

Uganda adopts TRASE project to expand trade of agricultural products

For years, trade of agricultural products from and within the East African Community (EAC) has been hindered by fragmented Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) among the states but with the adoption of the EAC SPS Legal Framework (ESLF), Uganda is set to expand her trade of agricultural products domestically, regionally and internationally through streamlined regulations, standard operating procedures and measures.

When the Trade in Agriculture Safely and Efficiently (TRASE) was set up last year, the aim was to improve regional and international agricultural trade in East African Communities through strengthening SPS institutional framework. SPS refers to measures to protect humans, animals, and plants from diseases, pests, or contaminants. However, the five-year project faced a challenge of poorly-coordinated SPS systems and legal frameworks, something that needed to be addressed for any success.

On December 2, 2020 senior officials from various ministries and agencies as well as the private sector converged via a virtual meeting to disseminate the SPS assessment findings to stakeholders and introduce SPS activities for Uganda by TRASE. At the end of meeting chaired by Ms. Grace Choda, the Permanent Secretary (PS), Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, it was agreed to reduce trade barriers, increase transparency and raise SPS awareness. Choda appreciated the support from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provided through the TRASE project and noted that the fragmentation of SPS responsibilities increases administrative costs. She re-iterated that TRASE intervention will help to improve national SPS systems and increase domestication of EAC frameworks and ultimately boost trade.

In this landmark adoption, it was also resolved that a multi-agency SPS coordination be created to align various stakeholders and that produce and export associations in the horticulture sector form an apex body to participate in the TRASE project. Meanwhile, Uganda is also going to form a technical working group to review maximum residue level (MRL) notifications on top of picking lessons from the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) on how it successfully responded to MRLs issues raised by Sweden and Sudan, including monitoring MRLs in coffee and sharing information with Sudan and Sweden. By extension, Uganda is going to review its Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) agreement by joining other EAC states to present one position as a region. The TBT agreement aims to ensure that technical regulations, standards, and conformity assessment procedures are non-discriminatory and do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade.

TRASE OVERVIEW

The TRASE project aims to drive best practices in SPS-related testing and inspection. The project will establish three center of excellence (CoE) laboratories as regional models and will also work with identified competent authorities to strengthen pest and disease surveillance, notification and overall transparency at the regional and domestic levels.

Strengthening systems and capacity.

The project will strengthen regional and national SPS committees to coordinate and communicate with the private sector and partner states to reduce trade barriers, increase transparency and raise SPS awareness. It will also increase producer and consumer awareness on the importance of safe food and the harmful effects of low quality and/or counterfeit inputs on public health and trade, which will drive demand for safer products and increase political will to support and enforce SPS standards.

In fact, it is estimated that the project will result in an increase of \$250 million (Shs 925 billion) in regional and international agricultural sales and further drive regional integration of the EAC.