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Title: *Towards developing intra-regional baseline trade indicators for staple food product in EAC and COMESA*

There have been various initiatives by national organizations and regional development partners aim to increase intra-regional trade in staple foods in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA). These aim to improve the aggregate welfare of producers and consumers in the region. However, the assessment of the impact of regional trade policies has been difficult due to the underdevelopment of trade data infrastructure. If there is no mechanism to measure and evaluate the impact of trade policies, then it would remain unclear whether or not member countries are making the best use of available trade opportunities. This study will highlight the existing disconnections between broader policy frameworks at the level of regional integration initiatives such as the COMESA and East African Community (EAC) free trade agreements and the apparent underdevelopments of trade policy analysis at all levels.

The overall goal of the study is to develop trade indicators to assess the intra-regional trade dynamics for the main staple foods in the region. The objectives of the study are: (1) assess the consistency of reported trade data for countries in the East African Community and selected countries in the COMESA region so as to identify the countries and products associated with reliable reported trade data; (2) develop trade flow matrix based on most accurate reported data; and (3) develop indicators to assess the dynamics of intra-regional trade in the region.

The methodological framework used in this study involves two steps. The first one consists in using various quantitative indicators to assess the quality of reported intra-regional trade data so as to identify the most reliable partners. The second step consists in developing a baseline trade flow matrix which will then be used to estimate various quantitative trade indicators aimed at assessing the dynamics of intra-regional trade in staple foods.

Preliminary findings indicate that reported trade data per product and on bilateral trade in the EAC is characterized by substantial discrepancies. However, relatively consistent reported trade data involve the reported data on the exports of maize grain from each of Kenya and Tanzania to the region. Similarly, the data reported on the exports of tomato and bovine meat, from Uganda to the region, are also relatively consistent. A trade flow matrix has been developed using the maximum value between reported exports and their mirror value for bilateral trade. Preliminary estimates imply that total trade in major staple foods was about USD 141 million in 2008.

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