



EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

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

**VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE
29TH MAY, 2020**

**REPORT OF THE MEETING:
SESSION OF MINISTERS / CABINET
SECRETARIES**

(Ref: EAC/HEALTH & EAC AFFAIRS /O3JMHE/2020)

**EAC SECRETARIAT
ARUSHA, TANZANIA
MAY 2020**

1.0. INTRODUCTION

1.1. CONVENING OF THE MEETING

A Joint meeting of Ministers responsible for Health, Transport and EAC Affairs has been convened by the Chairperson of the Council of Ministers to consider and deliberate on a mechanism for testing, certification and monitoring of truck drivers. In addition, the meeting is also considered the draft framework for the regional sensitization and communication on COVID-19. The meeting was held via Video conference on **29th May, 2020**.

1.2. STRUCTURED PARTICIPATION OF THE MEETING

The Session of Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries was attended by delegates from the EAC Partner States' National Ministries responsible for Health, Trade, Transport and EAC Affairs as well as representatives from the EAC Partner States. The meeting was also attended by representative from the national revenue authorities, members of the national task forces; works and transport, disaster preparedness and response, immigration, customs, civil aviation, portal health, internal affairs / security, transport, national Health Research and Academic Institutions, the EAC National Reference Medical Laboratories, the EAC National Medicines Regulatory Authorities (NMRAs), the EAC National Medical and Public Health Laboratory Regulatory Authorities, including representatives of various relevant national Health professional regulatory Authorities among others.

The meeting was attended by the experts from the Republic of Kenya, Republic of Uganda, Republic of South Sudan, and the republic of Rwanda, this consultative meeting was convened under the framework of responding to the COVID – 19 Pandemic which was not following the Strict EAC rules of procedure for convening EAC meetings. it's a

1.3. AGENDA AND PROGRAMME OF THE MEETING

The detailed Agenda and Programme of the meeting are hereto attached as **Annexes A-I and Annex A- II** respectively.

2. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Chairperson **Hon. Dr. Daniel NGAMIJE**, the Minister of Health Republic of Rwanda welcomed all the delegates to the meeting and thanked the Permanent Secretaries/Principal/Under Secretaries for the report and the EAC secretariat for convening the meeting. He underscored the need for the meeting to consider and review the proposed Digital system that would facilitate testing and sharing COVID_ 19 test results, certification and tracking of the drivers in the region, to ensure they to remain healthy as they transport goods while ensuring safety of the community.

The chairperson further emphasised to the meeting the importance of the Digital Surveillance trackers for truck drivers and crew, developed to facilitate sharing of information on truckers in the region. He noted that the System developed would be able to generate a bar-coded COVID -19 Test certificate for drivers and crew who were tested, which is expected to facilitate sharing of information and quick movement of goods in the region.

He further thanked the experts, the Permanent/Principal/Under Secretaries from Partner States for participating in the meeting, and wished them fruitful deliberations. Due to time constraint, the meeting commenced.

3. CONSIDERATION OF A MECHANISM FOR TESTING, CERTIFICATION AND MONITORING OF TRUCK DRIVERS

3.1 CONSIDERATION OF THE EAC REGIONAL ELECTRONIC CARGO AND DRIVERS' TRACKING SYSTEM (ERECDTS)

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries recalled that during the meeting Joint Meeting of ministers/ cabinet Secretaries held on 7-8 May 2020, a draft concept note on the **EAC Regional Electronic Cargo And Drivers' Tracking System (ERECDTS)** was presented by the EAC Secretariat. The meeting was informed that the East African Community in collaboration with its partners were planning to implement a digital COVID-19 Surveillance Tracker in a phased manner, while leveraging on the existing cargo tracking infrastructure. The system is expected to share truck driver's information leveraging on that which is managed and operated by Revenue Authorities in the region, and the existing health information systems in Partner States.

The meeting also 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 share across all Partner states, including the EAC Secretariat. The system will help policy / decision makers to make informed and well researched decisions, plans and programmes on benefit of all East Africans.

Key capabilities of the **EAC Regional Electronic Cargo and Drivers' Tracking System (ERECDTS)**:

The platform to be implemented will have three main phases:

- **COMPONENT ONE:** Establish the EAC dashboard that gives summary data of confirmed cases, active cases, recovered, deaths and the number of tests

conducted and also linking the portal to the EAC main website <https://covidcheck.eac.int/>, <https://www.eac.int/coronavirus>;

- COMPONENT TWO: Electronic Information sharing system for Truck drivers/crews and linking it to the Regional Electronic cargo tracking; and
- COMPONENT THREE: Individual/Personal/self-assessment/Digital COVID-19 Surveillance Tracker of citizen's risk of covid-19

The meeting was informed that the following key enablers need to be addressed for the system to work as follows:

Partner States need to:

- a) designate accredited facilities (clinic/laboratory/ health center/hospital) where truck drivers and crew will be going for COVID-19 Screening/testing;
- b) provide designated areas where truck drivers can spend the night and also areas of refreshments. The designated areas will the following basic requirements
 - i. safer parking space
 - ii. utilities including, cooking and showering areas
 - iii. clean and well-maintained shower
 - iv. water refilling facilities
 - v. hand washing and sanitary facilities
 - vi. resting facilities should be at least 100 – 150 Km apart
- c) collaborate with Truck companies/ owners for proper usage of the platform and sharing of relevant and accurate information about drivers and crew;
- d) provide the time allowed for trucks to start journey and when to stop depending on the national guidelines; and
- e) establish a Command Monitoring Center for live monitoring of the truck driver's system that will help for reporting and information sharing to the decision makers

EAC Secretariat needs to:

- a) establish a Command Monitoring Center for live monitoring of the truck driver's system that will be linked to the national Command Monitoring Centers for coordinating the reporting and information sharing by Partner States;
- b) ensure that the system is monitored under each EAC Ministry of health's command center and linked to other national surveillance tools;
- c) provide end user devices at all designated testing/ screening sites for each Partner State to ensure proper information sharing across all Partner States; and
- d) ensure that the developed system complies with all regional and national set rules and incorporates all requirements from Partner States.

An updated concept notes on the functionality of the EAC Regional Electronic Cargo and Drivers' Tracking System (ERECCTS) is attached hereto as **Annex I**.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries received a demonstration how the EAC Regional Electronic Cargo and Drivers' Tracking System functions and made the following observations:

- i. the system allows the users to share information across borders in a transparent manner, and the truck drivers will need to upload the phone app on their phones;
- ii. continuous screening will be done at selected check points along the transport corridors, which have already been designated, and information is available for all Partner States;
- iii. documents verification will be done by customs, immigration, law enforcement agencies / persons/ who will confirm if a particular traveller is fit to proceed on the journey;
- iv. the system will be supported by 4 Command Operating Centres (COCs) located in four locations at designated national Revenue authorities in Kenya, Uganda, DRC and Rwanda, and one additional COC was to be set up at Nimule for the Republic of South Sudan
- v. The Digital tracker has mobile phone and web-based applications for different users namely: the Health Mobile App (HA), Health Validator App (HV), Driver Mobile App (DA), Document Validator App (DV)
- vi. the EAC Regional Electronic Cargo and Drivers' Tracking System will interface and connect directly to designated laboratories in the Partner States to allow the Partner States, for purposes of COVID -19 laboratory results needed to generate the COVID -19 Test Certificates / attestation Certificates for COVID -19 test results
- vii. the truck driver and crew members' mobile phones will be used as the tracking devices once they commence their journey along the corridors, and command centres will be able to communicate directly with the drivers as long as the phones are not switched off
- viii. Additional information / updates will be along all check points along the corridor and shared along the system;
- ix. need to develop a Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs) for drivers and truck owners on how to use the application, and the need for sensitization on the system;
- x. Kenya is using the Kitenge app which has been interfaced with the digital tracking system;
- xi. the meeting emphasised the importance of having clear timelines indicating when infrastructure will be ready for the RSS and other countries;
- xii. system depends heavily on connectivity and internet, and the importance of engaging telecom companies to ensure good connectivity to allow tracking of these drivers throughout the journey;
- xiii. implementation issues to be addressed include:
 - a. need for a harmonised nomenclature of the system (name of the system)
 - b. defining the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders who are involved in use of the digital tracker for clear accountability
 - c. put in place clear mechanisms to deal with the drivers who don't fulfil the requirement

- d. need to implement joint supervision to increase level of trust for the laboratories
- e. *Need accredited laboratories which will be known, directors will be held accountable for the issuing of COVID -19 test results for drivers and crew*
- xiv. Testing protocols need to be harmonised
- xv. emphasised the importance of strengthening cross border communication and surveillance along border crossing points (gazetted and non – gazetted);
- xvi. enable the system to allow the owner of the trucks to book on behalf of their drivers
- xvii. ensure the system is bar coded and ensure inter-operability of the systems in the countries;
- xviii. *the platform to include penalty for none compliant drivers and transporters who violates the provisions of the system. We need to ensure that the truck drivers are compliant;*
- xix. need for data security;
- xx. After a driver is tested and confirmed negative, he / she should travel / commence his travel within 48 hours; and
- xxi. need to have rapid response teams to respond to any emergencies that may arise / respond to any warning generated by the system i along the transport corridors.
- xxii. The System also links to the national command centres in the Partner States to allow the sharing of information;
- xxiii. need for the drivers to provide consent for the Partner States to collect the data under the EAC COVID-19 Surveillance form, and to allow sharing this in the digital system;
- xxiv. The designated stop over areas will have the following basic requirements
 - safer parking space
 - utilities including, cooking and showering areas
 - clean and well-maintained shower
 - water refilling facilities
 - hand washing and sanitary facilities
 - resting facilities should be at least 100 – 150 Km apart

Observations

- proposed to adopt the name to be the “**EAC Regional Electronic Cargo and Drivers’ Tracking System (ERCCTS)**”, hosted at the EAC Secretariat;
- the tracking system will be supported by Trademark East Africa (TMEA) for an initial period of 6 months, will mobilize additional funds to maintain the system;
- previous COVID -19 positive drivers who were treated and recovered need to be provided COVID -19 test Certificates with a longer duration;
- there should be consideration to allow for random testing of truck drivers for COVID – 19, at designated check points (rest points) without affecting flow of trucks;
- need to put in place measures / mechanism to help build mutual trust in our available infrastructure for testing COVID -19, and avoid duplication of efforts
- need to have quarantine in the system;

- need for joint inspection, validation and accreditation of laboratories testing for COVID -19 for truck drivers, crew and travellers in the region. focus will be on designated Laboratories that will be enrolled in the EAC Electronic Cargo and Driver' Tracking System; and
- Use WHO country officers to provide initial guidance on accreditation of COVID -19 testing sites.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries:

- a) adopted the the EAC Regional Electronic Cargo and Drivers' Tracking System, ***(EAC/JMHE/CM3/Decision 001)***;
- b) directed Partner States to designate, provide, establish or ensure that the required key enablers for the digital system to work are put in place, ***(EAC/JMHE/CM3/Directive 001)***;
- c) directed the EAC Secretariat to fast track the implementation of the EAC Digital Surveillance Tracker, ***(EAC/JMHE/CM3/Directive 002)***;
- d) directed EAC Secretariat to coordinate rollout of the existing EAC Regional Electronic Cargo and Drivers' Tracking System to cover the Central Corridor;
- e) directed the EAC Secretariat in collaboration with the EAC Partner States and National transporters' association to sensitize key stakeholders on the EAC Digital Covid-19 Surveillance tracker, ***(EAC/JMHE/CM2/Directive 001)***; and
- f) directed the EAC Secretariat to include a section for consent on the EAC COVID-19 Surveillance form ***(EAC/JMHE/CM3/Directive 003)***.

3.2 TESTING AND REPORTING FOR COVID-19 FOR DRIVERS AND CREW

Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries were informed that on the 4th May 2020, the EAC Secretariat health department had convened a technical meeting for heads of the National Public Health Laboratories to discuss harmonised approaches for providing testing services for the general population including Truck drivers to facilitate movement in the region. The meeting had noted that the region was mainly using the Open PCR machines for testing for COVID -19, and also had the GeneXpert that could be used to decentralise testing services to the periphery, especially to facilitate testing of truck drivers and crew the facilities that will be conducting testing need to the will need to be accredited.

Using a report generated from an assessment conducted by the EAC Secretariat under the Mobile Laboratory project, the Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries were further informed the, Partner States have other existing PCR based platforms including Abbot, and Roche, that are available and can be used for COVID -19 testing. The challenge observed was the shortage or inability to access of consumables for the machines, needed for COVID -19

Further, the meeting noted that the EAC Secretariat had developed a harmonised testing guideline to address challenges in the region including:

- i. disparity (marked differences) in the screening and testing approaches for COVID – 19 among the EAC Partner States;
- ii. varied capacities for COVID -19 testing among the EAC Partner states;
- iii. inability to trust COVID -19 test results from neighbouring countries, thus leading to multiple testing of traveller mainly truck drivers and crew;
- iv. International movement of goods from the coast to inland destinations has been identified as an essential service in the region, however there is a growing concern over truck drivers who form a very big proportion of confirmed asymptomatic cases of COVID-19; and therefore pose a huge risk for further spread of the disease in the region;
- v. growing stigmatization and harassment of truck drivers in some countries in the region; and
- vi. COVID-19 testing facilities are centralized, mainly available at the National Reference Laboratories resulting in prolonged turn-around time for the results, hence the long stays / delays for the drivers at the border points, and the growing pile up of truck at the borders in the region;

The harmonised Testing guideline for COVID -19 for the region is hereto attached as ***Annex II.***

All Partner States are fast tracking the decentralisation of testing for COVID-19, to ensure that the current demand for testing services especially for drivers is met.

The meeting noted that once a driver and crew member tests Positive for COVID-19 while on transit, the results will be shared automatically with the transporter or supervisor to enable the company to send a driver to continue and deliver the truck to its intended destination.

The meeting considered the draft harmonised testing guidelines for COVID -19 for the region, and noted the need for country input before the session of Permanent / Principal and under Secretaries. They however noted the importance of having guideline to facilitate the use of the EAC Regional Electronic Cargo and Drivers' Tracking System for drivers and crew.

The meeting further noted the need for clear guidelines on how to manage the travellers (trucker driver or crew) who test positive while on transit. the meeting discussed and noted the following:

- i. All travellers will undertake a test at point of origin, before departure;
- ii. information on truck drivers or crew who tested positive prior to the implementation of the digital tracking system will be shared officially by the host country and should be recognised in the country of origin;
- iii. clear methods of hand over will be developed between the affected countries;
- iv. need to agree on the testing algorithm to be used in the region while using the PCR Testing platforms; and

- v. truck drivers and crew who test positive for COVID -19 in any country, should be treated as per the prescribed COVID -19 treatment guidelines of that country.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries:

- a) directed Partner States to submit their inputs on the harmonised Testing Guideline for COVID -19 to the EAC Secretariat by 2nd June, 2020 for incorporation ***(EAC/JMHE/CM3/Directive 004)***;
- b) directed the EAC Secretariat to convene a virtual meeting of Partner States' heads of National Reference Laboratories and heads of Disease surveillance to validate and approve the revised Harmonised Testing Guideline for COVID -19 for the EAC region, by 5th June 2020, ***(EAC/JMHE/CM3/Directive 005)***;
- c) directed Partner States to designate accredited testing sites for COVID -19 in the country and submit detailed information to the EAC Secretariat by 2nd June, 2020, for wider dissemination in the region ***(EAC/JMHE/CM3/Directive 006)***; and
- d) directed the EAC Secretariat and Partner States to work with WHO country Officers to undertake joint inspection, validation and provide accreditation of facilities (laboratories) testing for COVID -19 for truck drivers, crew and travellers in the region by 15th June 2020, ***(EAC/JMHE/CM3/Directive 007)***.

3.3 CONSIDERATION OF THE EAC COVID-19 SURVEILLANCE FORM FOR DRIVERS AND CREW MEMBERS

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries were updated on the COVID -19 reporting form for drivers and crew, developed for collecting the relevant information to be shared about the driver before he starts the trip and at all accredited designated check points and testing points. The meeting reviewed the Draft COVID-19 Surveillance form for drivers and crew members is hereto attached as ***Annex III***.

The Ministers/ Cabinet Secretaries adopted the EAC COVID-19 Surveillance form for truck drivers and crew members *(EAC/JMHE/CM2/Decision 002)*.

3.4 CONSIDERATION OF THE DRAFT COVID-19 TEST CERTIFICATE FOR TRUCK DRIVERS AND CREW MEMBERS

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries were informed that a system has been developed to facilitate a common approach to certifying results of these tested for COVID -19, by using the system to generate a COVID-19 test certificate for drivers and crew members. The meeting noted that the generated COVID-19 certificate for tested drivers and crew members would be shared with all respective stakeholders both at accredited designated testing points and borders crossing point in the region. This certificate that is recognised in the EAC is expected to be valid for 14 days, and would allow the owner to travel in the

region without being subjected to re-testing unless he or she is found to have signs and symptoms for COVID -19, on screening at check points using the screening tool.

The meeting also noted that the Certificates will be issued only for those drivers and crew members that tested negative for COVID-19. Those that test positive were expected to follow existing national protocols to access care and other services.

The EAC COVID -19 Test Certificate for truck drivers and crew members is hereto attached as **Annex IV**.

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries adopted the EAC COVID -19 Test Certificate for truck drivers and crew members, (EAC/JMHE/CM3/Decision 003).

4 CONSIDERATION OF THE DRAFT FRAMEWORK FOR THE REGIONAL SENSITIZATION AND COMMUNICATION ON COVID-19

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries recalled that the Joint meeting of Ministers responsible for Health, Trade, Transport and EAC Affairs held on 25th April 2020, had 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. The Joint meeting of Ministers had directed the EAC Secretariat, in collaboration with Partner States, to implement programmes that are geared towards preventing stigma and discrimination among truck drivers and COVID-19 recoverees in the region (EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 012), and directed the EAC Secretariat to coordinate the activities under the sensitization programmes in the Partner States, (EAC/JMHE/CM2/ Directive 013). The programme would aim to de-stigmatize COVID-19 recoverees and truck drivers in the region. The meeting joint meeting had also noted the need for the EAC Secretariat to ensure that the support for Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) was provided through the relevant Ministries in the Partner States. The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries further noted that Joint meeting of ministers;

In an effort, to supplement the sensitization programmes instituted by Partner States and have a harmonized approach, the EAC Secretariat has developed a draft a **regional sensitization and communication framework for COVID-19**, hereto attached as **Annex V**.

The meeting was informed that the EAC Secretariat was planning to develop harmonised sensitization material/content that is to be disseminated in the region and customized by individual Partner States.

further, the EAC Secretariat informed the meeting about resources mobilised for Risk and Community engagement to reduce the spread of COVID -19 in the region. The framework will be implemented by Partner States and partners including the International federation of the Red Cross (IFRC).

Meeting took note of the framework and made the following observations:

- i. noted the need to have targeted interventions with focus on interventions for truck drivers and border communities. They however noted the need to also provide information for the general population to ensure that the population is safe;
- ii. the importance of limiting printed materials, to guard against transmission of infection thorough distribution of IEC materials;
- iii. the interventions in the framework were not t costed, thus the need to include this component;
- iv. need for web page where all materials developed can be accessed;
- v. the support for risk communication on COVID-19 to the Partner States from the German Government, had been shared with the Partner States;
- vi. need to access harmonised information packages for the travellers in the region, to avoid misinformation; and
- vii. need to clarify on the reporting mechanisms for providing progress on implementation of the framework

The Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries:

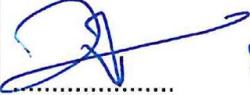
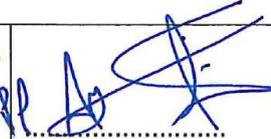
- a) took note of the Framework for the regional sensitization and communication on COVID-19; and
- b) directed the EAC Secretariat to mobilise more funds to support the implementation of regional sensitization and communication initiatives for COVID-19, ***(EAC/JMHE/CM3/Directive 008)***.

5 A.O.B

There being on other business, the meeting was ended at 18.00 hours.

Signed by Partner States' Heads of delegations on this 29th day of May, 2020.

Signed by Partner States' Heads of delegations on this 29th day of May, 2020.

 Hon. Dr. Daniel NGAMIJE, Minister of Health	 Hon. Mutahi KAGWE Cabinet Secretary for Health	 Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth ACENG Minister of Health Hon. Elizabeth Achuei Minister of Health
REPUBLIC OF RWANDA	REPUBLIC OF KENYA	REPUBLIC OF UGANDA	REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN