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Page: 1/2

**Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures**

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**COMMON MARKET FOR EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA (COMESA)  
SECRETARIAT REPORT ON SPS ACTIVITIES**

**COMESA REPORT TO THE WTO COMMITTEE ON SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES**

The following communication, received on 18 March 2024, is being circulated at the request of the secretariat of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

## **1 BACKGROUND**

1.1. The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) is a Regional Economic Community comprising 21 member States, namely Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The region has a population of over 640 million people, a Gross Domestic Product of \$1.0 trillion and a global export/import trade in goods worth US\$ 383 billion. As such, COMESA forms a major marketplace for both internal and external trading.

## **2 SPS PROGRAMMES TO FACILITATE IMPLEMENTATION OF WTO/SPS AGREEMENT**

2.1. COMESA has been implementing several programmes to facilitate the implementation of the COMESA SPS Regulations and WTO/SPS Agreement.

### **2.1 COMESA SPS Subcommittee meetings**

2.2. The COMESA SPS subcommittee meets annually to review, among other issues, progress in the implementation of COMESA SPS programmes. The recent one being the 12<sup>th</sup> SPS subcommittee meeting held in November/December 2023 with support from African Union Commission. Alongside the subcommittee, were meetings for the Animal Health (AH), Food Safety (FS) and Plant Health (PH) Technical Working Groups (TWGs) which are under the subcommittee. One of the outcomes of the meetings was the development of Work Plans for TWGs which included activities to facilitate implementation of harmonization risk based SPS measures in the region.

### **2.2 Harmonization of Food Safety Regulatory Measures**

2.3. COMESA, in collaboration with FAO with support under the 11<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund (EDF) Programme, supports member States to harmonise food safety regulatory measures for commodities of regional trade importance to facilitate trade within the region. International standards set under Codex are the basis for harmonization. The harmonization has been prioritized for commodities of regional trade importance which include maize, groundnuts, milk, and fish. The harmonized food safety requirements for the priority commodities will facilitate smooth trade among COMESA member States. A framework for harmonization has been drafted which is envisaged to be applied in the region.

### **2.3 Capacity Building in Risk Based Imported Food Control**

2.4. In collaboration with FAO, with support under the 11 EDF, COMESA is building capacities in risk based imported food control piloted in Arabic and French speaking members. The intervention is

aimed at supporting member States to adopt risk-based food import control based on the FAO Risk Based Imported Food Control Manual. The adoption of risk-based food import control ensures a harmonized approach to food import control thereby facilitating trade among COMESA member States.

#### **2.4 Strengthening of COMESA Reference Laboratory System**

2.5. Currently COMESA has three reference laboratories namely, Central Veterinary Research Institute (CVRI) (Zambia) for Animal Health; Food Technology Laboratory (FTL) (Mauritius) for Food Safety; and Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) (Kenya) for Plant Health. The reference laboratory system is being strengthened by identifying additional laboratories and streamlining their roles to specific areas/parameters of competence. The intervention also includes the development of sustainable operational mechanisms for the system.

#### **2.5 Strengthening of National Plant Protection Organisation (NPPOs)**

2.6. In collaboration with FAO/IPPC and support from European Union, COMESA has developed e-learning courses on Pest Risk Analysis, Phytosanitary Export Certification, Phytosanitary Inspection, Surveillance and Reporting Obligations (<https://www.ippc.int/en/e-learning/>) which are open to the world. Further, several training courses have been done to build capacities of NPPOs in managing pest outbreaks such as Fusarium Tropical Race 4 in Bananas. The capacity building also included development of Model Regulations for Electronic Phytosanitary Certification.

#### **2.6 Implementation of the Voluntary Capacity Building Scheme based on the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) Global Markets Programme**

2.7. This programme is aimed at supporting SMEs to implement GSFI Benchmarked Food Safety standards. In particular, the intervention is aimed at building SMEs' capacities to comply with food safety market requirements to enhance their participation in regional trade. A total of 151 SMEs have been on-boarded on the programme and a total of nineteen enterprises can successfully implement GFSI Certification. This intervention complements the SPS capacity building interventions that are targeted at the public sector.

#### **2.7 Implementation of the Green Pass Initiative**

2.8. The initiative is being implemented under the 11<sup>th</sup> EDF funded COMESA Small Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative (SSCBTI). It is aimed at simplifying SPS and technical standards requirements for small scale cross border traders. It has been piloted on dried fish originating from the Luangwa District of Zambia and traded across several borders, including Democratic Republic of Congo through Kasumbalesa border post. It is aimed encouraging small scale cross border traders who are mainly Women and Youths to use formal routes and enhance their participation in regional trade. Capacity building in self-regulation and risk-based regulation has been conducted targeting the traders and SPS/TBT Authorities, respectively.

#### **2.8 Enhancing Regional Agricultural Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa**

2.9. COMESA is implementing this intervention in collaboration with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) with support from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The project aims at facilitating trade among the trading partners with the establishment of Mutual Recognition Agreements based on equivalence of SPS measures and mutual recognition of conformity assessments procedures. The project has been piloted among six member States: Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe covering six commodities: maize, groundnuts, soybeans, sorghum, rice, and beans.

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