

Building an Inclusive East Africa Community

Background and Context

The East African Community (EAC) signed an interim Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU) in 2007. The developments on the two fronts of regional integration in Eastern Africa and the EPAs offer significant opportunities for promoting economic and social development in the EAC region. However, a wide range of challenges, many of which proved to be stumbling blocks in the previous effort to establish the EAC, still remain, including:

- (i) implementing existing agreements, such as phasing out tariffs within the region in order to implement the free trade agreement (FTA), and a common external tariff (CET), as well as removing non-tariff barriers (NTBs);
- (ii) agreeing to future terms of cooperation and external trade such as possible adjustments to the CET and external trade terms such as those relating to EPAs and the region's engagement in the wider regional integration process such as the one announced in October 2008 at Kampala for integration of EAC, Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA);
- (iii) adjusting to emerging economic and social dynamics to ensure that while trade integration creates new opportunities, it also leads to redistribution of resources away from some sectors, and those within

these sectors need support to take up opportunities elsewhere; and lastly,

- (iv) ensuring cooperation to promote inclusive developments and poverty reduction, hence, economically and socially marginalised groups require targeted assistance in order to access new trading opportunities.

Thus, successfully tackling these challenges will require a wide range of actions and cooperation across the EAC. Engaging citizens in the policy dialogue and implementation process, so as to ensure action responds to their needs and attracts the ownership required to be politically sustainable is a prominent action in this context. The project, 'Building an Inclusive East African Community' (BIEAC) was supported by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Objectives

With this background, the BIEAC project (2008-2010) proposed to address the above challenges by supporting a range of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the EAC member countries during project's two years duration to examine the implications of external trade policies on the welfare and livelihood of people and provide a better understanding of both challenges and opportunities of trade integration. It supported these CSOs in their efforts to raise awareness of the general public on relevant issues, gather their concerns and carry out advocacy to highlight them

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to policymakers. This was done through research, awareness raising and advocacy in two one-yearly cycles.

Project Activities and Outputs

Studies in all the EAC member countries, *viz.* Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, were carried out to identify potential implications of the proposed intra-EAC and external trade policies for the poor and marginalised in the region; interventions and policies required to support economic and social adjustment to trade reforms; and measures required to support the poor and marginalised to better access opportunities provided by the intra-EAC and external trade integration.

Briefing Papers and easy-to-read Trade Guides were produced based on this research. Outreach partners in the five countries disseminated the research findings in awareness raising workshops in different parts of each country. A series of Civil Society Position Papers were also produced based on the concerns raised at these workshops, and used for advocacy activities.

Outreach partners also organised national and regional level advocacy workshops to bring

together CSOs, relevant government officials, private sector and the academia to discuss emerging issues relating to EAC trade policy and its implications for trade and development. Findings of the research and the civil society position resulting from the activities under the project were shared with the stakeholders relevant for forging EAC trade policy. Outputs of the project included: research outputs on EPAs and regional trade issues; regular thematic outputs like Briefing Papers, Trade Guides and Position Papers; and a sustained interaction with policymakers during the two years with a view of establishing an aware and informed CSO constituency in the region

Project Outcome

The project contributed to building the capacity of CSOs in East Africa to respond to policy challenges in integration of the EAC *vis-à-vis* external bilateral, regional and multilateral trade arrangements like EPAs and WTO. More specifically, it provided support to a range of CSOs in the EAC Member States by examining the implications of external trade policies on the welfare and livelihood of people; and provided a better understanding of both challenges and opportunities of trade integration.