supply chains and potential fall in global demand for key export goods such as horticulture produce. Foreign Direct Investment to the region is also likely to fall as foreign investors strive to reduce their exposure to risk. In addition, the financial system in the region is likely to face significant pressures. Basically, all sectors of the EAC economies are likely to be seriously affected, resulting in a fall in business income/profit, personal incomes, employment, living standards, and food security. Much of the economic impact will be on poor and vulnerable households, such as street vendors and day-rate workers in urban and rural areas. A fall in economic activities will also shrink the revenue base of EAC Governments. Currently it is expected that GDP growth in most EAC Partner States will continue to be positive, but significantly lower than previously expected.

Potential Fiscal policy responses:

- Reduction in tax liabilities (VAT and Income Taxes) for firms as well as households;
- Extending payment and/or filing deadlines without interest or penalties;
- Negotiating debt reliefs/debt restructuring with multilateral lenders;
- Explore and take advantage of financial assistance available from the IMF/WB;

Potential Monetary and financial sector responses:

- Temporarily adjusting credit guarantees and loan terms;
- Reducing interest rates and various charges on financial transactions;
- Prevent liquidity pressures from turning into solvency problems.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries requested the Ministers of Finance to analyse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the fiscal and monetary sectors of the EAC region and recommend an appropriate plan of action (*EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Decision 006*).

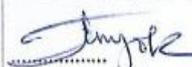
4. A.O.B

The DSG (PSS) informed the meeting that the EAC Secretariat would receive 700,000euros to support the partner states in Risk Communication and community engagement. the Meeting was informed that the funds were to be implemented through the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries directed the EAC Secretariat to formally submit detailed information about this support to the Partner States.

The meeting ended at 14.50 hours.

Signed by Partner States' Heads of delegations on this 8th day of May, 2020.

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|--|--|--|---|--|------------------------------------|
|  Hon. Dr. Daniel Ngamije Minister of Health |  Dr. Kevit Desai, CBS, FOR: Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of East African Community and Regional Development |  Maj. Gen. Kahinda Otalire ... Minister of East African Community Affairs |  Hon. John Luk Jok Minister of East African Community Affairs | | |
| REPUBLIC OF RWANDA | REPUBLIC OF KENYA | REPUBLIC OF BURUNDI | REPUBLIC OF UGANDA | THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA | REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN |