



ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA



Trade of Agroecological Products within the East African Community (EAC)

APRIL 2025



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAEs	Agroecological Enterprises
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
APET	African Union High Level Panel on Emerging Technologies
CBT	Cross Border Trade
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAC	East African Community
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
FGDS	Focus Group Discussions
OSBP	One Stop Border Posts
RoO	Rule of Origin
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SSCBT	Small Scale Cross Border Trade
TIC	Tanzanian Investment Centre
TMs	Territorial Markets

Executive Summary

Cross border trade is very important for members of the East African Community. The trade in agroecological products will become increasingly critical for countries within the East African Community. Given the impact climate change is already having and will continue to have on agriculture and food systems, conventional agriculture will face ever expanding challenges. Agroecological production systems, given that they are more resilient, will become more critical as they demonstrate on a growing scale the numerous advantages. It is within this context that agroecological products will experience increasing demand as food systems experience multiple crises.

However, collective knowledge on the scale of trade of agroecological products within the East African Community is limited. It is in that context that the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa has commissioned this study.

Specifically, the study aims to:

- (a) Identify and document the key types, volumes, and pathways of agroecological produce being traded across borders within the EAC.
- (b) Perform a comparative analysis of agroecological and non-agroecological products traded along the borders
- (c) Analyse existing trade policies, regulations, practices, and infrastructures affecting agroecological produce in the EAC member states.
- (d) In-depth analysis of the value chain and market system, Tariffs and Non-Tariff Barriers/ opportunities, and the role of AFCFTA and other trade agreements in promoting cross-border trade for agroecological produce
- (e) Investigate the socio-economic impact of agroecological produce trade on different demographic groups, including smallholder farmers, women, and youth

The EAC Treaty and its attendant protocols and policies commit to promoting unrestricted intra-regional trade in goods and services. By providing a favourable policy environment, it is hoped that the EAC will provide market opportunities for value web actors including smallholder farmers, traders (both big, small, formal and informal), transporters, warehouse/storage units' owners among others. From an agricultural perspective, the EAC provides an important regional market for Partner States. The sector accounts for 25–40 percent of EAC Partner States Gross Domestic Product (GDP)¹, employing over 80 percent² of the population in the region, and constituting about 65 percent³ of the volume of intra-regional trade in the EAC. One of the perceived beneficiaries of intra-EAC trade is cross-border traders in all capacities including small and medium enterprises

1 EAC. (2025). Agriculture and Food Security; <https://www.eac.int/agriculture#:~:text=EAC%27s%20Agenda%20for%20Agriculture%20and%20Food%20Security&text=The%20sector%20accounts%20for%2025,the%20population%20in%20the%20region> .

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

(SMEs), agroecological enterprises, and women and youth enterprises largely operating in key border markets, and trading in both fresh and value-added agricultural products.

At the Busia border agroecological trade is diverse but dominated by cereals and legumes. Maize leads with a total of 146.9 metric tons sold, followed by beans at 92.6 metric tons. Other prominent products include groundnuts (34.6 tons), cassava (17.3 tons), and sorghum (35 tons). Other agroecological products identified in the territorial markets of Busia, Sofia, and Jumuiya were bananas, aerial yams (*dioscorea bulbifera*), beans, sweet potatoes, fish, maize, forest products like honey, medicinal plants and herbs.

In Mpondwe, agroecological products identified in the territorial markets of Mpondwe Central Market and Mpondwe-Lhubiriha One-Stop Border Post Market were beans, rice, cabbages, carrots, onions, and tomatoes. Mpondwe exhibits a striking dominance of rice in its agroecological trade, with a staggering volume of 100,000.3 metric tons, vastly surpassing all other products. Beans follow at a distant 1,000.2 tons, reflecting strong demand for staple grains.

At the Tarakea border avocados are the most traded agroecological product. The research findings indicate that a minimum of thirty-two thousand, five hundred and thirty-eight tons of avocados are shipped from Tanzania via Tarakea to Kenya. The next most traded agroecological products are bananas. Based on the research, it is fair to assert that at least 41,310 metric tons are traded annually at this border point.

The Rusumo border between Tanzania and Rwanda is a site of significant trade in agroecological products. Based on the information provided by the traders, approximately 10,500 metric tons of cassava and 9000 metric tons of beans are traded annually from Tanzania to Rwanda.

Trade Policies: Continental, Regional and National

The most significant trade policy at the continental level is the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). The purpose of the agreement is to facilitate trade and thus socio-economic development. Unfortunately, as currently structured this policy does not intentionally support the trade of agroecological products. Given that AfCFTA is oriented towards industrial agriculture, it is unsurprising that there is no explicit support for agroecology. Yet, to the extent that it promotes trade in agricultural products and claims interest in reducing poverty, there are opportunities, which can be used to promote trade in agroecological products.

The East African Community (EAC) treaty and policies are generally biased towards conventional trade. That said, to the extent that there is a focus on increasing trade in value added products, there is an opportunity to expand trade in agroecological products.

The Kenya National Agroecology for Food System Transformation Strategy for 2024–2033 builds on several policies and strategies dealing with agriculture, sustainability, and trade to incorporate agroecological principles. The strategy's main goal is to promote a sustainable transformation of the food system in Kenya to ensure food security and nutrition, climate-resilient livelihoods, and social inclusion for all. From a trade perspective, the strategy aims at strengthening mechanisms for the production, distribution, and use of locally produced agroecological inputs.

Uganda also has policies favourable to trade in agroecological products. The National Agroecology Strategy 2023/24–2028/29 is at an advanced stage, with its launch and adoption slated for 2025. Explicitly concerned with trade, the strategy aims at strengthening mechanisms for the production, distribution, and use of locally produced agroecological inputs, promoting the conservation and use of Indigenous/locally managed seed and livestock breeds, and promoting the consumption

of Indigenous foods and protection of traditional food culture⁴.

Rwanda's policies may not explicitly support the trade in agroecological products. Still, the Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture, Phase 5 (PSTA 5) seeks to promote conservation agriculture, expresses concern for improving nutrition and it sees linking farmers to "remunerative markets" as critical for unlocking the systematic blockages that farmers face. This potentially aligns with the growing focus among advocates of agroecology about the need to strengthen markets for agroecological products and the linkage of farmers to the same.

The Tanzanian National Trade Policy 2023, which was launched in 2024, can be seen as pro-trade in agroecological products. To the extent that the policy strengthens fair trade practices and consumer protection, it is a potential opening for trade in agroecological products. In addition to this, the policy covers cross cutting issues regarding climate change, gender mainstreaming, and youth participation, which again all represents opportunities to promote trade in agroecological products. Critically, the policy also focuses on the promotion of trade integration. Together all of these can potentially benefit the scale up of cross border trade in agroecological products within the EAC.

In short, even when agroecology is not specifically identified in the policies of many EAC countries there are potential opportunities for promoting trade in agroecological products. For instance, where trade policies are attentive to promoting micro, small and medium size enterprises, there is likely to be space to promote agroecology. Similarly, when a country's policies claim commitment to strengthening gender equity and for enabling women's empowerment, opportunities in the policy to promote women entrepreneurship, for example, could be used to support agroecological aligned businesses in production, value addition, transportation and trade.

Conclusions

The study reveals that there is considerable trade of agroecological products across borders within the EAC. It is impossible to state exact volumes and the concomitant economic value. The volumes provided in this study are indicative of substantial trade.

The trade in agroecological products offers livelihoods opportunities for many. The study does not claim that the opportunities created through the trade in agroecological products are necessarily more financially rewarding than that in conventional products. This could not be established given the scope of the study.

Cross border trade in agroecological products, creates opportunities for women and men, youth and people living with disabilities. For instance, male youth seem to be disproportionately involved in the transportation of agroecological products within and across borders. Value addition, on the other hand, is disproportionately conducted by women.

The benefits of agroecological trade are more than financial. The findings suggests that many producers, for example, take pride in the fact that their activities are not detrimental to the environment and is sustainable. This suggests that one benefit of agroecology and the trade in agroecological products is the positive environment impact. Another benefit of agroecology is the relationships of solidarity and mutuality that it fosters. Interviews with producers, traders, and agroecological entrepreneurs reveals networks that are intentional about the sharing of benefits and oriented towards equity and the collective good.

The study demonstrates that by developing inclusive, climate-adapted agricultural value webs and building their capacity to grow more and better-quality food products, smallholder farmers, traders, and agroecological entrepreneurs can contribute immensely to agroecological transitions and the journey towards food sovereignty within East Africa.

This study has provided some key learnings.

First, it is evident that there are gaps in the documentation of agroecological products. It is quite challenging to identify agroecological products, especially those crossing EAC borders. In many instances, there is no independently verified data establishing the authenticity of agroecological products.

Second, many countries and their customs agencies are currently not systematically disaggregating agricultural trade into categories, such as conventional, organic, and agroecological categories. As a result of this, customs are not usually able to easily specify what volumes of agroecological trade are taking place for which category of products.

Third, awareness of agroecology, in any of its meanings, seems to be relatively non-existent outside of specialized audiences. Indeed, many people engaged in this study were more familiar with the terms “*kilimohai*” and “organic” than with agroecology.

Fourth, many producer organizations do not seem to be maximizing their potential as organized entities. For example, producer associations do not seem to be interested in strengthening the documentation and differentiation of their products so that they can attract premium prices.

Fifth, agroecological entrepreneurs, especially those involved in the production and sale of value-added products, have products that may have the potential to generate considerable demand in neighbouring countries. A range of constraints, from limited access to finance to non-tariff trade barriers, make it difficult for these AEEs to extend business to neighbouring countries.

Sixth, only Uganda and Rwanda systematically track small-scale cross-border trade. Other countries in the EAC do not do so. This information gap means that some policies are being developed without adequate evidence.

Seven, efforts to scale up agroecological businesses face challenges that have hindered the transition toward sustainable food systems. Such challenges include inadequate knowledge and skills on business development, limited financial support towards the promotion of agroecology, and poor market structures. Reaping the full benefits of agroecology requires strategic and adequate support from governments. Important interventions include infrastructure development, equipment to enable value addition, access to affordable capital and guaranteed markets, which offer premiums.

Finally, this study reveals that agroecology and the trade in agroecological products is being built from the ground up, by farmers, pastoralist, fisherfolks, traders, agroecological entrepreneurs and others. With or without the support of their governments, this process will continue, because Africans aspire for food sovereignty. The recommendations below provide ideas for further deliberation and action, so that through collective action we can advance agroecological transitions and realize food sovereignty.

Recommendations

Challenge: Production, Identification, Verification and Traceability of Agroecological Products

Governments should:

- Support the strengthening of producer organizations by facilitating capacity strengthening of producers who have self-organized into producer cooperatives.
- Provide critical support by enabling registration processes as well as fulfilling their obligations to respect the rights of farmers as articulated in [Declaration for the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas](#).

Civil Society organization (CSOs) should:

- Support the development and/or strengthening of producer organizations.
- Support producer organizations to strengthen organizational skills in policy analysis, advocacy and negotiation.

Challenge: The identification, verification and traceability of agroecological products requires a system to provide these functions.

Producer cooperatives and associations should:

- Organize Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) to strengthen their ability to verify the authenticity of their products.

Governments should:

- Support producer organizations to establish Participatory Guarantee System to help with the verification and traceability of agroecological products.
- Promote the use of PGS among producer cooperatives.
- Encourage citizen participation in Participatory Guarantee Systems
- Create of dedicated spaces in local markets specifically for trading of agroecological products.
- Invest in the provision of public-owned infrastructure (e.g. cold rooms and storage facilities) at markets, specifically for agroecological products.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should

- Support awareness creation about PGS among producer organizations.
- Support the development and/or strengthening of the use of PGS among producer organizations.
- Support capacity strengthening for producer cooperatives regarding PGS as well as value addition and marketing;
- Support capacity strengthening local governments (e.g. extension officers) regarding PGS;
- Engage in budget and expenditure advocacy, in collaboration with producer organization/ progressive social movements, to influence greater financial support for agroecological markets (e.g. through public procurement of agroecological products).

Challenge: Production, Identification, Verification and Traceability of Agroecological Products

Governments should:

- Work from the local to the national level to establish a system for identifying: (1) agroecological producer cooperatives, (2) agroecological entrepreneurs, and (3) agroecological products.
- Support public awareness of the benefits of agroecological products to promote rural livelihoods and development as well as public health and environmental sustainability.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should:

- Support the development of district/county, regional (sub-national) and National Directories of Agroecological Producers, Entrepreneurs, and Products by working with producers and AEEs to register their businesses and their products with government authorities.

Challenge: Inadequate Value Addition and Transportation

Producers' cooperatives should:

- Strengthen their participation in value addition of agroecological products. Primary level value addition: sorting, cleaning and packaging of fruits and vegetables could be a critical entry point for increasing trade in agroecological products.

Governments should:

- Support producers' cooperatives to scale up value addition activities. For example, governments can provide incentives for cooperatives and AEEs to add value to products.
- Support producers' cooperatives and agroecological entrepreneurs by developing credit facilities deliberately designed to facilitate access to affordable and appropriate credit. This should be done in collaboration with credit unions as opposed to commercial banks.
- Support women traders associations with capacity strengthening in value addition.
- Support women traders associations with access to affordable, adequate and long-term credit facilities. This should be done in collaboration with credit unions as opposed to commercial banks.
- Invest more in rural storage and handling facilities to reduce post-harvest loss.
- Invest more in rural infrastructure (roads, sustainable irrigation systems, solar based electrification, and information and communication technology).
- Invest in public transportation infrastructure to support cross border trade.
- Support the development of transportation cooperatives to take food from the farmgate to the market, utilizing refrigerated trucks.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should:

- Support women traders/women trade associations to improve the level of value addition to agroecological products.
- Support women traders/women trade associations with access to finance through a mix of interest free loans and low interest, medium term credit facilities.

- Support women traders/women trade associations with capacity strengthening in environmentally friendly packaging, branding and marketing.

Challenge: Trade infrastructure and the regional policy landscape do not adequately support trade in agroecological products.

Governments should:

- Strengthen capacity of customs officers, revenue authority agents and other state actors at cross border points, so they appreciate their role as **enablers** of trade, especially small-scale cross-border trade.
- Revise existing policies at national level to strengthen support for agroecology and the trade in agroecological products.
- Improve physical infrastructure at border posts to provide adequately user-friendly service for small-scale cross-border traders.
- Increase access to affordable and appropriate storage facilities and cold rooms at border points.
- Implement mutual recognition of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) certification: Policy interventions should include mutual recognition of SPS certifications, subsidies for small traders, and regional harmonization of broader agroecological standards to facilitate smoother trade across East African Community (EAC) borders.

Recommendations for AFSA

The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) should:

- Collaborate with its members to develop medium to long term programmes to scale up the organization of producers into cooperatives, associations and other structures. Strengthening the capacity and capabilities of organized producers to grow economic and political power by improving their organizational, business, and influencing capacity will be the strategic priority.
- Strengthen its citizen-consumer centered programming to increase citizen led advocacy for pro-agroecology public policy, budget expenditure and implementation (e.g. government procurement of agroecological products for school feeding programmes and public institutions as well as payment of premium prices for agroecological products. The latter could be financed in part through taxes on inorganic pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides and fungicides).
- Work with member organizations in each of the countries in this study to pilot a government led systems for the identification and verification of agroecological products at the local government level in at least three districts/counties.
- Commission a follow up to this study to include more countries cross border trading points. For example, Tanzania-Burundi and Tanzania-Uganda borders should be included. Given security challenges for some countries in the EAC it may not be possible to include South Sudan and areas of the DRC, but Rwanda should be included more comprehensively, and Burundi should be included. If security concerns are not a cause for concern, Somalia should also be included.
- Commission a study to explore the viability of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) as a mechanism for improving identification and verification of agroecological products. This study should explore the application of PGS in EAC member countries. This study should analyse the benefits PGS provides, its limitations, and the experiences of stakeholder, especially small holder farmers and consumers.

Key Concepts

Agroecology: The study adopts the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES–Food) definition of agroecology as the science of applying ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable food systems.⁵ While it is often confused with organic agriculture, Agroecology emphasizes holistic ecosystem management, blending social, economic, and ecological principles beyond chemical-free farming.

Agroecological Products: By agroecological products, we refer to items made for human consumption that are produced, distributed, and traded in ways that are aligned with the principles of agroecology. For this study, at least six of the principles of agroecology must be realized in the production of a product for it to be considered an agroecological product.

Cross Border Trade: Refers to trade of various types of goods across national borders using state-sanctioned and non-sanctioned routes. For this study, we are focused on products traded by road and water. Trade by air is excluded from this study.

Markets: Refers to a place, whether physical or virtual, where the exchange of goods and services takes place.

Conventional Products: Refers to products that are produced in ways not aligned to agroecological or organic principles/practices.

Value web: Refers to a network of businesses and consumers who collaborate to create goods and services with monetary value. It is a network of enterprises and end users who jointly produce things of economic value⁶. Distinguished from value chain, a value web is more customer driven and operates in a less linear fashion than the traditional value chain.

Life cycle Tracing: By product “life tracing,” we refer to a deliberate process to understand the production of an agroecological product and its journey to the final consumer. For this study, the end point of life tracing will be the pre-retail point across the trading border (e.g. the importer of the agroecological product). The product life tracing process seeks to understand the entire “life cycle” of a specific product from when the product comes into being to its final utilization and ultimate “return to the source”.

5 IPES Food. (2020). The Added Value(s) of Agroecology: Unlocking The Potential for Transition in West Africa; [IPES-Food_FullReport_WA_EN.pdf](#)

6 Gordijn, J. and Akkermans, H (2018). Value Webs: Understanding e-Business Innovation. (<https://www.amazon.com/Value-Webs-Understanding-Business-Innovation/dp/9082852411>)

Local community: In this study “local community” refers to the East African Community.

Industrial Agriculture: We adopt Gliessman’s (2015)⁷ definition of industrial agriculture as focusing on large-scale monocultures, development of new plant varieties, huge inputs of synthetic chemical fertilizers, pesticides, a top-down research and extension program designed to “tell farmers what to do”. It evolves around the following practices, i.e., intensive tillage, monoculture, application of synthetic fertilizers, extensive irrigation, chemical pest and weed control, manipulation of plant and animal genomes, and factory farming of animals⁸, among others. Thus, industrial agriculture contradicts agroecology because it fronts a system of food production that undermines the aforementioned 13 principles.

Commercialization of Agriculture is a process that seeks to orient small holder farmers to prioritize production for the market and for making maximum profit. Generally, commercialization encourages the production of crops and livestock on a large scale; it encourages the use of industrial agriculture’s inputs and organizational logics to increase production. The process of commercialization induces producers to approach farming not as a “way of life,” but “farming as a business.” That is, producers are to “commercialize” so as to prioritize making maximum profits. Still, in this study, it is recognized that the commercialization of agriculture does not necessarily imply a shift to “industrial agriculture.” It is possible to make agroecological production more commercially viable without pursuing “commercialization” as within the logic of industrial agriculture.

7 Gliessman R. Stephen. (2015). *Agroecology: The Ecology of Sustainable Food Systems*; Taylor & Francis Group, LLC
8 Ibid

1 Introduction

Cross-border trade is very important for societies and their economies. It is a widely held view that trade is critical for Africa's development. The Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is imagined as transformative for Africa. For instance, it is believed that it will create the free movement of goods across borders, the harmonization of regulations and a reduction in tariffs. In turn, this will lead to job creation and a reduction of people living in poverty. Cross border trade is supposed to make people in Africa better off.

Intra-African trade is seen as even more important than mere trade for Africa's development. In this regard there has been progress. In 2024, intra-African trade was 14.9 percent of total African trade. This is an improvement over the previous years, which was 13.6 percent.⁹

Historically, as in the present, trade in agricultural and food products are a central component of cross border trade. According to the FAO:

The monetary value* of global agricultural exports in 2022 was 2.9 times higher in nominal terms than in 2005, while the share of agriculture in total merchandise trade value increased from 6.2 percent in 2005 to 7.6 percent in 2022.¹⁰

For Africa, the intra-African trade of food and agricultural products is very important. Given rapid urbanization and population growth, it is anticipated that Africa's food markets will grow considerably. Already, Africa's food import bill is approximately US\$50 billion annually.¹¹ Indeed, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) estimates that food imports could reach as much as US\$110 billion by this year 2025.¹² This is an enormous economic strain on African countries. One way in which the consequences manifest are in the numbers of undernourished people. The Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023 report indicates that in 2022, "nearly 282 million people in Africa were undernourished an increase of 57 million people since the COVID-19 pandemic...[and] An estimated 868 million people were moderately or severely food-insecure."¹³

Clearly, food insecurity remains a major challenge yet depending on food imports continues unabated. This dependence ensures that Africa remains especially vulnerable to global fluctuations. More critically, the fact that imports have remained relatively stable¹⁴ while food insecurity has

9 African Export Import Bank. 2024. African Trade Report 2024 Climate Implications of the AfCFTA Implementation. Available at: https://media.afreximbank.com/afrexim/African-Trade-Report_2024.pdf. Accessed 26 May, 2025.

10 FAO. 2022. Trade of Agricultural commodities: 2005–2022. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b32f9ee9-a721-4e2a-95f9-e60922b3e546/content>. Accessed on 26 May 2025.

11 FAO and AUC. 2021. Framework for boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services. Addis Ababa. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb3172en>

12 Economic Commission for Africa. 2021. Economic Report on Africa 2021. Addressing poverty and vulnerability In Africa during the Covid-19 Pandemic

13 FAO, AUC, ECA and WFP. 2023. Africa – Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023: Statistics and trends. Accra, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8743en>

14 Africa Export-Import Bank. 2024. Food imports and Food security in Africa: Addressing the Challenges.

increased illuminates deeper structural problems within Africa's food systems. Therefore, if Africa decides to cease being a net importer of food, then it will require a transformation of Africa's agriculture and food system.

Currently, African countries are faced with two scenarios, as they seek to transform their agriculture. One option is to pursue the industrial agriculture model. The other model is to pursue an agroecological transition.

Agroecology: Illuminating its Evolution, Application, and Nexus with Trade

It is critical to define the concept of agroecology. For Gliessman (2018)¹⁵, agroecology integrates research, education, action, and change that brings sustainability to all parts of the food system: ecological, economic, and social. Agroecology is grounded in ecological thinking, requiring a holistic, systems-level understanding of food system sustainability. Critically, agroecology is not just a set of farming practices; it is deeply concerned with power, equity and justice. Increasingly, agroecology is recognized as pathway that can be deployed to overcome the economic, social, and ecological crises now facing the global agri-food system.¹⁶

Cross-border trade of agroecological produce within the East African Community (EAC) is increasing steadily. There are also several challenges. The current situation is characterized by a lack of uniform standards and inconsistent recognition of agroecological certifications across member states, making it difficult for producers to export their produce smoothly. Within Africa there is increasing demand for sustainably produced goods, however, many smallholder farmers struggle with barriers such as complex customs procedures and high transportation costs, which limit their access to regional markets. Additionally, trade policies are inadequately harmonized, especially policies specific to agriculture. Agroecological products are seldom differentiated from conventional products by Customs and do not receive preferential treatment at borders. Still, progress is being made and markets for agroecological products are growing.

It is in this context that the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) commissioned this study to better understand the state of trade in agroecological products within the East African Community (EAC). The prime purpose of this study is to deepen our knowledge about cross-border trade in agroecological products within the East African Community (EAC).

Specifically, the study aims to:

- (a) Identify and document the key types, volumes, and pathways of agroecological produce being traded across borders within the EAC.
- (b) Perform a comparative analysis of agroecological and non-agroecological products traded along the borders
- (c) Analyse existing trade policies, regulations, practices, and infrastructures affecting agroecological produce in the EAC member states.
- (d) In-depth analysis of the value chain and market system, Tariffs and Non-Tariff Barriers/ opportunities, and the role of AFCFTA and other trade agreements in promoting cross-

15 Gliessman, S. (2018). Defining Agroecology. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems: Volume 42, 2018 – Issue 6*, 599–600. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2018.1432329>

16 See International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development. 2009.

border trade for agroecological produce

- (e) Investigate the socio-economic impact of agroecological produce trade on different demographic groups, including smallholder farmers, women, and youth

It is hoped that this study will: (1) support the development and implementation of harmonized trade policies and practices and (2) catalyze actions by producers, entrepreneurs, civil society actors and governments. Together these actors can ensure the growth and sustainability of trade in agroecological products.

There are at least two development that render this study particularly timely. On the one hand, there is the strengthening of African trade regimes. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is of particular significance. It is hoped that it will instantiate massive trade within the African continent. Alongside the AfCFTA, are the regional policies. For instance, within the East African Community, under Articles 4 and 5 of the EAC Common Market Protocol, Partner States commit to promoting the free movement of goods, persons, labour, and services through eliminating tariffs, non-tariff, and technical barriers to trade, harmonizing and mutually recognizing standards, and easing cross-border movement of persons¹⁷ among others.

On the other hand, there is a growing appreciation of agroecology by some countries in the EAC. In November 2023, Tanzania launched the National Ecological Organic Agriculture Strategy (NEOAS) for 2023–2030. In 2024, Kenya launched her National Agroecology for Food System Transformation Strategy for 2024–2033, and Uganda's National Agroecology Strategy 2023/24–2028/29 is in its final stages of adoption. While the DRC does not have a dedicated agroecology policy, the Sustainable Agricultural Policy of 2022–2032, the primary agricultural framework, recognizes the role of agroecology by collaborating with various grassroots initiatives and organizations within the DRC. Significantly, in 2024, the Committee on Agriculture, Tourism, and Natural Resources (ATNR) of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) signed a resolution officially recognizing agroecology as a strategic priority for formulating and recommending sustainable policies in agriculture and natural resource management across the EAC¹⁸. Amidst such significant policy shifts, it is essential to assess and document the implications for trade in agroecological products.

This study is organized into four substantive chapters. This first chapter provides an introduction to the study. In chapter two, the volumes and value of agroecological trade are presented. In addition to this, the chapter offers a comparative analysis of agroecological and conventional products. Interwoven into this chapter is the socio-economic impact of trading in agroecological products. Chapter three provides an analysis of policies from the continental, regional (EAC) and national levels (Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda). The focus of this chapter is on trade policies. The objective is to assess the extent to which the various policies enable cross border trade of agroecological products. The review of trade policies are prioritized, but where necessary other policies, such as agriculture policies are also engaged. In this chapter, there is also an examination of the impact of NTBs on the trade of agroecological products. The final chapter provides a conclusion to the study. Informed by the findings, the study ends with a comprehensive set of actionable recommendations.

17 EAC. (2012). Protocol on the Establishment of the EAC Common Market; <https://eacj.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Common-Market-Protocol.pdf>

18 EALA. (2024). EALA Signs a resolution with FAO, Recognizing Agro-ecology as a Strategic Priority in the EAC; <https://www.eala.org/media/view/east-african-legislative-assembly-signs-a-resolution-with-food-agriculture-organization-fao-recognizing-agro-ecology-as-a-strategic-priority-in-the-eac#:~:text=Kampala%2C%20Uganda%20E2%80%93%20November%2018%2C.signed%20a%20resolution%20officially%20recognizing>

2 Trade in Agroecological Products in the East African Community

Cross-border trade is very important for African countries. Much of that trade is small scale trade and is often under-documented. Agroecological products are part of the goods traded across border channels. Little is known, however, about the quantities and value of the agroecological products moving across the border channels of the East African Community. This study attempts to contribute to filling this knowledge gap. Specifically, the study explores the trade of agroecological products at four borders: Busia, Mpondwe, Namanga-Tarakea and Rusumo.

Findings at Busia Border (Kenya-Uganda)

Uganda continues to be the leading destination for Kenya's exports, which amounted to US\$0.903 billion (\$903 million) in 2023 from US\$0.819 billion (\$819 million) in 2022, posting a significant increase of 11.48percent (EAC, 2024). On the other hand, Uganda's exports to Kenya in 2023 decreased to \$0.2896 billion (\$289.6 million) from \$0.3319 billion (\$331.9 million) in 2022, representing a 12.74percent decrease in Uganda's exports¹⁹. Indeed, in the 12 months ending September 2024, Uganda traded at a deficit worth USD 275.3 million with EAC Partner States. The country recorded the largest trade deficit with Tanzania, followed by Kenya, which indicated that Uganda imported more from those countries than it exported to them²⁰.

Territorial markets on Busia cross-border point

Territorial markets on Busia cross-border point vary in size on each side of the country (Kenya and Uganda). The table below shows the minor differences in each market.

Table 1. Territorial markets at Busia cross-border poin

19 EAC. (2024). Background Paper for the Sectoral Council on Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment. Arusha: EAC Secretariat.

20 MoFPED. (2024, December 31). THE NATIONAL BUDGET FRAMEWORK PAPER FY 2025/26 – FY 2029/30. Retrieved from Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED): [https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/2025-01/National%20Bud-get%20Framework%20Paper%20FY%202025-26.pdf](https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/2025-01/National%20Budget%20Framework%20Paper%20FY%202025-26.pdf)

Busia–Kenya	• Korinda Market: Located near the Busia border, serving traders dealing in fresh produce, cereals, and livestock. • Burumba Market: A key trading hub near the border, where fresh vegetables, fruits, and grains are sold. • Mundika Market: A vibrant market within Busia town that supports small-scale traders, including those engaged in agroecological trade.
Busia–Uganda	• Soko Posta Market: The largest open-air market on the Ugandan side, serving traders from both countries. • Busia Central Market: Located just at the border, it deals in fresh produce, cereals, and household goods. • Mataaba Market: Another key market at the border, attracting traders from Kenya and Uganda.

Uganda’s overall Trade with Kenya

Before examining the volumes and value of agroecological products traded between Kenya and Uganda, it is important to highlight the overall bilateral trade performance. Kenya’s main agricultural exports (combining both conventional and agroecological) to Uganda in 2023 included potatoes, sorghum, barley, palm oil, sowing seeds (corn, sunflower, beans, sorghum, millet, kale, soybean) tomatoes, onions, root vegetables, tropical fruits (mangoes, oranges and avocados), and dried legumes (beans, cowpeas, mung beans)²¹. On the other hand, Uganda’s top agricultural exports to Kenya in the same year include processed cereals, maize, dried legumes, tea, coffee, milk, eggs, bran, raw sugar, soybeans, and citrus fruits²². Nearly 80 percent of these exports are traded through the Busia cross-border point, comprising mainly agricultural items such as cereals and horticulture²³. Indeed, the border is one of the busiest border crossing points in the EAC, with its One Stop Border Post (OSBP) handling over 3,000 people and 900 vehicles crossing daily²⁴.

Overall Volumes and Value of Agroecological Products

As highlighted in Table 11 below, at Busia border, agroecological trade is diverse but dominated by cereals and legumes. Maize leads with a total of 146.9 metric tons sold, followed by beans at 92.6 metric tons. Other prominent products include groundnuts (34.6 tons), cassava (17.3 tons), and sorghum (35 tons), showcasing a focus on staple, drought-resistant crops. Fruits and vegetables like bananas, oranges, and green grams were sold in smaller quantities, reflecting limited but growing interest in perishable produce. The mix of cereals, legumes, and a few animal products like poultry highlights Busia as a key point for smallholder-driven, agroecological produce exchange across borders.

21 OEC. (2025, January 25). What does Kenya export to Uganda? (2023). Retrieved from The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC): https://oec.world/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/ken/uga/show/2023

22 OEC. (2025, January 10). What does Uganda export to Kenya? (2023). Retrieved from The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC): https://oec.world/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/uga/ken/show/2023

23 AfDB. (2025, February 24). Mano River Union Delegation Studies Successful Border Post Model to Enhance Women’s Cross-Border Trade. Retrieved from African Development Bank (AfDB): <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/mano-river-union-delegation-studies-successful-border-post-model-enhance-womens-cross-border-trade-81248#:~:text=The%20Busia%20OSBPs%2C%20one%20of,since%20its%20establishment%20in%202018.>

24 Ibid

Table 2. Overall volumes of traded Agroecological products at Busia

Border	Product Sold	Volume Sold (Metric ton)
Busia	Maize	146.9
Busia	Beans	92.6
Busia	Sorghum	35.0
Busia	Groundnuts	34.6
Busia	Cow Peas	25.0
Busia	Cassava	17.3
Busia	Banana	9.3
Busia	Watermelon	7.5
Busia	Oranges	6.4
Busia	Rice	1.0
Busia	Soya Beans	1.0
Busia	Green Grams	1.0
Busia	Poultry	0.9
Busia	Vegetables	0.6
Busia	Pineapple	0.5
Busia	Skumawiki	0.2
Busia	Fruits	0.1
Busia	Milk	0.0

Top three agroecological products

In Busia, agroecological products identified in the territorial markets of Busia, Sofia, and Jumuiya were Bananas, aerial yams (*Dioscorea bulbifera*), beans, sweet potatoes, fish, maize, Forest products like honey, medicinal plants and herbs. Other identified agroecological products in the Busia territorial market include local food plants like groundnuts, sesame (simsim), and cereals, while root crops include yams and cassava. Interviews also revealed a rise in production and trading in other agroecological products like oranges, pineapples, avocados, groundnuts, and passionfruit. These were identified as high value agroecological crops to develop value webs in Uganda and Kenya. To determine the top 3 most traded agroecological products at the border, a survey conducted with traders. This corroborates the findings from key informant interviews and focus group discussions with producers and traders. For instance, traders at Busia indicated that maize, beans and ground nuts (in that order) were the most traded agroecological products in the territorial markets at Busia.

Table 3. Top three traded Agroecological products at Busia

Agroecological Products Sold	Volume Agroecological Products Sold (Metric tons)
Maize	146.9
Beans	92.6
Sorghum	35.0

Life cycle tracing

As was earlier noted, Busia is one of the most active nodes for intra-EAC trade, particularly for agricultural goods. In tracing the life cycle of agroecological products across this border, the researchers adopted a deliberate methodology of “life tracing,” which followed a product from its origin to the point of pre-retail importation. At Busia, this process uncovered not only the movement of agroecological goods but also the actors, practices, and systems involved in producing and transporting agroecological products. A key feature of agroecological trade at this site is the integration of local knowledge, sustainable inputs, and community-driven value webs. For instance, agroecological maize seed and maize flour, a commonly traded commodity at this crossing, is sourced from production on smallholder farms that employ minimal tillage, organic composting (compost manure, rabbit urine as pesticide), and intercropping techniques (with other crops like beans), all aimed at enhancing soil health and biodiversity. Findings revealed that farmers in Busia (Uganda and Kenya sides) grow maize without synthetic inputs, dry and mill the product locally, often through cooperatives, before packaging it using biodegradable materials and transporting it on bicycles, motorcycles and on trucks (through joint hiring as a group) to the Busia border. This “green” value web aligns with agroecological principles, offering insight into how ecological, social, and economic factors converge in the production and movement of goods.

Interviews and observations during field visits revealed that transport and logistics play a critical role in shaping the life cycle of agroecological products destined for trading in territorial markets at the Busia border. In Busia, women and youth are central actors, particularly in aggregation, handling, and short-haul transportation. These products are usually moved in small consignments using bicycles, motorcycles, and public transport due to the informal and small-scale nature of the trade. Intermediaries operating at territorial markets like Busia, Sofia, Soko Posta, and Jumuiya facilitate sorting, quality checks, and packaging, which helps maintain the standards required for cross-border commerce. Nevertheless, trade facilitating infrastructure gaps—like limited access to cold storage, poor road networks leading to farms, and lack of weighing and grading stations—present significant challenges that increase product losses and reduce competitiveness. Additionally, trade facilitation measures like the Busia One Stop Border Post (OSBP) and EAC customs harmonization provide opportunities for smoother transactions. Despite these improvements, agroecological traders still face cumbersome regulatory hurdles and sporadic non-tariff barriers such as over-inspections or bribery, which disproportionately affect smallholder producers. This underscores the importance of tailoring trade infrastructure and policies to support agroecological traders, especially those moving perishable goods.

Socio-economic dynamics are also an integral part of the life cycle tracing process. The trade of agroecological products at Busia offers critical livelihood opportunities for smallholder farmers and marginalized groups, including women and youth. These actors are often part of informal cooperatives or networks that share knowledge about sustainable farming techniques, market research, and packaging innovations. Through such networks, they also engage in peer-verification systems that assure agroecological integrity, substituting for expensive and inaccessible third-party certifications. Importantly, these social structures help maintain traceability, a critical requirement for accessing formal and semi-formal markets. Furthermore, the trade at Busia contributes to regional food sovereignty by ensuring that nutritious, culturally appropriate, and locally grown food reaches consumers across the border. In doing so, it challenges the dominance of industrial food systems and offers a model for inclusive economic development. Yet, as revealed by field findings, this potential is often undermined by policy blind spots, where agroecological producers are treated as informal actors and denied access to essential services like trade finance, market information systems, and training on regional trade protocols.

In conclusion, the life cycle tracing of maize as an agroecological product at Busia border revealed a complex yet vibrant system shaped by ecological farming practices, informal trade networks, and socio-political dynamics. While agroecological enterprises demonstrated immense potential to enhance livelihoods and build resilient food systems, they remain constrained by systemic neglect in trade and agricultural policies. The lack of formal recognition and support by the two governments' (Kenya and Uganda) trade facilitation programs limits the scalability of these practices and curtails market access. Nevertheless, Busia presents a blueprint of what agroecological trade can offer i.e., empowerment of local actors, climate resilience, and diversified regional markets. For these benefits to be fully realized, there must be deliberate policy shifts—both at national (Kenya and Uganda) and regional levels towards recognizing agroecology as a cornerstone of food systems and regional integration.

What follows is a comparative analysis of agroecological and conventional products at the Busia border. The table below shows a selection of major conventional Ugandan agricultural exports to Kenya. Maize is the most traded product, which is consistent with the Busia border field reports. Between 2019 and 2023, there was an increase in maize exports from 25 thousand tons (valued at \$ 35 million), to 59 thousand tons (valued at over \$ 211 million).

Grain sorghum showed steady growth, with value increasing from \$417 million in 2019 to \$3,880 million in 2023, and volume from 881 tonnes in 2019 to 6,537 tonnes in 2023, highlighting its emerging importance in the market. . Fresh watermelons experienced fluctuating trends, peaking in value and volume mid-period before declining to 846 and 3,046, respectively, suggesting possible market volatility or seasonal influence. Ground nuts had minimal activity, appearing only in 2019 and early 2020 with very low values and volumes, and then dropping out entirely, possibly due to low production or limited market interest.. Therefore, the figures below may include agroecological products, although it is not possible to ascertain their extent.

Table 4. Uganda's select Agricultural Exports and Imports to Kenya (2019, 2020, 2021). Source: ITC

Product	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume
Maize	35,557	124,551	49,074	201,308	18,947	75,019	20,495	52,159	59,141	211,642
Grain sorghum	417	881	852	1,809	2,602	5,704	5,793	9,591	3,880	6,537
Fresh watermelons	1,425	3,802	2,627	8,089	1,240	3,426	1,782	3,581	846	3,046
Ground nuts	34	22	30	38	0	-	0	-	0	-
Tomatoes Fresh or Chilled	2,500	7,612	7,603	20,696	3,037	7,775	249	758	48	166
Milk and Cream, concentrated	12,215	3,714	19,565	5,881	17,253	7,733	32,102	8,870	16,856	3,509
Milk and Cream, not concentrated	41,376	63,810	34,099	55,389	38,490	59,842	45,237	70,607	45,834	81,364
Fresh or dried pineapples	1,383	4,173	2,680	11,438	2,486	8,763	2,313	6,518	3,096	12,749
Fresh or dried oranges	550	1,776	931	3,307	849	13,649	1,842	4,477	2,352	6,899

Table 5. Kenya's exports to Uganda in values (000' USD and volumes (tons)

Product	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume
Fresh or chilled potatoes (excl. seed)	360	2,884	3,909	26,664	7,956	66,556	3,728	33,784	5,586	85,445
Fresh or chilled carrots and turnips	2,755	12,797	3,782	19,936	4,432	23,530	3,310	19,485	4,424	27,050
Spices (excl. pepper)	2,046	488	1,947	544	2,034	540	2,174	536	2,244	699
Dried, shelled peas	1,534	4,147	15,860	16,285	4,729	8,465	3,088	6,651	2,400	10,376
Grain sorghum	13,246	37,522	13,199	34,996	13,570	33,447	0	0	7,114	17,349
Maize or corn	946	749	2,632	2,028	2,471	2,217	3,026	2,843	3,494	1,430
Barley	1,352	23,348	1,119	19,722	1,394	25,362	1,783	34,498	2,577	28,099
Vegetable seeds, for sowing	3,139	153	4,411	169	3,105	125	2,741	110	5,033	116

Source: International Trade Centre calculations

Socioeconomic impact of AE trading on the livelihoods of small farmers, women, and youth

The increased participation of agroecological value web actors like farmers, traders, and consumers in territorial markets of Mundika, Korinda, Mataaba, Burumba, and Soko Posta has resulted in increased adoption of digitalization to create online market platforms and cut out exploitative intermediaries. Indeed, digital marketing platforms can act as powerful tools for smallholder farmers to connect with buyers, expand their market reach, and obtain fair prices for their produce. A survey in 2024 found that 32 percent of horticultural farmers in Kenya used digital platforms to negotiate prices, quantities, transport logistics, and modes of payment with potential buyers.²⁵ From the conducted FGDs, respondents revealed that people are becoming more informed because of technological advancements and are therefore aware of agroecological products versus conventional products. Traders and farmers are now using the youth to help them in establishing a social media presence, like TikTok, and setting up social media pages for their businesses. For agroecological traders in both territorial markets, it was revealed that mobile money payments like MPESA (for Kenya), MTN MoMo, and Airtel MoMo (all for Uganda) have facilitated safer trade through reducing the risk of carrying physical cash, which is often associated with theft and sometimes harm on traders lives by thieves.

Interviews with agroecology value web actors further revealed that the actors are seeing a rise in their incomes and welfare through the establishment of farmers and territorial traders' saving groups. For example, the Busia Women Cross-Border Traders SACCO (Kenya) and 5K-1-Week Kiosk Initiative in Busia territorial markets have become lifelines in boosting their savings and providing quick access to affordable credit to support their businesses. Furthermore, these SACCOs have been supportive of farmers' efforts to improve yields through financing exchange learning visits. For example, this has been a practice in Busia whereby smallholder farmers often move from Busia to Bukwo district to learn from their other smallholder farmers on agroecological practices to grow maize, beans, potatoes (Irish and Sweet), tomatoes, cabbage, passion fruit, and onions, among others. In terms of inclusivity, these SACCOs have supported people with disabilities with

25 Choruma, D. J., Dirwai, T. L., Mutenje, M. J., Mustafa, M., Chimonyo, V. G., Jacobs-Mata, I., & Mabhaudhi, T. (2024). Digitalisation in agriculture: A scoping review of technologies in practice, challenges, and opportunities for smallholder farmers in sub-saharan africa. *Journal of Agriculture and Food Research* 18 (2024) 101286, 1-10. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jafr.2024.101286>

tricycles, which have enabled them to proactively participate in the agroecology web chain as transporters of products from the farm to territorial markets in Busia. This shows that agroecology can change the lives of value web actors and should be supported.

Mpondwe border (DRC-Uganda)

In 2023, DRC was Uganda's third largest export destination, with exports valued at \$400 million after Kenya and South Sudan²⁶. Equally, in the same year, Uganda was DRC's third export destination with total exports valued at \$8 million after Tanzania (\$1.2 billion), and Rwanda (\$9 million)²⁷. Uganda's top agricultural (both agroecological and conventional) exports to DRC in 2023 included processed tomatoes, raw sugar, fish, yeast, maize, rice, bananas, tomatoes, beans, ground nuts, and peas²⁸. On the other hand, Uganda's top agricultural (both agroecological and conventional) imports from the DRC in the same year included palm oil, cocoa beans, and vanilla²⁹.

Table 6. Territorial markets on Mpondwe cross-border point vary in size on each side of the country (DRC and Uganda).

The table below reveals the minor differences in each territorial market.

Mpondwe-DRC	• Kasindi Market: The main open-air market on the DRC side, where traders from Uganda sell fresh produce, cereals, and processed agricultural products. • Lhubiriha-Kasindi Market: An extension of the Ugandan Lhubiriha Market, facilitating trade in agroecological goods, including organic food products.
Mpondwe-Uganda	• Mpondwe Market: The largest open-air market at the border, serving traders from Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It is a major hub for agroecological produce, including fresh fruits, vegetables, and cereals. • Lhubiriha Market: Located near the border, it facilitates cross-border trade in grains, legumes, and livestock. • Mpondwe Border Market: A growing market space where small-scale traders engage in daily cross-border transactions, especially in agroecological and informal trade.

Most of the trade between Uganda and DR Congo is done at the three major border points of Mpondwe in Kasese district, Bunagana in Kisoro district, and Goli in Nebbi district, with Mpondwe being the busiest border point in terms of trade activities³⁰. Mpondwe is the Ugandan border point with the most informal exports in Uganda, estimated at USD 149.3 million in 2018 and USD 171.7 million in 2017 (27.3 percent and 31.1 percent share of Ugandan informal exports respectively)³¹. Interviews with Uganda immigration officials revealed that the Mpondwe cross-border point registers over 20,000 people passing by on its main market days (Tuesdays and Fridays), while it serves approximately 600–900 people in total and between 200–300 cargo trucks crossing daily.

26 EAC. (2024). Background Paper for the Sectoral Council on Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment. Arusha: EAC Secretariat.

27 Ibid

28 OEC. (2025, January 10). What does Uganda export to Democratic Republic of the Congo? (2023). Retrieved from The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC): https://oec.world/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/uga/cod/show/2023

29 OEC. (2025, January 10). What does Democratic Republic of the Congo export to Uganda? (2023). Retrieved from The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC): https://oec.world/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/cod/uga/show/2023

30 NCTTCA. (2018, March 16). Member States of DRC and Uganda to work together to boost Cross Border Trade at Mpondwe-Kasindi border. Retrieved from Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Coordination Authority (NCTTCA): <https://www.ttcanc.org/member-states-drc-and-uganda-work-together-boost-cross-border-trade-mpondwe-kasindi-border>

31 Ibid

Volumes/value of agroecological products generally

As highlighted in table 15 Mpondwe exhibits a striking dominance of rice in its agroecological trade, with a staggering volume of 100,000.3 metric tons, vastly surpassing all other products. Beans follow at a distant 1,000.2 tons, reflecting strong demand for staple grains. Fruits like mangoes and watermelon, along with vegetables such as carrots and cabbages, appear in lower but notable volumes, supporting dietary diversity. Palm oil and tomatoes also feature prominently, indicating engagement in value-added and perishable produce. Fish products, dairy (yoghurt, milk), and specialty crops like cocoa and kola nuts round out the trade profile. This illustrates Mpondwe as a dynamic and diverse agricultural trade center.

Table 7. Volume of traded agroecological products at Mpondwe

Border	Product Sold	Volume Sold (Metric ton)
Mpondwe	Rice	100,000.30
Mpondwe	Beans	1020.2
Mpondwe	Watermelon	96.0
Mpondwe	Palm Oil	18.1
Mpondwe	Tomatoes	16.3
Mpondwe	Cabbages	15.7
Mpondwe	Salted Fish	6.6
Mpondwe	Fish	2.3
Mpondwe	Carrot	2.2
Mpondwe	Milk	1.5
Mpondwe	Yoghurt	1.1
Mpondwe	Cocoa	1.0
Mpondwe	Coffee	0.8
Mpondwe	Mangoes	0.7
Mpondwe	Groundnuts	0.4
Mpondwe	Onions	0.4
Mpondwe	Silver Fish	0.1
Mpondwe	Kola nuts	0.1
Mpondwe	Vegetables	0.0
Mpondwe	Ghee	0.0

Top three agroecological products

In Mpondwe, agroecological products identified in the territorial markets of Mpondwe Central Market and Mpondwe-Lhubiriha One-Stop Border Post Market were beans, rice, cabbages, carrots, onions, and tomatoes. To determine the top 3 most traded agroecological products at the border, the survey conducted with traders corroborates the findings from key informant interviews and focus group discussions with producers and traders. For instance, traders indicated that rice, maize, beans and mangoes (in that order) were the most traded agroecological products in the territorial markets at Mpondwe.

Table 8. Top three traded Agroecological products at Mpondwe

Agroecological Products Sold	Volume of Agroecological Products Sold (Metric ton)
Rice	100000.30
Beans	1020.2
Watermelon	96.0

Life cycle tracing

Like earlier noted, Mpondwe is a bustling trade point that handles a high volume of agricultural goods, including agroecological products. The life cycle tracing of these goods at Mpondwe begins in the mountainous regions of Western Uganda, where smallholder farmers practice agroecology through methods like organic composting, intercropping, crop rotation, and use of indigenous seed varieties. Interviews with territorial market leaders and visits to farmers growing bananas, beans, and millet in Kasindi village (Mpondwe-Ugandan side) rely on minimal chemical inputs and traditional pest management techniques. These products are often harvested manually, sun-dried, and prepared for market by family labour or local cooperatives. From the farm, goods are aggregated in community hubs and loaded onto motorcycles, bicycles, or pickups bound for Mpondwe. Traders ensure basic sorting and cleaning is done at source, with further processing or packaging, mostly in reused sacks and biodegradable materials like sisal sacks (*eguniya*) taking place at the border in Kasindi and Lhubiriha territorial markets. The goal is to maintain the agroecological identity of the product while making it acceptable for trade. These goods are then handed over to Congolese importers or wholesalers, at markets operating at the Mpondwe frontier.

Interviews and field observations in areas of Kasindi and Bunagana revealed that transporting agroecological products to and across the Mpondwe border presents unique logistical challenges and opportunities. While the region's terrain is hilly, poor road infrastructure network in form of murram and feeder roads make it sometimes inaccessible for trucks and motorbikes during the rainy season, affecting transport reliability and post-harvest quality. However, agroecological producers mitigate this by scheduling early harvests and leveraging community-run drying and storage facilities. On arrival at Mpondwe, the goods pass through various border procedures under the One Stop Border Post (OSBP) framework. While this setup is meant to simplify clearance, researchers found that agroecological traders (especially women and youth operating informally) still face lengthy inspections and bureaucratic delays. Many traders lack proper documentation, and some are unfamiliar with sanitary and phytosanitary requirements, leading to occasional rejections or bribes. Moreover, infrastructure such as cold chains or standardized grading centers is lacking, meaning perishable products like fruits or leafy vegetables lose value quickly. Despite these constraints, local networks and informal arrangements—such as collective bargaining by cooperatives and informal pacts with transporters—help mitigate logistical disruptions and keep

trade flowing.

From a socio-economic perspective, agroecological trade at Mpondwe is heavily driven by grassroots value web actors. Women play dominant roles in both farming and cross-border vending of products like rice, beans, millet flour, and bananas, while youth are largely engaged in aggregation, packing, and transportation. These interactions generate multiple layers of livelihood benefits, from farming income to logistical and retail opportunities at the border. The study found that agroecological products are particularly valued in the DRC due to their longer shelf life when compared to conventional products. This has created niche markets in border towns like Beni and Butembo. Findings also revealed that peer verification, trust-based trading, and short value webs help maintain product integrity despite the absence of formal organic certifications. Nonetheless, the lack of targeted policies and support services—such as access to trade finance, simplified border clearance for small-scale traders, and recognition of peer-led certification systems—undermines the potential scale of agroecological trade. Cross-border tensions and inconsistent enforcement of trade protocols further complicate the environment for these largely informal actors.

In summary, life tracing at the Mpondwe border highlights agroecological trade as a vital yet under-supported contributor to regional trade. It shows how localized, sustainable farming systems are powering cross-border commerce even amid challenging policy and infrastructural settings. Mpondwe's agroecological value web operates on trust, community knowledge, and adaptive strategies, reinforcing the social and environmental dimensions of agroecology. However, policy blind spots and systemic barriers—ranging from lack of market infrastructure to exclusion from formal trade regimes—impede growth. To unlock the full potential of agroecological trade in territorial markets at Mpondwe, there is a need for integrated interventions: investment in transport and storage infrastructure, simplification of customs procedures for small traders, and formal recognition of agroecological verification systems. If harnessed well, Mpondwe could evolve into a leading corridor for environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive trade between Uganda and the DRC.

Contemporary Trends in Trade of agricultural products

The table below highlights selected conventional agricultural product exports from Uganda to DRC. Overall, there is a shifting trend in the value and volume of selected food products from 2019 to 2023. Rice experienced a sharp and steady decline over the years—from a value of \$ 14,951 million and volume of 30,770 tons in 2019 to just \$ 893 thousand and 947 tons in 2023. Trade in fish products also fluctuated with peaks in 2020 and 2022 (value of \$ 1,703 million and 1,840 tons respectively), but without consistent volume trends, indicating a volatile market possibly influenced by availability or pricing. However, there is a substantial growth in dried leguminous vegetable exports, peaking in 2021 with a volume of 15,665 tons before gradually declining. This suggests a temporary boom, possibly due to high demand or favorable production conditions during that period. In terms of fresh or chilled vegetables, there has been gradual growth, reaching a value of \$ 532 thousand and a volume of 471 by 2023, pointing to a slow but steady increase in market interest. Milk and cream demonstrated strong and continuous growth from 2019 through 2022, peaking in value at 3,841 and volume at 809. Although both metrics dipped slightly in 2023, they remained significantly above their 2019 levels, indicating long-term growth in demand or production capacity. The trends show the continued importance of DRC markets to Uganda despite the volatile political environment in the DRC. Again, due to a lack of disaggregated data, it is not possible to identify how much of this is agroecological products. Field observations and interviews, however, show that a significant amount of these products could be agroecological products.

Table 9. Uganda export to DRC in values (000' USD and volumes (tons)

Product	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume
Rice	14,951	30,770	12,583	24,999	3,714	6,601	825	1,175	893	947
Fish	1,186	295	1,703	658	649	142	1,840	414	1,235	357
Dried leguminous vegetable	281	698	1,540	3,611	2,715	15,665	2,434	4,529	650	997
Other vegetables, fresh or chilled	0	1	1	-	0		133	117	532	471
Milk and cream	834	325	1,105	428	2,106	603	3,841	809	2,168	567
Maize	108	445	311	1,794	276	1,019	174	297	4,382	11,456
Dry Beans	163	356	913	1,893	2,302	14,928	2,032	3,896	488	725

Source: International Trade Centre calculations

The table below highlights selected agricultural products exported from DRC to Uganda from 2019 to 2023. Rice dominates imports and has been on a rise both in value and volume between 2019 (\$1.2 million/5,240 tons) and 2023 (\$2 million/9,450 tons). Palm oil also dominates imports, despite a sharp dip in value in 2021 to 191 million (from \$548 thousand in 2020), it rebounded significantly to \$1.6 million in 2022 before slightly declining to 1.8 million in 2023, with volume steadily increasing over the years. There is an increasing demand for bananas and plantains despite fluctuating import figures, with a notable drop in volume in 2020. By 2023, imports peaked at 588 thousand tons, valued at \$29 thousand. Soya beans imports were high in 2019 but experienced a decline in both value and volumes afterward, possibly due to the insecurity in Eastern DRC where most of the products are sourced. In terms of plants and parts imported for various uses including pharmaceutical, there has been a steady growth throughout the five years, increasing from just 15 tons, valued at \$2 thousand in 2019 to 80 tons, valued at \$40 thousand in 2023. With the tropical rain forest in the Congo basin, DRC is conducive for agroecological practices which enhances the production of the above plants for the Ugandan as well as other EAC markets. The major barrier to DRC's exports to Uganda remains the security situation which not only hinders production in DRC but also distribution and any effort for market linkages.

Table 10. DRCs exports to Uganda in values (000'USD) and volumes (tons)

Product	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume
Rice	1,247	5,240	1,675	6,751	474	2,713	1,249	5,358	2,070	9,450
Palm oil	525	1,722	548	1,776	191	649	1,690	2,511	1,080	2,619
Bananas/plantains	21	299	23	129	25	433	6	138	29	588
Soya beans	12	277	8		1	23	4	10		0
Plants and parts used in perfumery, pharmacy, insecticidal, fungicidal, or similar purposes	2	15	10	20	27	90	30	60	40	80

Source: International Trade Centre calculations

Namanga-Tarakea³² Border Crossing

The Namanga border connects Tanzania and Kenya. This is a one-stop border point. What types of agroecological products, if any, are traded at this border? If this trade exists, what are the volumes of these agroecological products and what is the economic value? These were some of the questions animating the research team while in Namanga.

It seemed, however, that Namanga is not a major cross-border point where agricultural or agroecological products move from one country to another. Traders working at the Namanga cross-border conduct most of their business at the Namanga territorial market. Products traded include oranges, mangoes, avocados, carrots, and other vegetables. Were some of these products agroecological?

As is the case with most respondents, we would learn repeatedly during this research, there was limited understanding of the term “agroecological;” respondents were more familiar with “organic,” or rather “Kilimohai.” Indeed, both terms, especially the latter, was often used as a reference point to help respondents understand what was meant by agroecological products and help the research team to identify them.

Following the guidance of “organic” producers based around Arusha, the research team engaged traders in the Namanga market. The majority of traders indicated that they do not go across the border to trade in Kenya. Although traders from Kenya come to the market to buy products such as carrots, the volumes, according to the traders, are not that significant. One reason for this is the inability and/or unwillingness of traders to procure large quantities of products from Arusha. The “organic” carrots from Arusha often have higher demand from areas other than Namanga. Moreover, since traders do not receive a premium for organic carrots compared to carrots produced conventionally, there is not much incentive for traders to sell organic products, so they are not motivated to procure and trade in organic carrots and other organic products. What, then, had we learnt? Some organic, perhaps even agroecological products, were being traded, but most of it was not technically “cross border” trade. These products were circulating within local markets.

What agricultural products, then, were being traded across the border? What agroecological products were being traded. Critically, how did we know they were agroecological?

Where are the agroecological products and what volumes are being traded?

To identify the agroecological products the research team went to two villages, which were identified because of the presence of farmers aligned with Kilimohai principles and practices. If we could identify agroecological products, then we would also be able to calculate the volumes of agroecological products being traded. The research team conducted focus group discussions with farmers in Ngoswak and Kitende. Subsequently four farmers in Ngoswak and five farmers from Kitende participated in key informant interviews.

In the village, the research team confirmed that agroecological production³³ was taking place. Potatoes, maize, beans and wheat were being produced in alignment with agroecological principles. The modality of cross border trade also became more apparent. These farmers were

32 It is important to note there is no “Namanga-Tarakea” border. These are two distinct borders, but they are presented here as one border.

33 See Annex 3 for the criteria used for selection/confirmation of agroecological products.

not sending their products to the Namanga market. Rather, Kenya traders came to the village to purchase from the farmers directly.

Potatoes were the crop sold in the highest volumes across the border to traders from Kenya. Based on the volumes provided by five farmers, there was at least 65 metric tons of potatoes traded to Kenya annually. Maize followed potatoes as the second most widely traded crop at 31 metric tons annually. The third most traded crop was beans, with 25.5 metric tons of beans traded annually. Almost as much wheat (24.1 metric tons) was traded to Kenya.

Table 11. Four agroecological products and their volumes in two farming communities

	Wheat (Metric Tons)	Maize (Metric Tons)	Beans (Metric Tons)	Potatoes (Metric Tons)
Ngoswak	0	15	11.5	0
Kitende	24.1	16	14	65
Totals	24.1	31	25.5	65

Of course, there are many more farmers in both of these villages. However, it is not possible to verify that they all comply with agroecological practices. The data on trade presented here provides a glimpse into the level of trade in agroecological products which may be taking place. These two villages are representative of villages in the district regarding the crops cultivated. Currently, the local government does not have data on specific organic or agroecological producers, therefore it is not possible to extrapolate potential volumes of agroecological products based on the number of farmers, it is possible, however, using the survey findings as well as the key informant interviews and focus group discussions to identify the top three traded agroecological products at Namanga.

Table 12. Top three traded agroecological products at Namanga

Trader/Enterprise Location	Product Sold	Volume (Metric ton)	Volume Ranking
1st Most Sold Product	Maize	165.0	1
2nd Most Sold Product	Avocado	84.4	2
3rd Most Sold Product	Potatoes	30.3	3

Tarakea (Rombo District)

The Tarakea cross-border point connects Tanzania and Kenya. Unlike Namanga, it is not currently a one stop border point. The research findings indicate that avocados are one of two agroecological products that are traded in high volumes across the Tarakea. These avocados are sourced mainly by individual avocado trader-aggregators. These individuals, mainly women, collect avocados from households in Tarakea that have avocado trees on their compounds. Because these trees are not cultivated in plantations, it is assumed that there is no use of agrochemicals on these crops by households.³⁴ Avocados are not produced all year round. Peak production, according to producers and traders, is approximately seven months. There are three months of low production.

³⁴ It is important to note that there was no verification of the non-use of industrial agricultural inputs by households on avocado trees in their compounds. Can these avocados be considered agroecological? See Annex 3 for the criteria that was utilized.

There is a period of two months when there are essentially no avocados. The data provided here is based on an eight-month³⁵ production period.

How many avocados cross the border?

Two scenarios are provided here to illuminate the volume of cross-border trade. First, there is a low-volume scenario. For the calculation of volumes, this figure uses the minimal figure provided by government agencies and/or traders. For example, if customs agents say approximately five to ten trucks cross a border, then five is used as a basis for the calculation. To calculate the high-volume scenario, we take the average as the basis for the calculation. To return to the example above. If customs agents say approximately five to ten trucks cross a border, then we use the average of those numbers for the basis of the calculation. In the case above, 7.5 would be used in the calculation.

The research contends that a minimum of thirty-two thousand, five hundred and thirty-eight tons (32,538.60 MTS) of avocados are shipped from Tanzania via Tarakea to Kenya. If we take a less conservative figure, then the volume of avocados traded increases by 11 tons. That is, based on data provided by government agencies and the details provided by producers and traders during the field research, it is possible that as much as 43,561.80 metric tons of avocados are traded across the Tarakea border to Kenya and beyond. It is important to note here that this figure does not fully account for non-counted cross-border trade.

Table 13. Comparison of low and high volumes of avocados

Border point	Low	High	Difference
Kikelelwa	20,651.40	25,205.40	4,554.00
Eward	³⁶ 2,304.00	3744	1,440.00
Tarakea	9,583.20	14,612.40	5,029.20
Total MT Avocado traded at Tarakea	32,538.60	43,561.80	11,023.20

This border crossing has four points, which are monitored by the Customs agency. For this research, three were covered.

Bananas

The second most traded agroecological product at the Tarakea border seems to be bananas. As in the case of avocados, two scenarios are provided to help illuminate how much trade may be taking place. The first scenario is based on the volumes of trade taking place on a non-market day. During observations at one of the four border points, it was noted that the vehicles crossing the borders are trucks, cars (Probox), and motorbikes (bodaboda). Although bananas are available throughout the year, there is a period of approximately three months when the availability of bananas declines drastically. The calculations provided are based on a nine-month (270-day) period of availability for bananas. Based on the observations as well as the revenue authority

35 The use of eight months of production assumes that the three months of low production may be equivalent to one month of peak production.

36 It is important to note that the avocados from Eward were not coming from the Rombo district. Based on Key Informant Interviews and focus groups conducted, the overwhelming majority of avocados were not from Rombo, but were from places such as Mbeya and Njombe.

records, approximately 1 truck with the capacity to carry as many as 300 bunches of bananas crosses the border daily. Twenty-five cars (Probox) cross the border daily, carrying approximately 20 bunches each. Motorbikes were also a major mode of transportation used to transport products. The study realized that as many as 150 motorbikes cross the border daily to transport bananas. Finally, based on the above, it is estimated that on a non-market day, as much as 35,572 metric tons of bananas were being traded across the border. This is the conservative number.

Table 14. . Banana trade at one border point at Tarakea

Vehicle	No of vehicles	No. of bunches	Days	Total
Truck	1	300	180	54000
Probox	25	20	180	90000
bodaboda	150	5	180	135000
Total No. of Bunches				279000
Average weight of a bunch				85
Total volume of bananas in Kgs				23,715,000
Metric Tons				23,715

To generate a more complete, but still tentative, perspective on the cross-border trade of bananas at Tarakea, it is important to capture the volume of trade on market days and include it with the calculation of the non-market days. During the observation of trade at the border, it was noted, as to be expected, that the number of vehicles transporting agricultural products across the border increases. Generally, there was no change in the number of trucks and cars (Probox) crossing the border. It is the number of motorbikes crossing the border that has increased dramatically. On market day, the number of motorbikes crossing the border increased at least two-fold. Whereas the total volume of bananas traded on non-market days during a year was approximately 135,000 bunches (11,475 MT), the total volume of bananas traded on market days was approximately the same volume 11,475 metric tons (135,000 bunches of bananas). It is important to note that our calculations are based on a maximum of 5 bunches being transported by a motorbike. However, the research team observed motorbikes carrying as many as 10 bunches of bananas during one trip. In essence, it is quite likely that the volumes we estimate are but a fraction of the entire trade, especially since we are only reporting on one of 4 border points at Tarakea and that other routes are used for cross border trade.

Table 15. Banana trade on Market Days at Tarakea

Vehicle	No of vehicles	No. of bunches	Days	Total
Truck	1	300	90	27000
Probox	25	20	90	45000
bodaboda	300	5	90	135000
Total No. of bunches				207000
Average weight of a bunch				85
Total volume of bananas in Kgs				17,595,000.00
Metric Tons				17,595.00

What then is the total value of the banana trade at Tarakea? When we combine the non-market day and market days volumes, it is fair to assert that at least 41,310 metric tons are traded at that one border point. As has been stated previously, there are three formal border points where goods cross the border. If we assume that the trade in bananas at the second of these border crossing

points is at least 33³⁷ percent of that taking place at Tarakea and that the volume of trade at the two other formal border crossing points are each equivalent to at least 20 percent of the main border crossing, then it means that the total trades in bananas could be as much as 71,466 metric tons per year.

Table 16. Approximate value of banana trade at Tarakea

Total of non-market days and market days	Percentage	Metric Tons
First point – Tarakea		41,310.00
Second point at Tarakea (as a percentage of the first point)	33 percent	13,632.30
Third point at Tarakea as a percentage of the first point)	20 percent	8,262.00
Fourth point at Tarakea as a percentage of the first point)	20 percent	8,262.00
Total value of trade at all borders		71,466.30

Now that we have identified some of the trade in agroecological products taking place across borders, it is possible to explore the present level of trade of agricultural products. The analysis is based on data provided by TanTrade, within the Ministry of Trade. The aggregate data provided by TanTrade reveals the export of Tanzania to the EAC. The data provided by the ICT provides data on the volume and value of exports and imports between Tanzania to Kenya.

Table 17. Tanzania's trade within the EAC

Country	Product	2022		2023		2024	
		Value (\$,000)	Volume (\$,000)	Value (\$,000)	Volume (\$,000)	Value (\$,000)	Volume (\$,000)
Exports	Fresh or dried avocados	457	NA	270	NA	0	NA
	Fresh or dried bananas (excluding plantains)	7	NA	41	NA	1	NA
	Hulled maize grains (excluding rolled, flaked or pellets)	0	NA	44	NA	853	NA
	Fresh or chilled potatoes (excluding seeds)	18	NA	13	NA	405	NA
	Dried shell beans of species*	40	NA	4,261	NA	5,022	NA
	Millet	0.2	NA	0.1	NA	0.1	NA
	Dried cassava	0.0	NA	0.2	NA	0.3	NA

Source TanTrade 2025

The crop product that Tanzania exports in the largest volumes and has the biggest value is maize. From 2020, when the volumes traded were lowest between 2019–2024, to a high of 347,690 in 2023, maize is clearly the number one traded crop product. This is followed by rice. The total volume of rice traded between 2019 to 2023 was 275,247 metric tons. The third largest export crop from Tanzania to Kenya is beans. Approximately, 15,305,000 metric tons of beans were exported to Kenya, during 2019–2024.

37 Based on the observations of the numbers of vehicles crossing at the other border points, the research teams believes that our use of 33 percent, 20 percent and 20 percent for the other border crossing points is a very conservative figure.

Table 18. Tanzania export to Kenya in values (000' USD) and volumes (tons) ³⁸

Product	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume
Live cattle	9,647	8,311	4,548	3,942	1,055	1,116	1,415	988	1,527	1,242
Live goats	1,714	2,808	1,971	3,202	2,818	1,743	1,184	575	1,024	918
Maize	15,034	86,087	10,349	50,775	56,258	375,484	53,500	347,690	19,380	584
Rice	327	1,078	26,920	64,109	75,612	161,590	24,535	44,794	194	3,676
Beans	234	899	272	1,354	563	5,744	540	6,638	133	670
Potatoes	8	28	26	116	0	n/a	3	21	0	n/a
Fresh or dried avocados	166	n/a	231	n/a	457	n/a	206	n/a	0	n/a
Bananas	0	n/a	0	n/a	1	8	41	735	0	n/a

Let us now look at what Kenya exports to Tanzania. Table 19 below reveals that maize flour is Kenya's biggest food export to Tanzania. Between 2019 and 2023, Kenya's total export of maize flour was 20,385,000 metric tons, which was valued at US\$10,063,000. Although Kenya imports a lot of maize from Tanzania as we have seen in table 29, Kenya also exports maize to Tanzania, and this is its second largest food export, valued at \$3,833,000 over the five-year period under review. However, Kenya's export of seeds for sowing is larger in economic value (\$7,639,000) than its export of maize, over the 5-year period. Finally, the table reveals that, in terms of volumes traded, shelled peas are Kenya's third biggest export to Tanzania by volume at 9,419,000 metric tons.

Table 19. Kenya export to Tanzania in values (000' USD) and volumes (tons) ³⁹

Product	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume
Maize	641	430	490	356	2,391	4,137	293	484	18	37
Maize flour	2,416	5,032	1,535	2,942	959	2,036	3,241	7,041	1,912	3,334
Rice	0	n/a	0	0	125	372	36	70	0	n/a
Dried, shelled peas	621	2,506	683	1,982	1,478	3,383	248	593	567	955
Vegetable seeds, for sowing	1,063	55	1,212	41	1,455	45	1,615	149	2,294	60

Source: International Trade Centre calculations

³⁸ n/a means missing data (not captured by ITC)

³⁹ n/a means missing data (not captured by ITC). 0 means volume is lower than ton

Case Study: From to Tarakea to Nairobi- agroecological products and trader livelihood

Meet Madam JM. We met her at the Tarakea border in the Rombo District. She is an aggregator and primary trader. The main crop she sells is avocados, but she also trades in beans, maize, and bananas. After the research team explained what we meant by agroecological products, she informed us that the avocados she trades to Kenya, meets the criteria.

What makes these avocados agroecological? According to Madam M, these avocados are not from plantations. Rather they are from households in the area and these households do not use industrial agricultural inputs. It is a cultural practice to have fruit trees in your backyard and avocados are a favoured option. If the avocados were of the Hass variety, then the claims about non-use of chemical agriculture inputs may have been less tenable. Given that Hass avocados are a highly demanded variety in global avocado circuits, its cultivation may be indicative of a strong market orientation. If so, then commercial pressures may entice the use of chemicals. However, the avocados being aggregated from households are the traditional varieties such as Fuerte and Zutano. And though the trees have economic value, there does not seem to be practice of “investing” in the production of avocados.

The cultivation of avocados is embedded in a culture of natural farming. For example, avocado and bananas are perennial tree crops that are grown together in backyards, while maize and beans are rotated in the farms and in backyards. To improve/maintain soil fertility, households use animal manure and some also use compost. Banana leaves are cut down to cover land, to conserve soil moisture and preserve soil health. Additionally, after maize and beans have been harvested, the residue including stems are spread on the farm as mulch.

So how many of these agroecological avocados does Madam JM sell? According to her, she sells approximately 24 bags of avocados monthly. Each of these bags weigh, on average, about 250KG. She can aggregate and sell avocados for about eight months of the year. This is equivalent to about 48 metric tons. Based on the current price for 250Kg bag of avocados, the estimated value of this trade would be TZS 15,360,000.

This trade in avocados encourages collaboration between small holder farmers and aggregators and between aggregators themselves. For instance, since one aggregator cannot collect the large quantities of avocados needed to fill a truck in three days (the average time a truck stays to collect products), it requires that aggregators work together. Indeed, the aggregators have developed participatory decision-making and practices of solidarity. For example, because they are “small aggregators with small capital and unorganised activities . . . they collaborate together when traders demand huge amount of avocados. They decide together the amount of avocados each one has to supply.” This collaboration enables them to satisfy their customers and generate new business opportunities to trade avocados.

These avocados are packed in reusable bags and transported to Dar es Salam and Arusha. However, most of the avocados are traded across the Tarakea border into Kenya. There is no value addition taking place in Tarakea. Rather, some of the avocados are destined for an avocados processing plant, which produces avocado oil. This value addition takes place in Kenya.

This trade of avocados from Tarakea, Tanzania to Kenya is largely formal and is conducted through regulated border crossings. The aggregators usually take avocado, via motorcycles, across the border to Kenya. Traders are allowed to enter approximately 13 kilometers into Kenya. This area is called “last.” An area where traders are allowed to do business without documentation. Many Tanzanian traders do not have the requisite documents to participate in cross border trading. As a result, many do not go into Kenya beyond the area called “last.”

Indeed, the space called “last” is where a lot of trade takes place. Often, transporters pay for permits to drive their vehicles into Tanzania or Kenya. However, they tend not to enter neither Tanzania nor Kenya. This allows them to avoid an entrance fee. So, it is usually motorcycles are used to ferry avocado and bananas across borders and then taken by transporters into the hinterlands; or a Tanzanian registered truck meets with a Kenyan truck and exchanges products at the border zone, an area called “no man’s land.”

Whether the trade takes place in “no man’s land” or in “last”, this trade in avocados supports livelihoods for multiple food system actors, especially small-scale food producers, aggregators and transporters. For example, avocados are often transported from household and farms using motorcycles. Avocados are often taken across the border by motorcycles, small cars (Toyota probox) and by trucks of different capacities such as 5t, 7t and 10t trucks. The use of motorcycles, in particular, is beneficial to male youth, for whom the provision of transportation services has become a key livelihood strategy.

For Madam JM, the trade in avocados has been a strategic choice. She is deliberate about sourcing avocados that are not produced with the use of chemical inputs. According to her, she is able to sell “agroecological” avocados to Kenyan traders at a higher price than she gets in the local market. This has benefited her considerably. She explains that she is able to pay the schools fees for her children from her own income. Indeed, the fact that she is self-employed and successful --she has been able to build herself a modern 2-bedroom concrete home, has increased her social status. Importantly, this is not unique to her. According to Madam JM, the trade of agroecological avocados and bananas has had positive benefits for many other women, especially widows who find that the business of aggregating and/or trading avocados creates income generating opportunities, which empowers them to take better care of their families with increased incomes, as they also gain more respect in their communities.

It is not surprising, then, that Madam JM is supportive of cross-border trade. Specifically, she wants to see increased trade in agroecological products. What is necessary for this to happen? For her, there is a need for reduced trade restrictions such as cross-border fees. Additionally, there is need to harmonize permit requirements and fees. “In Tanzania there are a lot of requirements, also Tanzanians pay more than Kenyans”.

Madam M. wants to expand her trading activities. To enable her to be successful she wants to see an improvement in infrastructure. A key example is roads. She wants to see more roads to rural areas. “They are not passable especially during rainfall season, which adds to cost of transportation and cargo handling. In this situation avocados are transported by motorcycles from the rural areas to the main road where they are loaded to trucks read to be taken to Dar es Salaam, Arusha and Kenya”

Importantly, Madam M also wants a law that requires that avocados be sold by the kilogram. According to her, “selling per bag does not benefit us (aggregators and farmers) much, but it benefits the traders.” Finally, Madam JM indicated that the major challenge she experiences is her limited access to affordable capital. Despite these challenges, the trade in agroecological has positively impacted her life.

Rusumo (Tanzania and Rwanda)

The Rusumo border point connects Tanzania and Rwanda. It is a One Stop Border Point (OSBP). It is mainly male traders who are involved in trade at this border point. The majority of the trade in agricultural products flows from Tanzania to Rwanda. The major agricultural products traded at the Rusumo border (Tanzania and Rwanda) are cassava and beans.

Table 20. Top three traded Agroecological products at Rusumo

Trader/Enterprise Location	Product Sold	Volume (Metric ton)	Volume Ranking
1st Most Sold Product	Beans	2.082.0	1
2nd Most Sold Product	Cassava	969.3	2
3rd Most Sold Product	Maize	672.5	3

Are the cassava, beans and maize agroecological? Discussions with producers, traders, and agricultural officers suggest that the production of cassava and beans in this area (Ngara District) does not rely on the use of industrial agriculture inputs. Focus group discussions, as well as cursory observations of some farms, revealed a range of agroecological practices being used on farms. The research team was not able to systematically assess whether other criteria for a product to be considered an agroecological product were adequately realized. Put differently, it is mainly agroecological production practices that form the basis for asserting that cassava and beans are agroecological products.

What, then, are the volumes of cassava and beans being traded? According to Tanzania-based traders, they transport 35 trucks of dried cassava to Rwanda each month. Each of the trucks carries 30 tons of cassava. This level of trade takes place for approximately seven months (September to March) of the year. Based on the information provided by the traders, approximately 10,500 metric tons of cassava are traded annually from Tanzania to Rwanda. Regarding beans, the traders indicate that over a 10-month trade period, they export approximately 9000 metric tons of beans from Tanzania to Rwanda.

Table 21. Cassava and Beans traded from Tanzania to Rwanda annually

Agricultural product	Transportation type	No of Vehicles	Average volume transported (MT)	Months of trade	Total volumes in metric tons annually
Cassava	Trucks	35	30	10	10,500
Beans	Trucks	30	30	10	9,000

Finally, honey, is also a major product exported from Tanzania to Rwanda. According to Tanzanian officials at the Rusumo border, Rwanda was the leading importer of honey from Tanzania in the 2021/2022 fiscal year. Table 31 below presents Tanzania's export of honey from 2020/2021 to 2023/2024.

Table 22. Volumes of honey exported from Tanzania to Rwanda 2020–2024

Year	Metric Tons
2020/2021	543.01
2021/2022	809.10
2022/2023	746.84
2023/2024	417.86

Trade at the Rusumo border point is not unidirectional. There are also agricultural products moving from Rwanda to Tanzania. According to traders, millet, finger millet, and sugar beans are exported from Rwanda to Tanzania on an ad hoc basis. For instance, traders indicate that approximately 600 metric tons of millet and finger millet are traded from Rwanda to Tanzania annually. According to traders, approximately 6000 metric tons of sugar beans ⁴⁰are shipped to Tanzania annually across this border. It is not clear if this is consumed within Tanzania or if it is shipped out of the country.

With some perspective on the trade of agroecological products at the Rusumo border, let us now turn our attention to Tanzania's exports to and imports from Rwanda.

The table below reveals that maize has been the number one export of Tanzania to Rwanda in terms of volume during the five-year period under review. In 2019, 55,340 metric tons of maize were shipped to Rwanda. By 2023, this figure had increased to 71,188 metric tons. Maize is the export crop that has the second highest economic value at \$64,217,000. The second largest export crop from Tanzania to Rwanda is rice. Between 2019 and 2023, the lowest volumes of rice traded was 14,211, while the highest volumes 91,315 in 2021. Rice is also the crop that has the most economic value. For the five-year period under review, the value of rice export was \$148,675,000. Groundnuts is the third highest in terms of value during the period at \$40,053,000, while sorghum was the product with the third highest volumes traded (97570 metric tons) during this five-year period.

Table 23. Tanzania's exports to Rwanda in values (000' USD) and volumes (tons) ⁴¹

Product	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume
Maize	13,671	55,340	15,708	63,968	16,252	63,776	18,586	71,188	n/a	n/a
Rice	11,929	14,211	40,808	62,417	55,992	91,315	39,946	54,964	n/a	n/a
Grain Sorghum	3,933	21,169	4,359	23,503	5,348	30,111	3,439	22,787	n/a	n/a
Beans	1,827	7,016	2,192	10,578	1,297	6,115	1,108	7,112	n/a	n/a
Fish (dried, salted)	9,957	8,874	11,052	10,263	10,421	9,685	6,266	6,258	n/a	n/a
Natural Honey	1,369	1,214	1,113	1,031	1,083	923	1,292	1,113	n/a	n/a
Soya Beans	0	0	139	1,311	364	6,771	1,236	9,657	1,649	2,065
Ground Nuts	16	30	1,691	3,113	7,191	14,411	15,467	22,936	15,688	16,103

Source: International Trade Centre calculations

What does Rwanda export to Tanzania? According to the data from ITC, Rwanda's exports to Tanzania are quite small. The data from ITC, which covers 2019 to 2022, provides trade data for only coffee and beans.

Table 24. Rwanda's exports to Tanzania in values (000' USD) and volumes (tons) ⁴²

Product	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume
Coffee	0	n/a	42	12	678	295	536	128	n/a	n/a
Beans	0	n/a	0	n/a	889	1,659	0	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: International Trade Centre calculations

⁴⁰ According to the traders, these sugar beans originate in Uganda.

⁴¹ n/a means missing data (not captured by ITC). 0 means volume is lower than tons

⁴² n/a means missing data (not captured by ITC). 0 means volume is lower than ton

Summary of Total Trade in Key Agroecological Products at Busia, Mpondwe, Namanga and Rusumo

The analysis above illuminates that there is considerable trade in agroecological products within the EAC. While this trade is not adequately documented in the official records of the EAC States, the study's preliminary analysis from engagements with agroecology value web actors revealed a concentration in products ranging from cereals, fruits and tubers. The table below presents the top three traded agroecological products at Busia, Mpondwe, Namanga, and Rusumo border points.

Table 25. Overall Top 3 Traded Agroecological Products on select borders in EAC

Trader/Enterprise Location	Product Sold	Volume (Metric ton)	Volume Ranking
Busia			
1st Most Sold Product	Maize	146.9	1
2nd Most Sold Product	Beans	92.6	2
3rd Most Sold Product	Sorghum	35.0	3
Mpondwe			
1st Most Sold Product	Rice	100,000.3	1
2nd Most Sold Product	Beans	1020.2	2
3rd Most Sold Product	Watermelon	96.0	3
Namanga			
1st Most Sold Product	Maize	165.0	1
2nd Most Sold Product	Avocado	84.4	2
3rd Most Sold Product	Irish Potatoes	26.6	3
Rusumo			
1st Most Sold Product	Beans	2,082.0	1
2nd Most Sold Product	Cassava	969.3	2
3rd Most Sold Product	Maize	672.5	3

Case Study: Agroecological products and socio-economic development

Mr. AL is a trader who operates at the Rusumo border between Rwanda and Tanzania.

He is engaged in formal trade which passes through the regulated border crossings – the Rusumo One Stop Border Point (OSBP). As a formal trader he has all required documents for exporting agricultural products.

He consistently trades three products: Cassava, Sorghum, Millet. According to him, these are agroecologically produced. His claims are not based on the farmers having any type of organic certification. The farmers are also not a part of a farmer managed certification scheme. His claim about the agroecological status of the products is based on what he knows to be standard practice for farmers in Ngara district. Farmers, especially those not involved in what are seen as “staple commodities,” such as maize, do not use industrial fertilizers. The culture of cultivation is based on indigenous farming practices. Farmers incorporate animal manure to boost soil fertility. Crop residue is left in fields to cover the soil and decompose. Intercropping is widely practiced; For instance, avocados, bananas and coffee are often cultivated together with the former two providing a shady canopy of the latter. That agroforestry is widely practiced is evident.

Is value being added to any of the agroecological products moving across the Rusumo border? Mr. AL is not directly involved in the value addition process. Value, however, is added to cassava. It is dried and milled into flour. Unfortunately, the milling of cassava flour “were discouraged by high import fees in Rwanda.” Allegedly, Rwanda has high import fees which have effectively protected their local industries from competition from imported cassava flour and as a result the Tanzanian factory has now closed.

The importance of cassava extends beyond the producers and traders. For example, cassava processing creates opportunities for other women who are employed to sort and grade cassava for processing. The cassava flour is packed in bags that are environmentally friendly. This, of course, may have been influenced by Tanzania’s banning of plastic in 2019

Many borders within the East African Community are porous. Geography has made it more difficult for non-regulated trade at the Rusumo border. The Kagera river and other features of the landscape make crossing from Tanzania or Rwanda or vice versa anywhere other than the border, quite difficult.

Thirty-ton trucks are used to transport dried cassava across the border. For Mr. AL,

The challenges which are experienced most often are (1) too many road barriers (2) excessive crop fees and (3) delays.

Given this, what needs to change to improve trade in agroecological products across the border? According to Mr. AL, there is need for the following:

- Reduced number of road barriers
- Harmonisation of EAC custom fees as agreed in EAC Common Market Protocols
- Reduction in the price of electric power in Tanzania
- Increase in the number of extension officers by the Tanzanian government.

Mr. AL is clear about the types of services that would support your training activities.

There are three things which are seen as critical: (1) access to capital, (2) extension services and (3) market access,

Participating in trade of agroecological products has increased income for farmers/primary traders. For instance, his success as a trader has enabled Mr. AL to pay college fees for his children. This is not unique to him, but a common experience among many of the traders in their association. Using ownership of a vehicle as an example of upward mobility, Mr. AL indicated that his trading activities had helped him to move quickly from riding motorcycles to driving cars.

Of course, everyone does not transition from motorcycles to cars. For many male youth, motorcycles used to provide transportation services, is a relatively accessible employment option. It is clear that cross border trading activities are benefitting youth, especially males, who are now able to generate income from transporting people and goods.

What seems to be particularly good business is the cross-border trade in dried cassava. Traders, even relatively small traders, seem to have been able to increasingly afford school fees and medical services for their children. Indeed, traders have built homes and at least one has bought a tractor from trading in dried cassava.

Comparative Analysis of agroecological and conventional products

To gain further understanding of the significance of the cross-border trade of agroecological products within the EAC, it is helpful to conduct some comparative analysis. More specifically, it is useful to compare trade in agroecological products with that of conventional products. From an agroecological perspective, it is not enough to focus exclusively on the economic value of trade. It is critical to also focus on environmental and socio-cultural impact. Unfortunately, it was not possible in this study to attend to these critical areas. The analysis presented here is restricted to economic value of agroecological products. Still, by comparing the trade of agroecological products with conventional products, the study provides additional insights on cross border trade within the EAC.

Before proceeding with this comparative analysis, it is necessary to highlight an important challenge. There is a lack of disaggregated data on agroecological products within the Harmonized Standard (HS) code for import and export data. This lack of disaggregated data means that it is possible that reported trade data does not necessarily cover conventional products exclusively. Rather, it is highly probable that reported trade data includes agroecological products. Therefore, the comparative analysis offered in this section uses the primary data on agroecological product exports generated from this study to compare with overall exports. It is important to remember that the data on agroecological products captured reflect the findings of a few of the many cross-border points. This study covered approximately (35 percent)⁴³ of the official cross border points of the countries in the study. It is important to note that this section focuses on the top three agroecological products at each of the border crossing covered in this study. The value⁴⁴ of the agroecological trade identified at these borders is then compared with the conventional variant of the same products. Subsequently, this section also offers a comparison of the various agroecological products which are being traded. The section concludes by highlighting the opportunities available for the scale up of trade in agroecological products.

A comparative analysis of the agroecological products traded at Busia and the national volumes of trade is instructive. Maize is the most traded agroecological product at Busia, with a value of \$400,913. Compared to national trade value of \$58,141,000 this trades seems paltry given that it is less than one percent of maize traded. However, cognizance of the fact that this is only one of many cross-border trade points that could have been analyzed, and that conventional data probably includes some agroecological products, then it is evident that there is more trade in agroecological products taking place than is widely realized. Beans are the second most widely traded product at Busia. The trade is valued at \$711,879. Unfortunately, given that there is no data available for beans from Uganda to Kenya in 2024 or 2023, it is not possible to conduct a comparative analysis. Let's turn to the final product for our comparative analysis. Sorghum is the third most traded agroecological product traded at Busia. The value of this trade is \$268,128, which is 6.9 percent of national trade in 2024 of \$3,880,000.

43 Kenya-Uganda: 5 primary border crossings i.e., Malaba, Busia, Lokitanyala, Lwakhakha, and Suam.

Kenya-Tanzania: 5 main land border crossings i.e., Isebania, Namanga, Lunga Lunga, Loitokitok, and Taveta.

Uganda-DRC: 11 major border crossing points i.e., Mpondwe-Kasindi, Bunagana, Goli, Ishasha, Bunagana, Busanza, Ishasha, Kazinga, Kisenyi, Munyaga, and Rwenshama

Tanzania-Rwanda: 2 border crossing points i.e., Rusumo and the recently opened Kyerwa

44 The economic value of an agroecological product is based on the farm gate prices that were documented during the field work. In most cases, unless otherwise stated, the price is based on the average farm gate price.

At the Mpondwe border, rice is the most widely traded agroecologically produced product. Based on this study, the value of rice traded has an economic value of approximately \$76, 608. According to ITC data, the national value of trade in rice is \$893,000. Therefore, the volume of agroecologically produced rice traded at Mpondwe is approximately 8.6% of all rice traded, which is by no means inconsequential. The value of beans traded between Uganda and DRC is valued at about \$488,000. The value of agroecologically produced beans is \$58,997, which is 12.1 percent of the beans traded. The third most traded product at Mpondwe is watermelons. The value of this trade is \$537,600, which is 63.5 percent of the total national watermelon trade of \$846,000.

The top three agroecological products traded at Namanga are maize, avocados and potatoes. The study found the volume of agroecological maize traded at Namanga to be approximately \$311,809 (1.6%) of the total trade of maize, which was valued at \$19,380,000 in 2023 (see table below). At Namanga, the economic value of avocados traded is about \$14,428. According to ICT data, the value of avocados traded is approximately \$206,000. This suggests that approximately seven percent of avocados traded could be agroecological. Again, it is important to keep in mind that this is data for only one border. The other agroecological product of interest at Namanga is potatoes. According to the study, approximately \$16,798 is traded. The research team was unable to access data for the value of potatoes traded in 2023 or 2024; therefore, no comparative analysis has been conducted.

The Rusumo border also provides an opportunity to compare the volumes of agroecological and conventional products. The focus one again is on the top three most traded agroecological products and their counterparts. Beans are the most widely traded agroecological product (AEP). The economic value of agroecological beans is \$687,501 compared to the national trade in beans (Tanzania to Rwanda) valued at \$1,108,000. Cassava is the second most traded product at Rusumo, however since there is no data on the national value of cassava traded, it is not possible to conduct the comparative analysis. Finally, maize is the third most sold product at the Rusumo border. The value of conventional maize traded nationally is \$18,586,000. That agroecological maize is 0.5 percent of national trade is not negligible, when it is recalled that this is but one border crossing.

Table 26 Comparative data on the economic value of agroecological and conventional trade.

Border	Agroecological Product	Annual volume	Average Selling price per Kg	Value in USD	National trade volume (ICT data)	Trade in AEPs as a % of national trade
Busia	Maize	1,028,300.00	1,425	400,913.60	59,141,000.00	0.7
Busia	Beans	648,200.00	4,014	711,879.86	not available	not available
Busia	Sorghum	245,000.00	4,000	268,128.00	3,880,000.00	6.9
Mpondwe	Rice	100,000.30	2800.0	76,608.23	893,000.00	8.6
Mpondwe	Beans	71,414.00	3019.5	58,996.78	488,000.00	12.1
Mpondwe	Watermelon	672,000.00	800.0	147,087	846,000.00	17.4
Namanga	Maize	1,155,000.00	718.2	311,809.04	19,380,000.00	1.6
Namanga	Avocado	59,053.75	650.0	14,428.90	206,000.00	7.0
Namanga	Irish Potatoes	18,620.00	2,400.0	16,798.22	3,000.00	
Rusumo	Beans	145,740.00	1254.9	687,501.04	1,108,000	62.0
Rusumo	Cassava	678,510.00	352.3	898,588.94	not available	not available
Rusumo	Maize	470,750.00	566.2	100,186.75	18,586,000	0.5

In the previous section we compared the trade value of agroecological and conventional products. We will now turn to compare the agroecological products at the various borders.

Based on the findings of this study, it is possible to compare the cross-border trade in agroecologically produced maize. At the Busia border, maize is the top traded agroecological product; 1,028 metric tons of it is traded annually. Comparatively at the Namaga border, where maize is the second most traded agroecological product, 1,155 metric tons is traded. At the Rusumo border between Tanzania and Rwanda, maize is the third most traded agroecological product and 4,707 metric tons is traded at that border. It is possible, then, that Tanzania is trading more agroecologically produced maize than any of the other countries included in this study.

At the Rusumo border, beans are the most widely traded agroecological product. Approximately, 14,574 metric tons of beans are traded at Rusumo. This is more than double the amount of beans traded at the Mpondwe border, where beans are the second most widely traded agroecological product, at 7,141 metric tons annually. More beans are traded at Rusumo and Mpondwe than at Busia, where 648 metric tons of beans, the second most traded agroecological product at that border, is traded annually.

Based on the data from this study, the comparative analysis of the trade in agroecologically produced maize and beans, it is observed that Tanzania is accounting for a considerable amount of the agroecological products traded.

We conclude this comparative analysis of agroecological and conventional products observing that the trade in agroecological products is probably greater than imagined by advocates and detractors of agroecology alike. It is now time to examine the policy landscape in which trade in agroecological products takes place.

3

Continental, Regional and National policies

This chapter provides an analysis of the policies, plans, and strategies that are relevant for agroecology and the cross-border trade in agroecological products within the East African Community. The analysis of policies begins with the continental level policies. Specifically, the study examines the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Next, the study turns to examine the relevant policies of the East African Community. Finally, the focus shifts to the national level. Here, the relevant policies of five of the eight members of the EAC are subject to review. The five countries are the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. Given the focus of the review, policies that seem antithetical to trade in agroecological products are briefly highlighted. Subsequently, policies relevant to trade and agriculture are analyzed. To the extent that other policies and strategies relevant for environment, gender and social inclusion, rural development, and health, may also have relevance for the promotion of agroecology and trade in agroecological products, these policies/strategies were identified and included in this critical review.

Continental Policies and Frameworks

The most significant trade policy at the continental level is the AfCFTA. Bringing together 55 countries of the African union and connecting 1.3 billion people into a single free trade area. According to the African Union's website, this free trade area has and a "combined GDP of approximately US\$ 3.4 trillion. The AfCFTA is one of the flagship projects of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, the African Union's long-term development strategy for transforming the continent into a global powerhouse."⁴⁵

The African Union asserts that:

the AfCFTA is to eliminate trade barriers and boost intra-Africa trade. In particular, it is to advance trade in value-added production across all service sectors of the African Economy. The AfCFTA will contribute to establishing regional value chains in Africa, enabling investment and job creation. The practical implementation of the AfCFTA has the potential to foster industrialisation, job creation, and investment, thus enhancing the competitiveness of Africa in the medium to long term.

45 African Union. About the AfCFTA. Available at <https://au-afcfta.org/about/>. Accessed 21 May 2025

What is the significance of the AfCFTA for agriculture, for Africa's food systems? It is anticipated that AfCFTA will strengthen Africa's agriculture and massively increase intra-African trade. The World Economic forum states: "increased intra-African trade through the AfCFTA will help reduce dependency on foreign agricultural inputs."⁴⁶

Indeed, in its present design and implementation, the AfCFTA advances a clearly defined orientation towards industrial agriculture. The signing of an MoU between Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and the AfCFTA Secretariat⁴⁷ to foster agri-food trade and agro-industrial development on the continent is a testimony to this skewed orientation.

Moreover, as currently structured, this policy does not intentionally support the trade of agroecological products. Given that AfCFTA is oriented towards industrial agriculture, it is unsurprising that there is no explicit support for agroecological produced foods. Yet, to the extent that AfCFTA promotes trade in agricultural products, especially value-added products and claims interest in reducing poverty and improving nutrition, there are opportunities, which can be used to promote trade in agroecological products.

At the continental level, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) has guided Africa's agricultural transformation since its adoption in 2003 in Maputo, Mozambique. The Maputo CAADP framework, the Malabo framework and most recently, the Kampala Post CAADP agenda have all sought to enhance agriculture led growth and food security. Under the CAADP strategy of 2026–2035, the African Union Member States commit to adopt nature-based solutions like sustainable land management and agroecology-based adaptation to create fundamentally different, more resilient, and inclusive agrifood systems⁴⁸. Furthermore, to strengthen the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices, the CAADP commits to leverage partnerships with nongovernmental organizations and research institutions to promote and support the adoption of conservation agriculture and the promotion of agroecological practices⁴⁹. It also commits to addressing rural development issues by promoting farmer-managed seed systems and climate-resilient indigenous seeds and emphasizing the circular economy within the CAADP process. Given the above, the CAADP can be seen to offer opportunities for expanding production and trade of agroecological products.

EAC Regional Policy Landscape : Examining the Linkage with Agroecology

With an estimated population of 305.3 million people, the EAC region offers a large market with immense potential for trade in agroecological products produced by Partner States. Intra-EAC total trade similarly grew by 13.1 percent to US \$12.1 billion in 2023, with the percentage share of intra-EAC trade to EAC total trade increasing to 15 percent⁵⁰. The agriculture sector contributes between 30 percent–34 percent of the region's GDP, with over 80 percent of the population living

46 World Economic Forum. (2023). <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/03/how-africa-s-free-trade-area-will-turbo-charge-the-continent-s-agriculture-industry/>. Accessed 21 May 2025

47 AGRA. (2024). Request For Proposal (RFP AGRA-GH-1007): Consultancy for Technical Assistance to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat Supporting the Implementation of Agri-Food Trade Under the AfCFTA; agragreen.sharepoint.com/sites/ORACLEADVERTISEDPROCUREMENTS/Shared Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FORACLEADVERTISEDPROCUREMENTS%2FShared Documents%2FGeneral%2FRFP%2FCaroline%2F2024%2FRFP AGRA-GH-1007%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FORACLEADVERTISEDPROCUREMENTS%2FShared Documents%2FGeneral%2FRFP%2FCaroline%2F2024&p=true&ga=1

48 African Union. (2024). CAADP Strategy and Action Plan: 2026–2035: Building Resilient Agri-Food Systems in Africa. Retrieved from African Union: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/44344-doc-3_EN_CAADP_Strategy_and_Action_Plan_-_2026-2035_September_15_2024_Final.pdf

49 Ibid

50 EAC . (2024). Background Paper for the Sectoral Council on Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment. Arusha: EAC Secretariat

in rural areas and depending on agriculture for their livelihood.⁵¹ Let us now examine some select policies and strategies at the regional level.

The East African Fruits and Vegetables Value Chain Strategy and Action Plan 2021–31 is an important regional level policy with importance for strengthening the cross-border trade of agroecological products.

This regional level strategy and action plan states that it is part of an initiative to implement objectives of the EAC Industrialization Policy and Strategy; the 5th EAC Development Strategy, and the EAC Agriculture and Food Security Strategy and Action Plan.

The strategy notes that the fruit and vegetable sector can play an important role in the economies of members of the EAC. Indeed, for this strategy, the fruit and vegetable sector, since it represents 20–36 percent of agriculture GDP, is a very important sector.

This strategy and action plan is relevant for agroecology and the trade in agroecological products. First, as the document itself highlights:

Opportunities abound in the F&V sector, particularly on the trade front. The EAC produces a wide range of F&Vs, which can be exported to regional and international markets. The volume of EAC trade in the global F&Vs market is estimated at around 1.28 million tons per year.

Put differently, markets for fruits and vegetables, fresh or in other forms, constitutes an opportunity for producers of agroecological products and agroecological entrepreneurs. Policies seeking to increase the trade of fruits and vegetables within the EAC represent clear opportunities for advocates of agroecology.

The East African Fruits and Vegetables Value Chain Strategy and Action Plan 2021–31 is also potentially beneficial to the cross-border trade in agroecological products because it provides “significant opportunities for processing and value addition, which can subsequently promote backward linkages – currently lacking.” If the trade in agroecological products is going to expand one of the important areas that must be strengthened is value addition. To the extent that this strategy and action plan enables processing and value addition, then it can be an enabler of cross-border trade of agroecological products.

The East African Fruits and Vegetables Value Chain Strategy and Action Plan 2021–31 is particularly useful from another perspective. The documents provides some critical information on consumption trends within the EAC and globally. It points out that fruits and vegetables are inherently high value products. The study also indicates that given the preference of fresh fruits and vegetables, there is an opportunity for value addition which is not complicated but addresses the fundamental challenges. The strategy advises the following: producers in the “EAC should, therefore, focus more on trading fresh or primary produce (cleaned, sorted and packed) fresh fruits and vegetables.”

In short, this strategy and action plan provides opportunities for advocates of agroecology and the trade of agroecological products.

51 WTO. (2019). EAC TRADE POLICY REVIEW, WT/TPR/S/384. Geneva: WTO Secretariat

Table 27 EAC policies that enable agroecology

Policies/Plans/Strategies	Relevance
The East African Fruits and Vegetables Value Chain Strategy and Action Plan 2021-31	There is no specific mention regarding the trade of agroecological products. However, the strategy and action plan states: “To be a regionally and internationally competitive fruits and vegetable industry, sustainably contributing to the socio-economic development and transformation of the EAC region, through increased exports, value addition and retention.” (p.43). The strategy also includes an objective very relevant for agroecology. The objective is to: “Promote production and consumption of indigenous fruits and vegetables.”
East African Community Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan (2019-2024)	This Plan does not offer any explicit opportunity regarding the trade of agroecological products. However, it is a relevant policy for agroecology. This plan aims to” “contribute to the elimination of hunger, malnutrition, and extreme poverty in the East African region by the year 2022.” (p. 2).

EAC Common External Tariff (CET) of 2022: Under the new CET, which came into force on 1st July 2022, EAC Partner States have adopted a four-band common external tariff with a minimum rate of 0 percent, medium rates of 10 percent, 25 percent, and a maximum rate of 35 percent in respect of all products imported into the EAC⁵². For example, all beef mutton, pork and chicken (fresh, chilled or frozen) as well as vegetables (beans, peas, potatoes, sweet potatoes), fruits (tomatoes, onions, bananas, papaws, watermelons, guavas, mangoes, avocados, pineapples, oranges), and cashew nuts and ground nuts have been put at a CET rate of 35 percent⁵³. Ideally, this protects these products from cheap (often non-agroecological products) agricultural imports and provides a market for them.

EAC Treaty: Under the EAC Treaty, Partner States commit to increasing their agricultural productivity and output to reduce hunger and poverty and to achieve food and nutrition security in the region⁵⁴. A careful read of the treaty reveals that, while it is not mentioned explicitly, there are some commendable tenets of agroecology. Indeed, under Chapter Eighteen (Agriculture and Food Security), there is an emphasis on cooperation in sustainable agriculture, seed distribution, water catchment management, and food security⁵⁵. The chapter includes provisions on environmental protection, disease control, and resource sustainability, all of which align with agroecological principles. To safeguard the domestic Agriculture sector, the EAC Partner States have adopted a Common External Tariff (CET), which imposes an average 20.7 percent import duty on animals and animal products, cereals, sugar, beverages, dairy products, fish products, fruits and vegetables⁵⁶. Some agricultural products are on a “sensitive list” and are subject to even higher import duties. Examples include maize (corn) flour, which has a CET rate of 50 percent, rice (75 percent), cheese (60 percent), buttermilk, cream, yogurt (60 percent), and milk at 60 percent⁵⁷.

EAC Sectoral Council on Agriculture and Food Security: This is a body made up of agriculture ministers which is responsible for all issues related to the sector. Furthermore, the EAC has developed several Agriculture policies and strategies including the EAC Food and Nutrition

52 EALA. (2022). EAC Customs Union: Common External Tariff 2022 Version- Legal Notice No. EAC/117/2022. Arusha: EALA

53 Ibid

54 WTO. (2019). EAC TRADE POLICY REVIEW, WT/TPR/S/384. Geneva: WTO Secretariat

55 EAC Secretariat. (2002). The Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community; https://www.eala.org/uploads/The_Treaty_for_the_Establishment_of_the_East_Africa_Community_2006_1999.pdf

56 WTO. (2019). EAC TRADE POLICY REVIEW, WT/TPR/S/384. Geneva: WTO Secretariat

57 Ibid

Security Policy; the EAC Food and Nutrition Security Strategy and Action Plan; the EAC Regional Strategy on Aflatoxin Prevention and Control; the Livestock Policy to enhance growth in livestock productivity and competitiveness; the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Protocol; and a total of 23 staple food standards⁵⁸. The EAC has also established two online systems (the regional Food Balance Sheet, and the Animal Resources Data Base), to facilitate information exchange and to support evidence-based decision-making about food stock availability and strategic investments in the livestock and fisheries sub-sectors.

The Common Market Protocol (CMP): Signed in 2009 and entered into force in 2010, the CMP identifies Areas of cooperation that favour agricultural trade across the EAC. The Protocol allows free movement of goods across the borders – from one country to another, which makes agroecological trade possible within the EAC. Article 5 outlines the advantages of the free movement of goods, persons, labour, services and capital and to ensure the enjoyment of the rights of establishment and residence of their nationals within the Community. Movement of persons and labour also allows people with expertise and resources of producing agroecological products to engage in these activities in any part of the EAC which favour production of the products. Associated with this protocol are several articles that ideally could promote the trade of agroecological products within the EAC. Such articles range from establishing the EAC common standards and Phyto and phytosanitary standards means the agroecological products are acceptable in any part of the EAC provided that their production complies with the established standards.

The Simplified Trade Regime (STR): An STR is a special arrangement that aims at simplifying and streamlining the documentation and procedures for the clearance of low-value consignments of small cross-border traders⁵⁹. The purpose of the STR is to facilitate small-scale cross-border trade by way of simplified clearance procedures (such as foregoing the requirement for a certificate of origin) for low-value consignments (for example, usually less than US\$2,000) on applicable products. The STR reduces costs for small traders and reduces the border crossing time using a simplified Certificate of Origin, a Simplified Customs Document (SCD), and simplified customs clearance procedures⁶⁰. All these are necessary ingredients to increase the thriving of territorial markets and agroecological enterprises. To support informal cross-border traders, the EAC Customs Union provided for an STR⁶¹ to make it easier and faster for small scale cross border traders with products that are grown or manufactured in the EAC (in other words, goods of East African origin) to trade with other EAC countries. A precondition for utilizing the STR is that all traders in all perishable crop-based products and veterinary based products (e.g. livestock, poultry and their products) are required to present their products for health and safety inspections at the border⁶². Nevertheless, there is flexibility to waive the requirement for documentation for traders in crop-based products who are trading under the Simplified Trade Regime⁶³.

58 Ibid

59 Luke, D. (2023). How Africa Trades. London: LSE Press. doi:10.31389/lsepress.hat

60 Ibid

61 EAC. (2021). EAC SIMPLIFIED GUIDE for MSMEs on Cross-Border Trade of Perishable Agricultural Goods; https://strapi.eacgermany.org/uploads/62cd15406373a361542459_d458a93278.pdf

62 Ibid

63 EAC. (2021). EAC SIMPLIFIED GUIDE for MSMEs on Cross-Border Trade of Perishable Agricultural Goods; https://strapi.eacgermany.org/uploads/62cd15406373a361542459_d458a93278.pdf

Table 28. Key issues related to Agroecological Trade in the EAC

Area	Issues related to Agroecological trade
Co-ordination of Trade Relations	The EAC has a mechanism for coordinating trade across the border. This allows coordinated movement of products, including agroecological products, ensuring that issues such quality standards and consumer protection standards are met and complied with during crossing the border. The coordinated trade relations ensure that partner states use common principles of tariff rates, the conclusion of tariff and trade agreements, the achievements of uniformity of measures of liberalization, export promotion strategies, and trade remedies
Co-ordination of transport policies	The flow of products, including agroecological products, from one country to another within the EAC is coordinated, which ensures that the products produced in one state get to their destination without unnecessary delays and interference by road traffic agencies. EAC Transport policies provide for coordinates logistics and transport by both road, rail, inland waterways, maritime, pipeline and air and facilities such as ports, airports and inland dry ports. This essentially facilitates smooth movement of agroecological products by alternative transportation means, which ensures that trade does not depend upon only one means but allows flexibility to ensure that traders are not bound to only one or two means of transporting their trade consignment. In general, the EAC CMP aligns all other agreements on the transportation of products across the EAC borders.
Environmental management	The production of AEPs is in favour of protection and preservation of environmental and natural ecology. The emphasis by the EAC to protect environment encourages production of AEPs which in turn may be traded across its borders freely.
Harmonization of social policies	One of the key yardsticks promoted by agroecological products is meeting social protection standards criteria such as protection of human and peoples' rights; ensuring equal access to opportunities and gender equality; protection of the rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups; and promotion of moral values, social values, and ethics. These issues are harmonized by the EAC-CMP, which makes cross-border trade in agroecological products ideal and quite lenient in the EAC.
Consumer protection	One of the major drivers of having agroecological products is the protection of life, health, and safety of consumers. AEPs are well-known to protect consumers health and life. Recognition of the need to protect consumers' health and life encourages cross-border trade as the demand of the product may be higher in one partner state than the other.
Co-operation in agriculture and food security	Agriculture is the sector that produces agroecological products. EAC-CMP encourages cooperation in Agriculture and food security by among others ensuring that production and productivity issues are promoted to ensure that supply of agroecological products meets the demand and excess can even be traded beyond the EAC, which boosts the EAC forex.
Protection of cross-border investments	This allows entities to invest anywhere in the EAC – the entity may put production assets in one country and processing ones in the other country within the EAC (e.g. production in Tanzania while processing in Kenya)

Concerning NTBs, the EAC Elimination of NTBs Act of 2017 potentially promotes trading in agroecological products by prohibiting Partner States from engaging in activities that (a) result in wastage of time or loss of business or market including, delays in clearing imports and lengthy testing and certification procedures; (b) leads to ban on market entry and loss of potential market; (c) amounts to a corrupt practice; and (d) restricts business transactions in the Partner State⁶⁴. Since the establishment of the EAC Regional Monitoring Committee (RMC) on the elimination of NTBs in 2007, 274 NTBs have been cumulatively resolved, while 10 NTBs remain at different levels of resolution⁶⁵. For example, as of May 2024, the ban on poultry and poultry products between Kenya and Tanzania was resolved, while the requirement by South Sudan that all food items imported into South Sudan must be accompanied by a Certificate of Conformity (CoC) was also resolved⁶⁶. Moreover, the recurring NTBs, like blockage of Uganda's eggs and milk by Kenya, the blockage of

64 EALA. (2017, October 27). Act Supplement No.1: THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY ELIMINATION OF NON-TARIFF BARRIERS ACT, 2017. Retrieved from East African Legislative Assembly (EALA): https://www.eala.org/uploads/EAC_Elimination_of_Non-Tar_Act_.pdf

65 EAC. (2024). EAC Trade And Investment Report 2023. Arusha: EAC Secretariat

66 Ibid

Tanzania's rice by Kenya, and the blocking of Rwanda's milk products by Tanzania are also being discussed by the Regional Monitoring Committee (RMC) on elimination of NTBs to devise measures for their elimination. Therefore, the NTBs Act can, if effectively implemented, act as an important tool to promote and facilitate agroecological products' trade in the EAC. There is also an ongoing revision to the EAC Customs Management Act (CMA) of 2004, which aims to streamline customs administration operations and procedures to align them with trade facilitation initiatives such as advanced ruling, duty remission schemes, exemption regimes, and export promotion measures. If such an initiative and infrastructure prioritized agroecological trade, it would provide increased intra-EAC trade in agroecological products. However, these initiatives are largely designed to promote conventional trade in the region.

National standards regulatory bodies in DRC, Uganda, and Kenya have put in place standards to regulate trading in agricultural products. These standards apply to both agroecological and conventional products, which value web actors should adhere to. For example, in Uganda, the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) has established comprehensive policies to guide trading in maize, including requirements for milled maize (corn) products (US EAS 44:2019), Outlines specifications for maize grains (US EAS 2:2017), and general requirements for the labelling of pre-packaged foods (US EAS 38:2014). In Kenya, the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) has established Milled maize (corn) products — Specification (KS EAS 44:2019) standards to guide maize trading within its territory. The same applies to several agricultural products. Compliance measures include maintaining the cleanliness of premises and equipment, preventing contamination from foreign matter, proper storage practices to avoid mould and aflatoxin contamination, and using acceptable pest control methods, among others. It is key to note that these strict standards often favour large-scale industrial producers, and the lack of awareness discourages small agroecological enterprises from trading under the standards regime. Besides, traders in conventional products who dominate cross-border trade prioritize profits over meeting these standards. This limits market access, discourages sustainable farming and reduces the competitiveness of agroecological products.

Overall, while the EAC policies and strategies promote regional trade, it also puts in place standards that exporters must comply with to trade. To conclude this review of the policy landscape at the EAC level, it is important to note that in 2024, the Committee on Agriculture, Tourism, and Natural Resources (ATNR) of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) signed a resolution officially recognizing agroecology as a strategic priority for formulating and recommending sustainable policies in agriculture and natural resource management across the EAC⁶⁷. While these can be interpreted as merely policies which are often left unimplemented, they also indicate that stakeholders at the regional level recognize the need to explore strategies that aim to prioritize transformation of the food system, so that it is more equitable and sustainable.

67 EALA. (2024, November 18). East African Legislative Assembly Signs a resolution with Food Agriculture Organization (FAO), Recognizing Agro-ecology as a Strategic Priority in the EAC. Retrieved from East African Legislative Assembly (EALA): <https://www.eala.org/media/view/east-african-legislative-assembly-signs-a-resolution-with-food-agriculture-organization-fao-recognizing-agro-ecology-as-a-strategic-priority-in-the-eac?s=09>

Box 1: Implementation of potentially pro-agroecological strategies

Region: East African Community

Policy/Strategy: Simplified Trade Regime (STR)

Objective:

To simplify and streamline the documentation and procedures for the clearance of low-value consignments of small cross-border traders

Outcomes:

- Reduction in time and costs associated with cross-border trade for small-scale traders with consignments equal to or less than USD 2,000 in value.

National Policies and Frameworks

Now that the African continental and the East African Community policy landscape have been reviewed, we turn to analyze national policies in the five EAC countries which are the focus of this study. We will examine policies in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. First, we present some of the key policies that promote industrial agriculture. Table X provides the policies and the key objectives. Subsequently, we examine policies that may offer some opportunities for the trade of agroecological products.

Table 29. Key Policies for national governments

Country	Policy	Objectives
Kenya	Kenya Vision 2030	Emphasizes transforming agriculture into a commercial enterprise through value addition and market access. Focuses on industrial production and export-oriented farming, often overlooking smallholder agroecological practices.
	Big Four Agenda – Food Security Pillar	Promotes large-scale food production and processing industries, emphasizing industrial agriculture over agroecological methods.
	Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS) 2019–2029	Prioritises industrial agriculture through large-scale value chains, mechanization, and private-sector investment. While a National Agroecology Strategy (2024–2033) exists, the dominant policy focus remains on industrial models, often marginalizing agroecological practices.
	Kenya Trade Policy (2017)	Aims to integrate Kenya into the global economy by promoting exports. Encourages standardized production systems favoring industrial agriculture, often at the expense of diverse agroecological methods.
	Seed and Plant Varieties Act (Cap 326)	Regulates the certification and distribution of seeds, favoring proprietary and hybrid varieties, which can marginalize traditional and indigenous seed systems.
	National Agricultural Research System (NARS)	Prioritizes research on high-yield crop varieties and modern farming methods, often overlooking traditional agroecological knowledge systems.
Uganda	Agro-Industrialization Programme under National Development Plan III	Emphasizes commodity-based clusters, processing infrastructure, and market integration, favoring industrial agriculture and value chains over agroecological methods.
	Uganda Investment Authority (UIA) Incentives	Provides incentives for large-scale agribusiness investments, often prioritizing monoculture and intensive farming systems, with minimal support for agroecological initiatives
	Uganda Genetic Engineering Regulatory Bill 2018	Promotes industrial agriculture by enabling widespread use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), favoring large-scale monocultures and corporate agribusiness. This undermines agroecology by sidelining traditional practices, biodiversity, and farmer-led, sustainable food systems
	National Food and Nutrition Strategy (2015)	Emphasizes increasing food production through modern farming techniques, with limited integration of agroecological approaches.

Tanzania	National Trade Policy (2023)	Focuses on enhancing Tanzania's export competitiveness by encouraging standardized production systems favoring industrial agriculture, with limited support for agroecological approaches.
	Agricultural Sector Development Programme II (ASDP II) 2017	Focuses on modernizing agriculture through mechanization, irrigation, and private investment, favoring industrial agriculture over agroecological practices.
Rwanda	Rwanda Trade Policy (2010)	Aims to integrate Rwanda into global markets by promoting exports, encouraging standardized production systems favoring industrial agriculture.
	Rwanda Development Board (RDB) Incentives	Provides incentives for large-scale agribusiness investments, often prioritizing monoculture and intensive farming systems, with minimal support for agroecological initiatives.
	Agro-Processing Industrial Master Plan (2014):	Focuses on enhancing value chains through mechanization and standardization, aligning with industrial agriculture models.
DRC	Agro-Industrial Parks Initiative	Launched to boost agricultural production, encourage private and foreign capital investments, and increase agricultural exports, often prioritizing monoculture and intensive farming systems, with minimal support for agroecological initiatives
	African Development Bank Country Strategy (2023–2028)	Supports the development of value chains in key agricultural sectors like cassava, maize, soya, and rice, focusing on industrial agriculture and value chains over agroecological method
EAC	EAC CAADP Compact (2017)	Promotes agricultural transformation through increased productivity, trade, and investment. Supported by organizations like AGRA, it emphasizes industrial agriculture.
	Protocol on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures (2013)	Implements strict SPS standards for exports, leading farmers to adopt chemical-intensive practices to meet requirements, thereby sidelining organic and agroecological methods.
	EAC Industrialization Policy (2012–2032)	Seeks to enhance industrial production and productivity, accelerating structural transformation. Its focus on growth and development of SMEs and integration into regional and global value chains may prioritize large-scale agricultural processing, potentially marginalizing agroecological practices.

The policies and plans detailed in the table above reveal that governments within the EAC are still prioritizing industrial agriculture. It is evident that with the concern to boost agricultural productivity, African governments continue to promote a model of agriculture based on the intensive use of fossil fuels. Yet, at the same time these governments are also developing some policies, which have the potential to support agroecology. We turn to look at some of the policies, particularly trade policies which may enable trade in agroecological products.

Kenya's National Policies and their relevance for the cross-border trade in agroecological products

Kenya has several policies and strategies related to agroecological trade. Kenya the National Agroecology for Food System Transformation Strategy for 2024–2033 was launched in 2024. The National Agroecology Strategy builds on several policies and strategies dealing with agriculture, sustainability, and trade to incorporate agroecological principles. The strategy's main goal is to promote a sustainable transformation of the food system in Kenya to ensure food security and nutrition, climate-resilient livelihoods, and social inclusion for all⁶⁸. From a trade perspective, the strategy aims at strengthening mechanisms for the production, distribution, and use of locally produced agroecological inputs, promoting the conservation and use of Indigenous/locally managed seed and livestock breeds, and promoting the consumption of Indigenous foods and protection of traditional food culture⁶⁹. Strategic area four of the strategy specifically targets

68 MoALD. (2024, November 28). National Agroecology Strategy for Food System Transformation 2024–2033. Retrieved from Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD): <https://kilimo.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/National-Agroecology-Strategy-for-Food-System-Transformation-2024-2033.pdf>

69 Ibid

agroecological products trade and aims at strengthening value addition, markets, and trade through (a) establishing and strengthening agroecology actors and actor associations to support the acquisition of inputs and the local and international marketing of products and services; and (b) promoting the use of agroecology foods and products in public and private institutions (schools, hospitals, correctional facilities), social protection and humanitarian relief programs⁷⁰. With more institutional coordination, engagement of farmers, agroecological and other actors in the value web, the passing and subsequent implementation of the Kenya agroecological strategy may provide good lessons for other EAC Partner States.

The constitution of Kenya also promotes agroecology through obligating the State to ensure sustainable exploitation, utilization management, and conservation of the environment and natural resources and ensure equitable sharing of the accruing benefits⁷¹. Finally, the Agricultural Policy of 2021 aims to protect and conserve biodiversity and promote the wise use of natural resources that support sustainable agriculture, all of which relate to agroecology. Although lacking in other agroecological principles like the co-creation of knowledge and the re-embedding of food systems in local economies⁷² the policy promotes several agroecological principles, including integrated soil fertility management, use of farmyard manure, water harvesting and conservation, crop diversification, management of farm-level biodiversity conservation, functional diversity, including farm forestry, economic diversification, and pasture management⁷³.

Table 30. Key policies related to agroecological trade in Kenya

Policy/strategy	Overall policy/strategy goals
National Agroecology Strategy for Food System Transformation 2024–2033	To guide Kenya's transition to sustainable and ecologically friendly farming and support organic agriculture, biodiversity, and farmer seed systems. Strategic area four of the strategy specifically targets agroecological products trade and aims at strengthening value addition, markets, and trade through (a) establishing and strengthening agroecology actors and actor associations to support the acquisition of inputs and the local and international marketing of products and services; and (b) promoting the use of agroecology foods and products in public and private institutions (schools, hospitals, correctional facilities), social protection and humanitarian relief programs
National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2011)	The policy can promote intra-EAC trade in agroecological products by supporting sustainable agricultural practices, food safety, and nutrition-sensitive value chains. It encourages diversification and value addition, which aligns with agroecological methods and boosts market competitiveness. The policy also promotes regional collaboration, harmonization of standards, and improved infrastructure, facilitating cross-border trade. By enhancing resilience and productivity through ecological approaches, the policy positions Kenya to contribute to and benefit from intra-EAC trade in safe, nutritious agroecological products.
Kenya Climate-Smart Agriculture Strategy (2017–2026)	Kenya's Climate-Smart Agriculture Strategy (2017–2026) fosters intra-EAC trade in agroecological products by promoting sustainable practices that enhance productivity and resilience. By integrating climate adaptation, mitigation, and food security, the strategy supports agroecological methods like agroforestry and conservation agriculture. It emphasizes harmonizing policies and building institutional frameworks, aligning EAC standards to facilitate cross-border trade. Investments in infrastructure, research, and capacity building further strengthen value chains, enabling smallholders to meet regional market demands. Collectively, these efforts position Kenya to contribute to and benefit from the regional trade of sustainable agricultural products

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Awiti, A. O., & Aurillia, N. M. (2024). Evaluating the Integration of Agroecological Principles into Kenya's Legal and Policy Framework. Montpellier: CGIAR System Organization. doi:10.17528/cifor-icraf/009198

⁷² Awiti, A. O., & Aurillia, N. M. (2024). Evaluating the Integration of Agroecological Principles into Kenya's Legal and Policy Framework. Montpellier: CGIAR System Organization. doi:10.17528/cifor-icraf/009198

⁷³ MoALD. (2021, December 12). Agriculture Policy-2021. Retrieved from Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives (MoALD): <https://kilimo.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Agricultural-Policy-2021.pdf>

National Agribusiness Strategy (2012)	The strategy can promote intra-EAC trade for agroecological products because it fosters value addition, improved post-harvest handling, and enhanced market infrastructure, aligning with regional trade standards. By supporting smallholder participation in agribusiness and encouraging sustainable practices, the strategy enhances the competitiveness of agroecological products. Its emphasis on public-private partnerships and institutional coordination facilitates harmonization with EAC trade protocols, thereby strengthening regional integration and expanding market access for Kenya's agroecological producers.
National E-Commerce Strategy (2022)	To promote digital trade and the integration of SMEs into e-commerce. The strategy focuses on cybersecurity, digital payments, and cross-border online trade. The strategy can promote intra-EAC trade in agroecological products by leveraging digital platforms to enhance market access and visibility for smallholder farmers. By fostering secure and inclusive e-commerce ecosystems, the strategy facilitates cross-border transactions and streamlines logistics, benefiting agroecological producers. The integration of mobile payment systems and digital trust frameworks reduces transaction costs and builds consumer confidence in sustainably produced goods. Furthermore, aligning with regional digital trade initiatives, the strategy supports harmonization of standards and regulatory frameworks, thereby easing the movement of agroecological products within the EAC.
Kenya Trade Policy	The policy can foster intra-EAC trade in agroecological products by promoting regional integration, harmonizing standards, and enhancing competitiveness. It emphasizes aligning national trade frameworks with EAC protocols, facilitating smoother cross-border movement of goods. The policy supports the development of infrastructure and trade facilitation measures, reducing non-tariff barriers that often hinder agroecological trade. By encouraging value addition and compliance with regional standards, the policy enhances the marketability of agroecological products. These strategic initiatives collectively create an enabling environment for the growth and sustainability of agroecological trade within the EAC.
Postharvest Management Strategy for Food Loss and Waste Reduction (2024–2028)	The strategy aims to reduce the estimated 30 percent of food lost or wasted along the supply chain. By enhancing postharvest handling, storage, and value addition, the strategy improves the quality and shelf life of agroecological products, making them more competitive in regional markets. It promotes harmonized standards and cross-border collaboration within the EAC, facilitating smoother trade. Through a multi-sectoral food systems approach, the strategy strengthens value chains, enabling agroecological producers to access broader markets and contribute to regional food security.
Agricultural Marketing Strategy (2023–2032)	The strategy can potentially promote intra-EAC trade in agroecological products, given that it aims at enhancing market access, value addition, and regional competitiveness. It emphasizes developing modern market infrastructure, improving transport logistics, and harmonizing product standards to facilitate cross-border trade. The strategy supports digital technologies and market intelligence systems to empower smallholder farmers with real-time information and direct market linkages. By fostering sustainable practices and aligning with EAC trade protocols, the strategy strengthens agroecological value chains, enabling Kenyan producers to access and compete effectively in regional markets.

From a policy perspective, what sets Kenya apart from other EAC countries regarding commitment by the State to promote Agroecology is that different counties have established (or are in the process to) county agroecology policies to fast-track the broader Kenya National Agroecology Strategy for Food System Transformation of 2024–2033. Moreover, some counties like Murang'a developed agroecological policies (in 2022) way before the national one was developed (recently adopted in 2024). (See Annex X for agroecological policies at the county level in Kenya. Currently, implementation of the strategy is ongoing.

Box 2: Implementation of potentially pro-agroecological strategies

Country: Kenya

Strategy: National Agroecology Strategy for Food System Transformation 2024–2033

Objective:

To guide Kenya's transition to sustainable and ecologically friendly farming and support organic agriculture, biodiversity, and farmer seed systems.

Outcomes:

- Established the Youth agri-preneurs Program which has engaged 9,450 youth across 1,335 wards to strengthen extension service⁷⁴.

Uganda's National Policies and their relevance for the cross-border trade in agroecological products

Uganda has put in place several policies to focus on value web activities from the farm level through marketing, distribution, and exports to regional markets. For example, the National Agroecology Strategy 2023/24–2028/29 is also at an advanced stage, with its launch and adoption slated for 2025⁷⁵. From a trade angle, the strategy seeks to revitalize local food systems and associated indigenous knowledge that advance agroecology and promote value addition and market access for sustainability of agroecological products and services through enhancing value addition on agroecological products to increase shelf life and market access and supporting the establishment of functional market infrastructure for agroecological products⁷⁶. One commendable feature about the strategy's desire to increase agroecological products trade is its commitment to scaling up physical markets for Agroecological products; establish a market information system for agroecological products; and promote market intelligence and market profiling⁷⁷.

The national agroecology strategy is complemented by the Uganda National Agriculture Policy of 2013, which seeks to attain household and national food and nutrition security through innovative and sustainable interventions linked to the country's long-term development agenda and targets⁷⁸. The policy explicitly recommends the promotion of Agroecology among other nature-based solutions as a way of achieving sustainability and resilience of food systems. As one of the implementation strategies, a national Agroecology Actors Platform with over 270 members from NGOs, the private sector, academia, and farmer organisations was launched in 2019 with a core mandate of facilitating multistakeholder dialogues, experience sharing, and synergies toward scaling up agroecology⁷⁹. From this platform, four regional (Eastern, Northern, Western, and Central) agroecology actors' platforms have been established with their steering committees and have successfully pushed for the ongoing development of a national strategy for scaling up Agroecology⁸⁰.

74 Kenya News Agency. (2025). Kenya on the right track in transforming its food systems; <https://www.kenyanews.go.ke/kenya-on-the-right-track-in-transforming-its-food-systems/>

75 Biovision. (2024). National Agroecology Strategies in Eastern and Southern Africa: Lighthouses for food system. Zurich: Biovision. Retrieved from <https://www.agroecology-pool.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/NAS-brief-web.pdf>

76 Ibid

77 Ibid

78 MAAIF. (2013). National Agriculture Policy. Entebbe: Uganda Printing and Publishing Corporation

79 Food Security Cluster. (2022, May 11). Scaling Up Agroecology: Experiences from Uganda. Presentation made at FSL Cluster meeting. Retrieved from Food Security Cluster: https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/agroecology_experiences_in_uganda_ssd_fsl_cluster_meeting.pdf

80 Ibid

There are also other policies which can be supportive of trading in agroecological products at national and regional level. These are highlighted in the Table 5 below:

Table 31. Key policies related to agroecological trade in Uganda

Policy	Relevance
National Agriculture Policy (NAP)	By enhancing sustainable agricultural productivity, value addition, and market access, the policy can potentially promote market access for agroecological products. It emphasizes the development of agro-processing and storage infrastructure to improve post-harvest management and facilitate marketing, all of which are vital for agroecological value web actors' participation in territorial markets. The policy also focuses on improving food handling, marketing, and distribution systems, linking producers to domestic, regional, and international markets. By promoting sustainable use and management of agricultural resources, including soils and water, NAP supports environmentally friendly farming practices aligned with agroecology. These strategies collectively create an enabling environment for the trade of sustainably produced agricultural products within the EAC.
National Organic Agriculture Policy (NOAP) of 2019	The policy aims at harnessing Uganda's organic agricultural potential by ensuring a regulated sub-sector that contributes to national development. It focuses on strengthening research, promoting education and training, enhancing production and processing, and developing markets for organic products. Linked to how it can promote agroecology, the policy commits to increasing the annual growth rate in Organic Agricultural products by more than 3.0 percent, reducing the degradation of the ecosystems, reducing the proportion of Organic agriculture-dependent people living below the absolute poverty line and food insecurity to more than 27 percent, and increasing public investment in Organic Agriculture subsector
National Trade Policy of 2007	Though it expired (expired in 2017) and thus requires review, the policy promotes intra-EAC trade by advancing regional integration, removing trade barriers, and fostering the competitiveness of locally produced goods. By supporting the harmonization of standards and mutual recognition of certifications, the policy enables agroecological producers to access regional markets more easily. The policy fosters infrastructure development, efficient trade logistics, and the use of ICT to streamline cross-border trade. By encouraging value addition and compliance with EAC trade protocols it enhances the visibility and competitiveness of agroecological products. These measures create an enabling environment for intra-EAC trade for Agroecological products.
Uganda MSMEs Policy of 2015	The Uganda MSME Policy promotes intra-EAC agroecological trade by enhancing value addition, market access, and regional trade integration for small businesses. It supports agro-processing, certification, and quality assurance—key to meeting EAC standards—while encouraging clustering and linkages between MSMEs and larger firms. The policy promotes participation in regional trade fairs and facilitates infrastructure like cross-border markets and business parks. It also prioritizes environmentally friendly production, aligning with agroecological principles. Through regional cooperation and harmonized standards, the policy empowers agroecological MSMEs to scale, formalize, and access EAC markets competitively, fostering inclusive, sustainable trade growth across East Africa.
National Grain Trade Policy of 2015	The policy promotes intra-EAC trade in grain by supporting harmonization of regional standards, reducing non-tariff barriers, and enhancing cross-border market access. It encourages quality assurance through certification aligned with EAC frameworks, enabling smallholder farmers to practice agroecology to meet regional market requirements. The policy also emphasizes infrastructure development and trade information systems to improve efficiency and transparency. Also, it aims to create opportunities across the entire value web, emphasizing the role of women in grain production. Through partnerships and institutional coordination, it strengthens value chains and promotes fair trade practices. These efforts can collectively facilitate the movement of safe, sustainably produced grains across borders, boosting regional integration and economic opportunities for agroecological producers within the EAC.
National Industrial Policy of 2020	The policy promotes intra-EAC trade in agroecological products by prioritizing agro-based value chains like fruits, grains, oil seeds, dairy, and leather. It emphasizes value addition, compliance with quality and environmental standards, and the development of agro-processing parks and industrial infrastructure. By aligning with the EAC Industrialization Strategy and supporting MSMEs through rural industrialization, skills development, and market linkages, the policy enhances Uganda's capacity to produce and export certified agroecological products. It also fosters regional integration through harmonized standards and infrastructure, making Uganda's agroecological industries more competitive within the EAC market
National Adaptation Plan for the Agricultural Sector of 2018	The plan can enhance intra-EAC trade in agroecological products by promoting climate-resilient, sustainable agriculture. It emphasizes climate-smart practices such as agroforestry and conservation agriculture, improving productivity and aligning with EAC sustainability goals. The plan supports the harmonization of standards and regional cooperation, facilitating cross-border trade. By strengthening value chains, building institutional capacity, and improving infrastructure, NAP-Ag enables agroecological producers to meet regional market demands, contributing to food security and economic integration within the EAC.

Box 3: Implementation of potentially pro-agroecological strategies

Country: Uganda

Policy/Strategy: National Organic Agriculture Policy and Implementation Plan⁸¹

Objectives:

To harness Uganda's Organic agricultural potential by ensuring a well-regulated and coordinated sub-sector that contributes to National Development

Outcomes:

- Increased certification of organic farmers (210,000) and 262,282 hectares under organic cultivation.
- Establishment of demonstration farms and community- based learning centers.
- Supported in-service training of agriculture extension agents to provide knowledge and skills in Organic Agriculture.

DRC's National Policies and their relevance for the cross-border trade in agroecological products

Sustainable Agricultural Policy (Politique Agricole Durable): Adopted in 2023, the policy seeks to transform agriculture from a subsistence-based sector into a competitive and sustainable engine for economic growth, rural development, and environmental protection⁸². The policy responds to key challenges, including high dependence on food imports; increasing vulnerability of rural populations; environmental degradation due to unsustainable practices, weak agricultural governance and coordination; and insufficient public and private investment⁸³. It envisions that by 2030, the DRC's agriculture sector should be competitive, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable, contributing significantly to food sovereignty, economic development, and climate resilience.

The policy contains commendable objectives which speak to agroecology principles, i.e., (i) Strengthen the resilience of farmers to climate change and economic shocks; (ii) Promote sustainable land and natural resource management; (iii) Improve food and nutritional security by supporting local production and reducing dependency on imports; (iv) Enhance agricultural governance through institutional reforms and stakeholder coordination; and (v) Promote decent employment and social equity, especially for youth and women. Furthermore, the strategic axes of the policy's intervention commit to promoting agroecology through encouraging agroecological practices, improving market access for smallholder farmers, promoting agroforestry and biodiversity conservation, and ensuring land tenure security, especially for vulnerable populations.

The National Strategic Development Plan (*Plan National Stratégique de Développement*) of 2019–2023 entails two pillars that promote agriculture and trade at national, regional and global level. The plan highlights agriculture as a pillar for inclusive economic transformation, with the sector's revitalization being central to reducing poverty and unemployment⁸⁴. Under Agriculture, the plan envisions transforming agriculture from subsistence to a productive, competitive, and market-oriented sector, emphasizing its high potential to generate mass employment and support inclusive growth. To achieve this aspiration, the plan puts in place three interventions i.e., development of agro-industries to add value locally and enhance food security; support to

81 MAAIF. (2020). Speech for the Launch of the National Organic Agriculture Policy and Implementation Plan; <https://eoai-africa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Minister-Speech-at-NOAP-Launch14311.pdf>

82 Ministère de la Communication et Médias. (2023). Compte Rendu de la Quatre-Vingt Septieme Reunion du Conseil des Ministres; https://www.cafi.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Adoption%20de%20la%20Politique%20Agricole%20Durable_RDC_02.2023_0.pdf

83 Ibid

84 DRC. (2019). Plan National Stratégique de Développement (PNSD) 2019–2023; https://climate-laws.org/documents/national-strategic-development-plan-pnsd-2019-2023_2afb?id=national-strategic-development-plan-pnsd-2019-2023_5df4

smallholders through access to quality inputs, credit, and agricultural services; and strengthening of value chains, especially for priority crops, to foster agro-industrial development⁸⁵.

Table 32. DRC's policies/plans/strategies relevant for cross-border trade in agroecological products

Policies/Plans/Strategies	Relevance
Sustainable Agricultural Policy (<i>Politique Agricole Durable</i>) of 2023	Guiding principles are crafted along agroecology principles i.e., Sustainability (Emphasizing long-term viability of natural resources and ecosystem services); Inclusivity (Ensuring equitable participation and benefits for all, especially marginalized groups); Resilience (Building capacity to adapt and recover from climatic and socio-economic shocks); and Decentralization and subsidiarity (Promoting local solutions and community-based governance). The policy also provides for six strategic Axes of Intervention, which can be leveraged to promote agroecology highlighted below: ▪ Modernization of Agricultural Production Systems: Improve access to seeds, fertilizers, and mechanization; Encourage agroecological practices; Develop irrigation systems and climate-smart agriculture. ▪ Development of Agricultural Value Chains and Markets: Strengthen rural infrastructure (roads, storage, cold chains); Promote value addition through agro processing; Improve market access for smallholder farmers. ▪ Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and the Environment: Combat soil degradation and deforestation; Promote agroforestry and biodiversity conservation; Align with climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. ▪ Agricultural Financing and Investment Promotion: Facilitate access to credit and insurance; Mobilize public-private partnerships (PPPs); Encourage investment in rural infrastructure and research. ▪ Strengthening Institutions and Agricultural Governance: Reform and strengthen relevant ministries and agencies; Enhance data collection and monitoring systems; Improve coordination across sectors and levels of government. ▪ Capacity Building and Social Inclusion: Train farmers, especially women and youth; Promote agricultural education and extension services.; Ensure land tenure security, especially for vulnerable populations.
National Strategic Development Plan/ Plan National Stratégique de Développement (PNSD) 2019–2023	The plan places emphasis on sustainable agriculture and climate resilience, including climate-smart practices to mitigate deforestation, land degradation, and water scarcity. A key intervention of this plan is to support to smallholder farmers through access to quality inputs, credit, and agricultural services. From a trade angle, the plan supports the territorial markets through the development of trade corridors and border infrastructure to enhance the flow of goods regionally and internationally, reduce spatial disparities and support trade-based regional development. It also places special focus on agricultural export development, particularly through improved logistics, quality certification, and market information systems. In terms of inclusivity, the plan focuses on gender mainstreaming in rural development projects to empower women farmers.

Box 4: Implementation of potentially pro-agroecological strategies

Country: Democratic Republic of Congo

Policy/Strategy: National Strategic Development Plan/ Plan National Stratégique de Développement of 2019–2023

Objectives:

MoU with the EU signed with one of the pillars on fostering the agroecological transition and creating the conditions for sustainable food sovereignty⁸⁶.

Outcomes:

- Supported the regeneration and conservation of biodiversity and agroecological systems in Garamba, Salonga, Upemba, Virunga and Yangam.
- Developed selected value chains such as wheat, maize, cassava, and coffee/plantain banana to create jobs, increase food production and security and expand export opportunities⁸⁷.

Rwanda's National Policies and their relevance for the cross-border trade in agroecological products.

The Rwanda Vision 2050 aims to realize “Economic Growth and Prosperity and High Quality of Life for Rwandans.” The agriculture sector is expected to contribute considerably to this vision. Currently, approximately 70 percent of Rwandans earn their livelihoods through agriculture. The vision is to transform agriculture, so that it becomes mostly market oriented, conducted by large scale professionalized farmers and overwhelmingly commercial, with less than 30 percent of Rwandans involved in agriculture. The vision is one where “modern” agriculture drives wealth creation. Does this vision creation opportunities for agroecological products? Neither agroecology nor agroecological products are recognized in this vision explicitly. The Rwanda Vision 2050 states:

Reflecting Rwandans’ rising income levels, the population will be eating better and more diversified diets of safer, processed and packaged foods, reflecting the shifting dietary preferences associated with income growth and urbanization. While today such products are mostly imported, by 2050 Rwanda’s domestic agri-food system will meet the modern dietary needs of the population. This will mean a shift away from staples to higher amounts of fruits, vegetables, and animal source proteins.

The stated desire for greater consumption of diverse foods including higher amounts of fruits and vegetables is potentially an opportunity for greater regional trade in agroecological products.

To get a deeper understanding of how Rwanda’s policy landscape may or may not support the trade in agroecological products, it is necessary to examine agricultural policy specifically.

The strategic plan for the transformation of agriculture, phase 5 (PSTA 5) is the most up-to-date policy document focused on Rwanda’s agriculture sector. The PSTA 5 serves as a “framework for implementing the National Strategy for Transformation (NST 2), ensuring direct alignment with the National Agriculture Policy and Rwanda’s Vision 2025.”⁸⁸ Unfortunately, this document does not recognize agroecology as an important factor in the quest for agricultural transformation. In fact, the word, “agroecology” does not appear anywhere in the entire document. There is mention

86 European Commission. (2024). Partnerships: Democratic Republic of Congo; https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/democratic-republic-congo_en

87 Ibid

88 See Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI). Fifth Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation: Building Resilient and Sustainable Agri-Food Systems (PSTA 5). Kigali-Rwanda, 2024. Available at www.minagri.gov.rw.

of “agroecology,” but this is in reference to ecological zones. Still, the question remains: does PSTA 5 offer opportunities for agroecology and agroecological products, even if there is no specific mention? In recognition of growing impact of climate change, the PSTA 5 seeks to promote conservation agriculture. This may be an entry point for advancing agroecology. Similarly, the concern for improving nutrition (stunting remains high in Rwanda at 34 percent) within the PSTA 5 offers another entry point for promoting agroecology and agroecological products. There is one strategic intervention of PSTA 5 that has clear relevance for agroecology: “Increase efficiency of agriculture inputs with soil testing and bio-fertilizers.” The reference to biofertilizers implies that there may be production and also potentially trade. The PSTA 5 theory of change sees linking farmers to “remunerative markets” as critical for unlocking the systematic blockages that farmers face. This potentially aligns with the growing focus among advocates of agroecology about the need to strengthen markets for agroecological products and the linkage of farmers to the same. If so, then, the attention given to linking farmers to remunerative markets may be an entry point for adherents of agroecology.

The National Agriculture Policy, 2018–2024 articulates a clear vision for the development of the agricultural sector. Of particular significance for agroecology and the promotion of trade in agroecological products in the intent of Rwanda to increase organic fertilizer production and utilization training.⁸⁹ If this leads to the increase in production of organic fertilizers it could increase the availability of “agroecological” products for cross border trading.

Although the Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture Phase four (PSTA 4) has been replaced with PSTA5, it is still worthwhile examining the former to identify if there were opportunities, which may have been present and to see the extent to which they remain present in new policies, even if not as explicitly articulated in more recent policy documents. In the Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation, Phase 4, there is emphasis on developing Integrated Soil Fertility Management. This includes research on bio-fertilizers such as organic fertilizers, enriched compost and vermicomposting.⁹⁰ This focus implies a concern for soil health, which aligns with principles agroecology. Moreover, research on these products and their production are inputs for organic agriculture. Such a development could be beneficial as it may enable trade in organic inputs within and across Rwanda’s borders. They could become products in regional cross-border trade.

Therefore, it is important to look specifically at policies concerned with cross border trade. The Rwanda: National Cross Border Trade Strategy 2012–2017 does not contain any objectives that are explicitly relevant for agroecology or organic products. To the extent, however, that these policies aim to reduce the cost of trade and to improve the competitiveness of Rwandan goods, then if implemented they could have positive implications for agroecological entrepreneurs and traders of agroecological products⁹¹. This policy is also cognizant that the majority of informal traders are women and that there is a need for the policy to be gender sensitive, and specifically oriented to benefit women traders.

It is also useful to examine Rwanda’s trade policies. The Rwanda Trade policy 2010 states that the country will explore the potential for the production and export of organic cotton, organic tea and coffee production.⁹² If this potential was explored, it may indicate an area of opportunity. It will be important to see if Rwanda’s trade policy has been updated.

89 See National Agriculture Policy, 2018–2024. Policy action 3 is specifically concerned with the increase in production of organic fertilizer.

90 PSTA 4 articulates a clear intent to strengthen the production of organic inputs. See p. 46; section 2.1.2.).

91 These are three of the four objectives of this strategy: (1) “Reducing the cost of trade to improve competitiveness of Rwandan goods in neighbouring markets, increase volumes exported and increase the profitability of trade;” (2) “Strengthen market linkages between producers, traders and markets in the informal and formal sector”; and (3) “Provide targeted financial and export support to producers and traders in the informal and formal sectors;” (See p. 42)

92 See section B on short-term measures.

The trade policy is supported by the Rwandan Trade strategy implementation plan. The Rwandan Trade strategy implementation plan indicates that it will “support development of Rwandan Organic Agriculture Trade, Strategy.” It also states that it will “cooperate with other East African countries to develop regional trade in organic products.” This suggests that there was/is some interest in supporting the development of Rwanda organic agriculture. It is not clear, however, the extent to which this focus on supporting organic agriculture remains. For example, there is no mention of this in PSTA 5.

The National Environment and Climate Change Policy 2019 does not seem to provide any support for the trade in agroecological products. First, the terms agroecological or organic do not appear anywhere in the document. This suggests that these concepts may not be integrated into the thinking process that led to the drafting of the document. That said, this policy includes policy statement 2: “Prevent and promote integrated pollution control and waste management.” Informed by this, there are thirteen policy actions. Two of them could be potentially of value. One policy action promotes “the use of economic incentives to manage waste”. Another policy action, “promote establishment of facilities and incentives for cleaner production, waste recovery, recycling and reuse (Reduce-Reuse-Recycle “3Rs”) countrywide.” It is possible that entrepreneurs interested in producing organic agroecological inputs could emerge to address this. However, it is fair to say that the climate policy does not create any explicit support for the trade in agroecological products within the EAC. The Revised National Export Strategy prepared by the Ministry of Trade does not include any specific objectives relating to agriculture and trade. It does, however, indicate that agricultural related trade is catered for in the Plan for Strategic Transformation of Agriculture (PSTA III).

Rwanda’s Private Sector Development Strategy 2013–18 is pending revision. Although it is not up to date, the Private Sector Development Strategy is relevant for the growth of trade in agroecological products within Rwanda and beyond. According to the strategy, there is a “growing regional market for food which provides Rwanda’s agriculture and processing sectors an opportunity to develop competitive value addition for exports as well as capturing the domestic market.”⁹³ The strategy is also concerned with supporting micro informal, and household traders and indicates that local government authorities should facilitate trade opportunities for micro informal traders. For example, restrictions imposed on informal traders could be relaxed.⁹⁴

⁹³ See the Private Sector Development Strategy p. 76.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 85.

Table 33. Rwanda's policies/plans/strategies relevant for cross-border trade in agroecological products

Policies/Plans/Strategies	Relevance
Rwanda Vision 2050	The Rwanda vision is built on agricultural modernization. There is no explicit articulation of opportunities for trade in agroecological products. It is possible, however, for the suggested intent for Rwanda to produce organic fertilizers (p.17) for EAC countries as an opportunity.
PSTA5 2024–2029	“PSTA5 is the first food systems and climate resilient centric strategy in our country, covering the period 2024–2029. It will support our initiatives to transform and modernize the agricultural sector in line with NST 2 and the Rwanda Vision 2050.” There is no specific mention of agroecology. However, there is a plan to support the development of a company producing “organic manure” from household waste as well as produce other organic fertilizers.
National Environment and Climate Change Policy 2019	There is no explicit support for the trade in agroecological products in this policy document.
National Agriculture Policy 2018	The National Agriculture Policy of 2018 includes a policy action (2.9) which is specifically focused on research on bio-fertilizers technologies and organic fertilizer use among farmers. This intended research on bio-fertilizers and organic fertilizers could be a potential entry point for agroecological producers creating or interested in trading relevant products.
Rwanda: National Cross Border Trade Strategy 2012–2017	In this policy, there is no objective that is explicitly relevant for agroecology or organic products. This policy is also cognizant that the majority of informal traders are women and that there is a need for the policy to be gender sensitive, and specifically oriented to benefit women traders. Still, three of the four objectives of this strategy, because of inclusion of informal traders and cognizance of needs of women producers and traders, may be potentially relevant for the promotion of agroecology.
Rwanda Trade policy 2010	In particular the Government will examine the potential for the production and exports of new and dynamically growth sectors in international trade. These can include in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors pyrethrum, organic cotton, organic tea and coffee production. Flowers, fruit, vegetables and herbal exports, hides and skins, and handicraft goods are among the new products with potential for value addition and diversification. (Section B Short Term measures)
Rwandan Trade strategy implementation plan (2017–2024)	The Rwandan Trade strategy implementation plan indicates that it will : “Support development of Rwandan Organic Agriculture Trade, Strategy.” “Cooperate with other East African countries to develop regional trade in organic products.” “Elaborate analytical study on creating growth poles for sustainable rural development by linking organic agriculture and decentralized renewable energy such as biogas.”
Revised National Export Strategy 2015	This policy does not have any relevance for the trade in agroecological products.
Rwanda Private Sector Development Strategy 2013–18	This may have provided opportunities for traders in agroecological products in the past. It is not clear if and to what extent opportunities may exist in the most recent version of this policy.

In sum, based on the selected Rwandan policies reviewed here, it is safe to say that there is no explicit support for the trade in agroecological products. Still, to the extent that there is support for cross border trade, especially small-scale cross border trade it is possible that this can be leveraged to support agroecological trade. From a policy perspective, it would be helpful if Rwanda, given the exhaustive evidence of the short terms gains (think production), but long-term problems (think unhealthy soils and soil acidification to name a few) of the industrial agriculture model, plan for a transition away from its dogged persistence of the Western model of industrial agricultural . Indeed, given the general policy coherence across the Rwandan policy landscape, a government pivot towards agroecology could be truly transformative.

Box 5: Implementation of potentially pro-agroecological strategies

Country: Rwanda

Policy/Strategy: Private Sector Development and Youth Employment Sector Strategic Plan (2024 – 2029)

Objectives:

Set to drive Rwanda's second National Strategy for Transformation (NST2), the plan's Agriculture pillar aims at attracting investments in the agriculture and agro-processing sector through flagship projects [such as High Value Trade Commodities (HVTG), Gabiro Phase II (Est: USD 100M), Kigali wholesale market development (Est: USD 51.6M), and Gako Beef (Est: USD 63M)]⁹⁵.

Outcomes:

While still in its early stage, the plan has supported the development of aggregation centres and common user facilities to support farmers and supply chain actors in export readiness and standards compliance.

Tanzania's National Policies and their relevance for the cross-border trade in agroecological products

Tanzania Policies

In this section select Tanzanian policies and strategies relevant for the trade in agroecological products are assessed. The objective is to identify what opportunities the policies and strategies may offer for advancing cross-border trade in agroecological products. We begin with The National Ecological Organic Agriculture Strategy (2023 – 2030) and will also review other key policies that address issues related to trade in agroecological products. These include: Agricultural policy 2013; Tanzania – National Trade Policy 2003 Edition 2023; Tanzania Development Vision (TDV) 2025; Agricultural Sector Development Programme, Phase II (ASDP II); and National Environment Policy (NEP) 2023.

The National Ecological Organic Agriculture Strategy (2023 – 2030) is:

designed to accelerate impacts from on going initiatives for sustainability, income generation and food security by providing a framework for government and private sector initiatives and supporting new actions and partnerships in line with Tanzania's priorities for agricultural transformation.

Before going any further, it is important to note that for the Tanzanian government “ecological agriculture” is understood as synonymous with agroecology, as stated in the definition provided in this policy document. “Ecological organic agriculture” is seen as a relatively newer term. The policy states:

*Ecological Organic Agriculture is a relatively new term which is used to describe a holistic system that considers a combination of more than one production entities (soil, water, air, sun) in an ecologically sound manner and promotes rational and sustainable use of inputs and conservation of environment.*⁹⁶

With this brief background, we can now pose two questions: (1) does this policy support agroecology?

⁹⁵ MINECOFIN. (2024). Private Sector Development and Youth Employment Sector Strategic Plan (PSDYE SSP 2024 – 2029); <https://www.minecofin.gov.rw/index.php?elD=dumpFile&t=f&f=113400&token=ac73623a70ff0c1ffc2ebab308908ff27e8c7567>

⁹⁶ It is important to note that the way agroecology is defined in this policy is problematic in that the definition seems to elide the social movement aspect of agroecology and restrict it to a set of agricultural practices.

And (2) does this policy support the cross-border trade in agroecological products within the EAC?

The first question can be addressed by examining the strategic objectives of the strategy. By 2030 the goals of the strategy includes the following⁹⁷:

i. Enhance capacity of institutions for research, training and extension systems in developing and disseminating appropriate EOA technologies and practices.

ii. Promote availability and accessibility of EOA inputs and appropriate farm machineries (tools, equipment and implements)

iii. Strengthen Information and Communication Technology (ICT) system to access and disseminate appropriate EOA information.

xii. Increase the business and trade volumes of EOA products in the national, regional and international markets.

The second question concerns the relevance of this policy for regional trade of agroecological products.

The policy expresses a clear intention to pursue regional trade. It states:

Parallel to work with third-party organic certification, and access to global markets for both small and larger organic producers, the NEOAS pursues the opportunities for market development for EOA (organic and agro ecological) products on local and regional markets.

When articulating the need for a multipronged market development strategy, the policy states the following objectives:

Support for the promotion of the East African Organic Standard and label for development of regional markets

- *Expand training and standards for EOA Participatory Guarantee Systems to increase access to affordable certification for smallholder organic and agro-ecological farmers selling on local and regional markets.*

This clearly indicates a concern to promote cross border sale of agroecological products.

⁹⁷ These objectives are from the National Ecological Organic Agriculture Strategy (2023 - 2030). See page 43.

Table 33. Tanzania's policies/plans/strategies relevant for cross-border trade in agroecological products

Policies/Plans/Strategies	Relevance
National Ecological Organic Agriculture Strategy (2023 – 2030)	This policy is very relevant for trade in agroecological products. Some of its key objectives include the following: • Ensure compliance of standards and certification of EOA products at affordable cost • Facilitate development of EOA value chains. • Facilitate development and use of irrigation infrastructure in EOA production systems • Enhance availability, accessibility and utilization of land for EOA. (see p. 43).
Tanzanian National Trade Policy 2003 (edition 2023)	Given this policy is concerned with fair trade and consumer protection it may be an opening for advocacy for agroecology. The document states the following as a policy objective: “Strengthen fair trade practices and consumer protection” (p.43)
Tanzania Development Vision (TDV) (2050)	TDV is a long-term vision (currently to 2050) that the Government of Tanzania issued to guide its development. The vision articulated in this policy document is that by 2050, Tanzanians will have created a substantially developed, people-centred, peaceful, stable, and united society with high-quality livelihood and high level of human development. All the 6 goals embodied in the TDV align with the principles of agroecological trade. The TDV's goal statements that are pro-agroecological cross-border trade include: • sustainable management of natural ecosystems and resources; • building resilience to climate change; • focus on and engagement of women, youth and people with disabilities; • balanced regional trade.
Agricultural Sector Development Programme, Phase II (ASDP II)	The Agriculture Sector Development Programme (ASDP) is one of the key instruments that the government of Tanzania uses to meet TDV 2025. One of the main priorities of the ASDP II is the commercialization of sustainable small-scale farmers production systems, which encourages sustainable use of the natural resources, use of sustainable agricultural such as crop rotation and use of organic residues to increase productivity while maintaining soil ecology. This focus may be consistent with some principles of agroecological production.

This review of select Tanzania policy asserts that there are some weaknesses that need to be addressed in policy and legal frameworks.

Despite statements within the policy instruments which align with features of agroecological trade across-the border, the policies do not clearly discuss how conflicting objectives related to the promotion of agroecology, on one hand, and increasing the commercialization of agriculture, which often entails increased use of industrial farm inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides, on the other hand, will be addressed.

Non-citizen ownership of land is a somewhat contentious issue. Some stakeholders view the land tenure regime in Tanzania as discriminatory as non-citizens are not allowed to own land as a production asset, except through the TIC, which provides for short-term occupancy. It is therefore recommended that EAC should continue engaging with the GOT to review policy and legislative framework behind the land law reforms.

Generally, the policies do not have clear statement that link local policy issues with regional agreements and common protocols. For example, can EAC citizens equitably utilize Tanzania land to promote agroecological products. This calls for EAC member states to discuss how issues of land can be harmonized withing the region to facilitate agroecological production.

Box 6: Implementation of potentially pro-agroecological strategies

Country: Tanzania

Policy: National Ecological Organic

Objective: To accelerate development and mainstream ecological organic agriculture subsector into existing national frameworks for agricultural sector development in order to enhance sustainable environmental conservation for improved health, income and food security by 2030

Outcomes

- Increased its agricultural budget dedicated to organic farming by fivefold compared to three years ago. This substantial investment has facilitated the growth of the organic sector, enabling farmers to adopt sustainable practices that avoid synthetic chemicals and embrace agroecological methods.
- Initiated efforts to build capacity among farmers, extension officers, and other stakeholders through training and awareness programs. These initiatives aim to promote the adoption of organic farming practices and increase the production and productivity of organic foods.

Policy Analysis Conclusion

This review of the policy landscape from AfCFTA and the EAC to select policies from Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda illuminate the context in which cross border trade in agroecological products take place. It is evident that there is an absence of explicitly agroecological oriented policies in Rwanda and Tanzania. Recently, and more positively, Kenya and Uganda have developed or are in the process of developing national agroecological strategies. For there to be increased trade in agroecological products, it is imperative that the policy landscape become more extensive and supportive. For instance, the development of agroecological policies in Rwanda and Tanzania would be welcome. What is truly necessary, however, is not merely the presence of policy. There is need for policy coherence so that agroecology policies are not contradicted by policies promoting industrial agriculture. It is critical that policies across various sectors, for example, Agriculture, Health and Trade, share key objectives and are synergistic.

Also evident in many of these policies, except for those articulating agroecology, is the overwhelming bias towards industrial agriculture. Although EAC partner states sometimes refer to agroecology and food sovereignty (and this does not necessarily exclude countries with agroecological strategies), they often draft policies and strategies rooted in a technology-oriented Green Revolution production model. Current continental and national economic policies, agreements, and initiatives are consolidating corporate power in agriculture with few safeguard measures to protect and promote the rights of smallholder farmers. This one-size-fits-all industrial model of agriculture is being pursued at the expense of small-scale farmers who produce 70 percent of Africa's food. This has disrupted agroecology and farmer managed seed systems (FMSS) because agricultural modernization displaces landraces by so-called improved varieties, and seed commercialization has led to genetic erosion⁹⁸. This is exacerbated by initiatives at the continental level, which are largely geared to conventional agriculture and trade. Indeed, initiatives like the APET and the AfCFTA's MoU with AGRA all mirror the flawed logic that it is only through industrial-led agriculture that Africa will achieve food security and increase intra-Africa food trade while adapting to climate change.

It is striking that policies promoting organic production is not necessarily beneficial to trade in agroecological products. Technically, organic farming should be a subset of agroecology. Its founding principles include an ethic of care that is inclusive of people, non-human life and the

98 Westengen, O. T., Dalle, S. P., & Mulesa, T. H. (2023, March 27). Navigating toward resilient and inclusive seed systems. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2218777120>

broader environment. However, when organic farming, focuses primarily on input substitution—eliminating synthetic chemicals and fertilizers—then it fails to be truly transformative. Unlike agroecology which encompasses the entire food system and is attentive to the broader socio-economic, cultural, and ecological principles, organic production models seem to limit themselves to production. Driven by the need to generate revenue, governments, and they are often encouraged by some “development” partners, seek to increase the production and export of organic products. Thus, governments may develop regulatory frameworks and market incentives that prioritize certification-based organic standards. For instance, some existing agricultural policies in Uganda and Kenya emphasize organic farming and favour certified organic producers. These, however, often exclude smallholder farmers practicing agroecology who may not have the financial means or institutional support to obtain costly organic certification. When governments fail to embrace agroecology, they limit the extent to which national food systems can be equitable, just, sustainable and resilient.

Still, the policies have spaces which can be strategically engaged to support cross border trade of agroecological products within the EAC. Where policies indicate an interest of increasing trade, it is an opportunity. If policies support micro, small and medium scale enterprises, then the policy may have positive potential for agroecological traders. Agriculture policies concerned with value addition can be an opening for agroecological entrepreneurs. Where climate change policies promote resilience, it is an opportunity to grow the webs of solidarity and mutuality that often underpin territorial markets and agroecological businesses.

What happens, however, when NTBs are not eliminated? What are the implications of this for the trade in agroecological products? This final section of the chapter provides some insights.

Implications of Tariffs and Non-Tariff Barriers on the trade of Agroecological Products within the EAC

It is well established in trade literature that tariffs and non-tariff barriers impact trade. Generally, these are seen as deleterious to trade. In this section the focus is understanding how tariffs and NTBs impact the cross-border trade in agroecological products across the EAC. Put differently, we seek to understand how and to what extent tariffs and NTBs are impacting the trade of agroecological products.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) notes that high tariffs result in 30 percent to 40 percent higher food prices in Africa south of the equator compared to the rest of the world⁹⁹. High taxes imposed by local governments and the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) in territorial markets like Busia and Mpondwe significantly impact cross-border traders and agroecological entrepreneurs. These effects manifest in increased cost of doing business, reduced competitiveness, and barriers to market access. Cross-border traders, particularly those dealing in agroecological produce, often operate on thin profit margins.

Field findings revealed that excessive taxation on agricultural goods, including produce inspection fees, import duties, and local government levies, discourages trade by reducing profitability. On both Busia and Mpondwe, findings revealed the application of several fees imposed by Plant Health, Standards Bodies, Phytosanitary, Counterfeit, Biosafety, Port Health, and Agriculture Food Authorities to ease trading in cereals and horticultural products under the EAC Simplified Trade

99 Peter, L. (2021, December 4). Can the AfCFTA bring about Food Security in Africa? Retrieved from African Liberty: <https://www.african-liberty.org/2021/12/04/can-the-afcfta-bring-about-food-security-in-africa/>

Regime (STR). For example, for the export of 2–5 tons of cereals between Uganda and Kenya, traders must navigate seven different trade facilitation agencies at the border, with inspection fees and testing charges totaling approximately Kenyan Shillings. 20,000 (USD 200), which is around 10 percent of the consignment value¹⁰⁰. Women and youth traders from Uganda raised concerns about Kenya's excise duty on eggs, which has rendered them uncompetitive, halting the exports of eggs. Furthermore, Tanzania levied almost 30 percent of the free on Board (FOB) price of milk (which includes a livestock Levy of Tanzanian Shillings. 1,000 per litre of milk), making Uganda's milk very expensive¹⁰¹.

As a result, some agroecological traders have resorted to informal trade routes to evade taxes, exposing them to risks such as confiscation of goods and harassment by border officials. Agroecological entrepreneurs promoting sustainable farming face added costs from compliance with tax obligations. Unlike conventional agricultural products, agroecological produce often incurs certification costs and adheres to organic standards, making it already relatively expensive¹⁰². High border taxes further inflate prices, reducing consumer demand and making it difficult to compete with non-organic imports. Finally, in Busia and Mpondwe, traders struggle with multiple taxation layers, including municipal fees, border clearance charges, and URA levies¹⁰³. This fragmentation stifles trade growth and discourages agroecological entrepreneurs' (especially the informal and small ones) from participating in cross-border trade.

High tariffs and Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) continue to negatively impact intra-African trade. For example, while Tanzania is a big exporter of both agroecological and conventional agricultural products within Africa, (e.g., in 2022, the country exported maize worth \$999 million, vegetables worth \$1.01 billion, fruits worth \$71.4 million, and fish and fish products worth \$800 million)¹⁰⁴ prevalent NTBs on its maize exports often imposed by countries like Kenya and Zambia limit access to maize and maize products. For example, in Mpondwe and Busia, interviews with stakeholders revealed that agroecological traders face significant challenges due to inadequate storage facilities for perishable products like fruits, vegetables, fresh grains, and pulses. This deficiency, together with a lack of agroecologically tailored common-user facilities, forces farmers to sell their produce immediately after harvest, often at lower prices, to prevent spoilage. The absence of proper storage hampers their ability to engage in collective marketing and negotiate better terms, leading to diminished incomes. While initiatives such as the construction of community grain stores have been implemented, they are largely tailored for large-scale conventional traders rather than the often-small-scale agroecological traders. The absence of such facilities in Mpondwe and Busia underscores the need for targeted interventions to support agroecological traders in these border towns.

Additionally, sanitary and phytosanitary standards (SPS) certification presents significant challenges for agroecological entrepreneurs trading across the Mpondwe and Busia border posts. Both the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) and the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) enforce strict compliance, which can be particularly burdensome for small-scale traders.

100 EABC. (2024, December 5). WOMEN AND YOUTH CROSS-BORDER TRADERS URGE EAC GOVERNMENTS TO ELIMINATE FEES AND CHARGES TO IMPROVE UPTAKE OF EAC SIMPLIFIED TRADE REGIME AT BUSIA BORDER. Retrieved from East African Business Council (EABC): <https://eabc-online.com/women-and-youth-cross-border-traders-urge-eac-governments-to-eliminate-fees-and-charges-to-improve-uptake-of-eac-simplified-trade-regime-at-busia-border/#:~:text=Key%20Kenyan%20exports%20to%20Uganda,myco-toxin%20contamination%20and%20>

101 MoFPED. (2024, December 31). THE NATIONAL BUDGET FRAMEWORK PAPER FY 2025/26 – FY 2029/30. Retrieved from Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED): <https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/2025-01/National%20Budget%20Framework%20Paper%20FY%202025-26.pdf>

102 FAO. (2022). Organic Trade and Market Access in Africa. Rome: FAO

103 Oketch, M. L. (2023, December 13). Complaints about NTB still stands at 43.75% in the regional bloc-EAC. Retrieved from Daily Monitor: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/business/markets/complaints-about-ntb-stands-43-75-regional-bloc-eac-4462640>

104 Christopher, J. (2023, March 19). Tanzania among top food exporters in Africa, says BOT. Retrieved from The CITIZEN: <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/tanzania-among-top-food-exporters-in-africa-says-bot-4163674>

Ugandan respondents revealed that obtaining organic certification through Uganda Organic Certification Ltd (UgoCert) involves costs starting from approximately one million Ugandan Shillings (about \$270) per commodity annually, with additional expenses for inspection, evaluation, and transport¹⁰⁵. Similarly, AfriCert, operating in multiple East African countries including Kenya and Uganda, charges daily inspection fees of \$250, with pesticide residue analysis costing \$140 per sample¹⁰⁶. In Kenya, KEBS requires imported agricultural products to comply with established SPS measures, which often necessitate multiple laboratory tests. While specific testing fees vary depending on the product and number of tests, KEBS indicates that charges are determined by these factors. Additionally, consular fees for issuing a Certificate of Conformity amount to \$34.09 per shipment, irrespective of the size or value of the products¹⁰⁷. For agroecological traders trading across the border, findings revealed that the financial burden of these certifications is prohibitive and reduces their competitiveness compared to larger agribusinesses that benefit from economies of scale. Furthermore, the lengthy approval processes at border points can lead to delays, resulting in post-harvest losses, particularly for perishable goods like fresh vegetables and herbs.

Multiple permits and complex documentation requirements significantly hinder agroecological traders from accessing markets across East African borders. Traders face extensive paperwork, including permits from KEBS, UNBS, KEPHIS, and the EAC Trade Permit Certificate, which are tedious, costly, and short-term, making compliance difficult. Many agroecological traders struggle with registration and value addition procedures, as they lack formal knowledge about processing documents. Additionally, network failures at customs, missing supportive documents of origin, and unclear tax requirements further delay clearance. To legally operate, traders must have all necessary documents, including permits, insurance, and trading licenses, to avoid arrests by border officials. Despite compliance with COMESA and URA cross-border assessments, these burdensome regulations act as non-tariff barriers (NTBs), limiting seamless agroecological trade.

Poor postharvest handling practices along the value web have affected cereals (e.g., maize, beans, groundnuts, and simsim/sesame) exports from Uganda to DRC and Kenya, given the high level of aflatoxins that are sometimes present in the products. Whereas agricultural commodities (both agroecological and conventional) account for about 65 percent of intra-regional trade in the EAC, it is estimated that losses associated with Aflatoxin contamination in Africa have escalated to US\$670 million annually¹⁰⁸. Interviews with farmers and agroecological entrepreneurs revealed that instead of building the capacity of value web actors on post-harvest handling, government programs in Kenya and Uganda have largely focused on restricting trade in aflatoxin-infested products, hence limiting participation in intra-EAC trade. For example, in Kenya, 650 County Public Health officers (CoPHOs) have been trained on aflatoxin screening in cereals and pulses from 24 counties (including Busia), and mini laboratories have been established in 18 counties, including at the Busia border post¹⁰⁹. In Uganda, interviews revealed that apart from private laboratories, only the Uganda National Bureau of Statistics (UNBS) Lab has been equipped and accredited to test for aflatoxin with the services decentralized to the regions.

Agroecological entrepreneurs engaged in cross-border trade at Busia, Mpodwe, Namanga-Tarakea and Rusumo also face the challenge of limited awareness, operationalization, and

105 ESAFF. (2021). Guidelines For Organic Certification of Individuals, Farms, and Businesses Producing Organic Agricultural Products. Kampala: Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF).

106 AfriCert. (2024, January 10). Organic Fee Schedule 2024. Retrieved from AfriCert: <https://africertlimited.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/ORGANIC-FEE-SCHEDULE.2024.pdf>

107 Yvea. (2025, January 10). Certification of conformity for Kenya. Retrieved from Yvea: https://www.yvea.io/en/services/certifications-goods/certification-of-conformity-kenya?utm_source=chatgpt.com

108 EAC. (2023, October 24). Limited knowledge and lack of access to appropriate technologies inhibiting aflatoxin prevention and control in East Africa. Retrieved from EAC: <https://www.eac.int/press-releases/141-agriculture-food-security/2888-limit-ed-knowledge-and-lack-of-access-to-appropriate-technologies-inhibiting-aflatoxin-prevention-and-control-in-east-africa>

109 Ibid

domestication of the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) policy's provisions for small-scale cross-border traders and government agencies. While the EAC provides for an STR, interviews revealed that agroecological enterprises in border territorial markets of Mpondwe, Busia, and Namanga-Tarakea are prone to multiple taxes, charges, and fees mainly because the rules and regulations of the STR are not followed. For example, the traders at Mpondwe border crossings still pay taxes on agricultural products like plantain (gonja) and edible palm oil (huile rouge) despite such products being on the common list for products with preferential treatment, while at Busia border post, traders still incur charges to obtain the Simplified Certificate of Origin, which goes against the purpose of the STR. Moreover, the Trade Information Desk Officers (TIDOs) whom the STR introduced to render the traders the necessary help have, sometimes, not been respected by other border agency officials such as those from the Kenya and Uganda revenue authorities, as pointed out in the dialogues with stakeholders at Busia and Mpondwe border points. These challenges have promoted the increased use of non-regulated border crossing points (*panya roads*) and limited agroecological enterprises' capacity to maximize the trade opportunities that territorial markets offer.

The high transport costs resulting from poor feeder roads in Mpondwe and Busia significantly hinder agroecological trade, limiting smallholder farmers' ability to access markets efficiently. Climate change-induced erratic rainfall patterns exacerbate these challenges by either damaging already weak road infrastructure or making roads impassable during heavy rains. In Mpondwe, where most farm roads are feeder roads, interviews revealed that transporting agroecological produce becomes costly, reducing farmers' profitability. Since agroecological products are typically fresh and perishable, delays caused by poor road conditions, coupled with poor storage facilities like mobile refrigerator vans, lead to post-harvest losses, further diminishing returns. Similarly, in Busia, small-scale agroecological farmers and traders face increased transportation expenses due to deteriorating rural roads. The lack of reliable and affordable transport means that traders must rely on middlemen who dictate lower farm-gate prices to compensate for high logistical costs. This reduces farmers' bargaining power and discourages engagement in agroecological farming, as conventional traders with better access to transport and storage facilities have a competitive advantage. Ultimately, poor transport infrastructure inflates the cost of agroecological trade, making it less viable for smallholder farmers. Addressing these challenges requires investment in road maintenance, climate-resilient transport networks, and cooperative-led transport solutions to enhance market access and support agroecological trade in Mpondwe, Busia, Namanga-Tarakea and Rusumo.

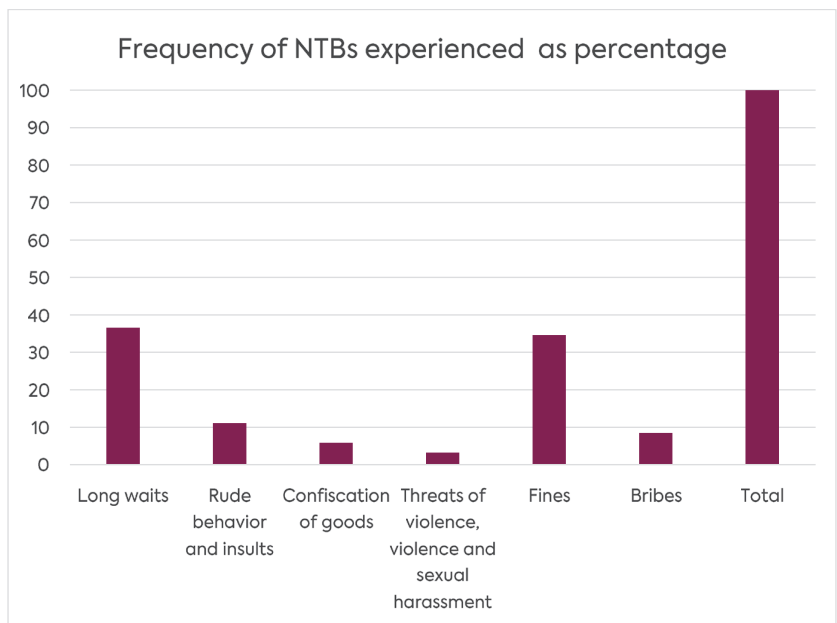
Currency exchange challenges significantly impact agroecological traders' participation in cross-border trade. At key trading points like Mpondwe and Busia, traders face high exchange rates, which reduce their profit margins and make pricing unstable. Since the Ugandan shilling holds lower value compared to other regional currencies, Kenyan and Tanzanian suppliers often demand payments in stronger currencies, making transactions expensive for Ugandan traders. Unlike large-scale traders who hedge against currency fluctuations, small agroecological entrepreneurs lack financial buffers, forcing them to sell at lower prices or absorb losses. This discourages participation in cross-border trade, limiting their ability to scale businesses and invest in value addition. To support agroecological trade, policymakers should consider regional currency harmonization, fair exchange rate mechanisms, and mobile money innovations to ease transactions. Without such interventions, currency exchange issues will continue undermining agroecological trade growth and discouraging smallholder participation in regional markets.

To better understand what types of NTBs traders experienced, the survey tool administered to traders included the following question: ***What type of challenges do you face when conducting cross border trade in agroecological products?*** Respondents were asked to select all that are

appropriate.

The findings revealed that the majority of respondents identified “long waits” at the border as the primary challenge. That is, 37 percent of response indicated “long waits” was the major inhibitor to their trading activities. This was closely followed by “fines,” which was identified by 35 percent of respondents. The third most identified challenge reported by traders was “rude behavior and insults.” This was identified by 11 percent of respondents. The challenge with the fourth highest frequency as identified by respondents is “bribes.” Eight percent of respondents identified this challenge. The “confiscation of goods” has the second lowest frequency (six percent) as a challenge, while the least identified challenge (three percent) was “the threat of violence, violence and sexual harassment”.

Figure 1. Traders experience with NTBs



The findings from the survey indicate that the top three challenges experienced by respondents are long waits, fines, and rude behaviour and insults. These findings are confirmed by the key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Let us turn now to the perspectives of a respondent.

A trader at the Rusumo border articulated his challenges with non-tariff barriers to trade. When asked about the barriers he experienced, the most troublesome one identified was the multiple local government barriers.

The trader explained that each district demands payment when a truck passes through their district to get to the border. Therefore, if a trader must drive through five districts to reach the border at Rusumo he will pay five different districts a fee, as each district has the “right” to generate revenue from the trader’s passage through their jurisdiction.¹¹⁰

Having to pay multiple districts fees while passing through them to get to the border is compounded by the issue of inadequate roads. For this trader, another impediment to change is the dearth of quality rural road infrastructure. We [traders] need roads for moving of goods so [that] transportation is also good.”

Another NTB identified by this trader revolves around phytosanitary services. The trader explains that in order to take his products across the border he is required to satisfy specific phytosanitary standards. Unfortunately, the laboratory services required are not available at the border. The far distance he is required to travel to access these phytosanitary services, then, delays delivery of his

110 Researchers personal interview with trader at Rusumo border in March 2025.

consignment.

A final challenge to trade articulated by this trade has to do with taxes. For him, when the level of taxation changes constantly it creates challenges for traders. His advice for the government is precise: “Government official should do research before implementing taxes or anything that will affect our business.”¹¹¹ This is important also because price variability also has serious consequences for traders. For the respondent, the government “stabilizing prices for three to five months so that traders know what to expect would be very good.”

This section of the chapter has revealed the impact of NTBs on trade whether one trades in agroecological products or not, it is clear that NTBs continues to impede trade. Given that agroecological products have more stringent demands for certification than conventional products, it is likely that NTBs are more negative for the former than the latter.

This chapter has provided an analysis of the policy landscape in which agroecological products are being traded. The policy analysis began at the continental, looking specifically at the AfCFTA, moved to the regional level of the East African Community and then explored policies/strategies of the five countries, which were part of this study. It is evident from the analysis that at every level of governance there are obstacles to the promotion of trade in agroecological products. These obstacles are largely linked to a general bias towards industrial agriculture. Nonetheless, the analysis has also detailed the extant opportunities in support of agroecology and the trade in agroecological products. A very promising development has been the emergence of explicitly agroecological policies or strategies in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Also promising, for example, is Rwanda’s Cross Border Trade Strategy. In short, the policy landscape does not yet favour the trade in agroecological products. This is partly because there are still challenges with the implementation of policies which would harmonize trade within the region. As governments across the EAC provide more support for product transformation, offer price premiums for agroecological products and provide and/or enable the provision of appropriate marketing and other services, the policy landscape will become progressively more supportive of trade in agroecological products with the East African Community.

Case Study: Plant Biodefenders and the production and distribution of organic products

Plant Biodefenders was founded in 2019 and registered officially as a company in 2020. Currently, they have 12 permanent staff and three part-time workers.

What led to the creation of this business focused on the production of bio-inputs for agriculture? The founder and CEO of Plant Biodefenders, Dr. Never Mwambela explains:

“The impact of chemical in our foods... you are a scientist, and you are a mother. You are cooking, so one of the most challenging things is the smell of chemical in tomatoes whenever you cook... it is a danger to me and your kids... no one is caring about what is being sprayed on our food. This was the main drive for me to start.”

What products does Plant Biodefenders offer?

The company currently offers four products: a biopesticide, a bio fertilizer, a vector biocide and herbal teas. The first three products have considerable demand within Tanzania. Table 1. below reveals the sales of these products within Tanzania and the targets for 2025.

Table 1.

Products	2024	2025 Sales Target
Biopesticides	35,000 L	50,000
Bio Fertilizers	1,000 L (under trial)	12,000
Vector biocide	5,000 L	10,000

These bio-inputs produced by Plant Biodefenders are an example of an agroecological product. How much of these products are involved in the cross-border trade within the EAC? Plant Biodefender's bio-inputs are being traded with Tanzania's neighbouring countries: Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda. The table below reveals the quantity of these products that were sold across the East Africa border to neighboring countries. Evidently, Kenya is the largest purchaser of these products as it bought 100 litres of the biopesticide in 2024 compared to the 63 litres and 40 litres respectively purchased by Uganda and Rwanda.

Table 2.

Products	Kenya	Rwanda	Uganda
Biopesticides	100L	40L	63L
Bio Fertilizers	120 L	12 L	---
Vector biocide	93 L	25 L	150 L

Who are using these products?

There are hundreds of farmers across Tanzania using Plant Biodefender's products. Currently, Plant Biodefenders is working with three companies that produce organic cotton for export to Germany, Japan and Switzerland. These three companies are: REMEI (Biore), AFRISIA and ALLIANCE. In total they work with about 7000 farmers who grow organic cotton. The cotton exported to Europe by these countries have never been rejected for failure to satisfy organic standards. Similarly, the coffee company, Kilimanjaro Plantation, uses the vector biocide to control termites on its farms. This coffee is exported to Germany as organic coffee and has consistently satisfied organic certification.

What are the challenges to doing more cross border trade?

Transportation is one of the biggest challenges faced by Plant Biodefenders. The company has tried sending its products by plane. Unfortunately, the airlines in the region have declined to transport the bio-inputs. Transporting the products by road have also been a challenge as there is no bus-based cargo service going to Rwanda and Uganda. High market demand for products becomes hard to satisfy given the challenges of transporting the products.

Another challenge to expanding the trade in agroecological products has to do with regulation. If a local distributor is identified in another country, the product needs to be tested by the regulatory authorities for certification. This process can take a year. In addition, to this every four years it is necessary to review the certification for each product.

In response to these challenges, the CEO of Plant Biodefenders shares the strategic decision I had to make:

“I have abandoned the EAC market because of the bureaucracy. I focus on the local market, so I can get profits.”

Are there positive developments?

In 2025, Plant Biodefenders will become a partner on a government of Tanzania subsidy programme focused on maize and coffee. The Tanzania government has already bought 20,000 litres.

What is on Plant Biodefender's Wish List?

For Plant Biodefenders, it is important that the government of Tanzania start providing coffee cotton, cashew and maize producers organic inputs as part of the state's subsidy program. That is, locally produced organic and/or bio inputs should be included in the government subsidy programme. Additionally, the government of Tanzania should promote the use of the locally produced bio-inputs by investing in the training of extension officers and the development of demo plots across the country.

What might the future hold?

The demand for bio-inputs is extensive. In Tanzania alone there is demand for more than four million litres of pesticides annually. There is demand, not yet specified, in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. With appropriate government support, Plant Biodefenders can increase the trade of these agroecological products to other countries within the EAC.

Conclusion and Recommendations

4

What are the important takeaways from this study? It has been established that there is considerable trade of agroecological products across borders within the EAC. It is impossible to state exact volumes and the concomitant economic value. Reality always supersedes attempts to document it. It is possible, however, to recognize that the scale of this trade is far from negligible. The volumes provided in this study, with their limitations, are indicative of substantial trade. This trade has implications for livelihoods, women's economic autonomy, poverty alleviation, food and nutrition security, youth employment and rural socio-economic development.

The study demonstrates that by developing inclusive, climate-adapted agricultural value webs and building their capacity to grow more and better-quality food products, smallholder farmers in, for example, Mpondwe (both Uganda and DRC sides) have been able to grow food above and beyond subsistence to generate income from territorial markets on both border crossings. Some of the farmers revealed that they been supported by the FAO implemented “**Promoting Agroecology Assisted Transition to Enhance Food Security and Incomes among Smallholders Farmers through Inclusive Participation and Digital Technologies in Uganda** (PATHS)” program which aims to improve food security and incomes for smallholder farmers in Uganda by promoting agroecology, inclusive participation, and farmer friendly digital technologies. Farmers revealed that the reason for their embracing of PATHS and similar programs is due to their criticism of genetically modified seeds, which they believe will take away their seed and food security. This does not imply that the products traded in Mpondwe territorial markets are all agroecological. Indeed, cross-border traders stressed aggregating both agroecological and conventional products like maize, chicken, eggs, and genetically modified cotton to obtain the required quantities for the market. It does show, however, that well designed interventions to promote agroecology can improve the availability and trade of agroecological products.

At the cross borders of Namanga-Tarakea and Rusumo, the study reveals that in the absence of external support, producers and agroecological entrepreneurs build vibrant cross border trade relationships, which despite numerous challenges, generate dignified livelihoods for women and men. At these border crossings, the study reveals how enterprising youth play a major role in the transportation of agroecological products across borders. The study illuminates the way in which entrepreneurial women working in aggregation and trading, grow financial autonomy as they trade in agroecological products.

This study has provided some key learnings. First, it is evident that across the countries of the EAC who featured in this study, it is evident that there are gaps in the documenting of agroecological products. It is quite challenging to identify agroecological products, especially those crossing EAC borders. In many instances, there is no independently verified data establishing the authenticity of agroecological products.

Second, many countries and their Customs agencies are currently not systematically disaggregating agricultural trade into categories, such as conventional, organic, and agroecological categories. In the best of cases, organic exports are tracked, especially as they go to lucrative markets in the global North and provide States with export revenue. However, agricultural products that are not part of external organic certification systems tend not to be documented or easily traceable. As a result of this, Customs are not always able to easily specify what volumes of agroecological trade are taking place for which category of products. Third, awareness of agroecology, in any of its meanings, seems to be relatively non-existent outside of specialized audiences. Indeed, many people engaged in this study were more familiar with the terms “*kilimohai*” and “organic” than with agroecology.

Fourth, many producer organizations do not seem to be maximizing their potential as organized entities. For example, producer associations do not seem to be interested in strengthening the documentation and differentiation of their products so that they can attract premium prices. Indeed, it seems that producer associations are content with being “price-takers” rather than “price-setters.” It is probably the case that the investment to differentiate agroecological products from conventional, does not generate enough of a premium to warrant the effort. Fifth, agroecological entrepreneurs, especially those involved in the production and sale of value-added products, have products that may have the potential to generate considerable demand in neighbouring countries. A range of constraints, from limited access to finance to non-tariff trade barriers, make it difficult for these AEEs to extend business to neighbouring countries. For example, the organic agri-inputs developed by the Tanzania brand, Bio-Defenders, are probably in demand in neighbouring countries. Yet, such products are unlikely to be moving across EAC borders seamlessly. This is significant because strengthening inter-African trade cannot be based mainly on trade in primary products. Growing trade between EAC countries must increasingly include value-added products from within the EAC.

Sixth, only Uganda and Rwanda systematically track small-scale cross-border trade. Other countries in the EAC do not do so. This information gap means that some policies are being developed without adequate evidence. Additionally, other policies that perhaps could be developed remained unimagined due to the critical evidence gap.

Seven, efforts to scale up agroecological businesses face challenges that have hindered the transition toward sustainable food systems. Such challenges include inadequate knowledge and skills on business development, limited financial support towards the promotion of agroecology, and poor market structures. Reaping the full benefits of agroecology requires strategic and adequate support from governments. Important interventions include infrastructure development, equipment to enable value addition, access to affordable capital and guaranteed markets, which offer premiums.

Finally, this study reveals that agroecology and the trade in agroecological products is being built from the ground up, by farmers, pastoralist, fisherfolks, traders, agroecological entrepreneurs and others. With or without the support of their governments, this process will continue, because Africans aspire for food sovereignty. The recommendations below provide ideas for further deliberation and action, so that through collective action we can advance agroecological transitions and realize food sovereignty.

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are meant to enable the cross-border trade of agroecological product; these recommendations are not exhaustive. Some of them are achievable in the short to medium term. Other recommendations are only possible in the long term, because they are more challenging to realize. All of the recommendations are important; even by realizing a few of them, there will be progress. Below the challenges, proposed actions, and lead actors are identified.

The challenges to strengthened trade of agroecological products within the East African Community are multiple. These challenges can be organized into distinct but interrelated categories. The first category is: the production of adequate volumes of agroecological products, the Identification and verification of agroecological products, and the traceability of agroecological products. The second category is value addition and transportation. The third category is trade infrastructure and national and EAC trade protocol.

Challenge: Production, Identification, Verification and Traceability of Agroecological Products

Trade in agroecological products can only happen when there is adequate production of agroecological products to meet growing demand. Therefore, a critical first step in increasing the trade of agroecological products means addressing adequate production and attendant issues of identification, verification and traceability. In alignment with the principles of agroecology and food sovereignty this must start with producers.

Action: Organize and strengthen farmer organizations

The development of more producer organizations and the strengthening of existing ones is an important step in enabling the availability of agroecological products. Organized producer groups facilitate producer-led co-learning and sharing of agroecological principles and practices, which may strengthen production.

Producers should:

- **Champion their own struggles for equity, justice and rights.** A critical element of this is the self-organization of producers. More specifically, there is a need for self-organization of producers (e.g. peasant farmers) in collaboration with landless farmers, farm workers and rural dwellers. The development of producer cooperatives may be an important first step.

Governments should:

- Support the strengthening of producer organizations by facilitating capacity strengthening of producers who have self-organized into producer cooperatives.
- Provide critical support by enabling registration processes as well as fulfilling their obligations to respect the rights of farmers as articulated in [Declaration for the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas](#).

Civil Society organization (CSOs) should:

- Support the development and/or strengthening of producer organizations, for example producer cooperatives. For example, by providing technical assistance to already established cooperatives in areas such as accessing finance and developing risk management plans, CSOs can support the effective functioning of producer cooperatives and other producer organizations.
- Support producer organizations to strengthen organizational skills in policy analysis, advocacy and negotiation.

Challenge: The identification, verification and traceability of agroecological products requires a system to provide these functions.**Action: Scale up the use of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)**

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) may be an effective, producer-led mechanism to strengthen the identification and verification of agroecological products. Working with producer organizations to strengthen the use of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) may be an important step in supporting the trade of agroecological products. On the one hand, it provides a basis for producers to make verifiable claims about their products; On the other hand, it enables processors, aggregators, and consumers to have confidence in the fidelity of agroecological products to specific standards. Critically, PGS avoids the expensive process for external organic certification as it puts producers and consumers at the center of this important part of the food system.

Producer cooperatives and associations should:

- Organize Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) to strengthen their ability to verify the authenticity of their products.

Governments should:

- Support producer organizations to establish Participatory Guarantee System to help with the verification and traceability of agroecological products.
- Promote the use of PGS among producer cooperatives.
- Encourage citizen participation in Participatory Guarantee Systems
- Create of dedicated spaces in local markets specifically for trading agroecological products.
- Invest in the provision of public-owned infrastructure (e.g. cold rooms and storage facilities) at markets, specifically for agroecological products.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should

- Support awareness creation about PGS among producer organizations.
- Support the development and/or strengthening of the use of PGS among producer organizations.
- Support capacity strengthening for producer cooperatives regarding PGS as well as value

addition and marketing;

- Support capacity strengthening local governments (e.g. extension officers) regarding PGS;
- Engage in budget and expenditure advocacy, in collaboration with producer organization/ progressive social movements, to influence greater financial support for agroecological markets (e.g. through public procurement of agroecological products).

Challenge: Production, Identification, Verification and Traceability of Agroecological Products

Action: Establish National Directories of Agroecological Producers, Entrepreneurs, and Products

The establishment of national agroecological directories, which is a listing of agroecological producer cooperatives, agroecological entrepreneurs, and agroecological products, would be an important tool for EAC member countries to develop. This would allow for the identification of agroecological producers (producer cooperatives and agroecological entrepreneurs) and the registration of agroecological products.

Governments should:

- Work from the local to the national level to establish a system for identifying: (1) agroecological producer cooperatives, (2) agroecological entrepreneurs, and (3) agroecological products. This would enable the availability of registers at the district/ county level, the regional level and the national level. By documenting both producers and products, these directories would enable the provision of support as well as linking producers/entrepreneurs to markets.
- Support public awareness of the benefits of agroecological products to promote rural livelihoods and development as well as public health and environmental sustainability.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should:

- Support the development of district/county, regional (sub-national) and National Directories of Agroecological Producers, Entrepreneurs, and Products by working with producers and AEEs to register their businesses and their products with government authorities.

Challenge: Customs does not disaggregate data on the basis of the types of products.

There is a need for policies that require that agroecological products be distinguishable from other types of products, whether conventional or organic. It would also be critical that the necessary resources are provided to the relevant agencies to ensure the implementation of the policies.

Action: Disaggregate trade data at Customs to capture agroecological products

Governments should:

- Design policy to ensure that agricultural products are disaggregated by production type (e.g., agroecological, organic, and conventional).
- Provide incentives for the production of agroecological products as well as for appropriate labelling and transportation. This will enable greater efficiency in tracking agroecological products.
- Ensure that national Standards Authorities enable AEEs/farmer cooperatives to comply with appropriate standards, without the product certification process becoming a barrier to entrepreneurship.

Challenge: Inadequate Value Addition and Transportation

Agroecological products are often traded with no value addition, which affects their lifespan. To scale up cross border trade in agroecological products it is necessary to increase the volume and variety of value added agroecological products as well as improving transportation.

Action: Increase value addition and Improve transportation**Producers' cooperatives should:**

- Strengthen their participation in value addition of agroecological products. Primary level value addition: sorting, cleaning and packaging of fruits and vegetables could be a critical entry point for increasing trade in agroecological products.

Governments should:

- Support producers' cooperatives to scale up value addition activities. For example, governments can provide incentives for cooperatives and AEEs to add value to products.
- Support producers' cooperatives and agroecological entrepreneurs by developing credit facilities deliberately designed to facilitate access to affordable and appropriate credit. This should be done in collaboration with credit unions as opposed to commercial banks.
- Support women traders associations with capacity strengthening in value addition.
- Support women traders associations with access to affordable, adequate and long-term credit facilities. This should be done in collaboration with credit unions as opposed to commercial banks.
- Invest more in rural storage and handling facilities to reduce post-harvest loss.
- Invest more in rural infrastructure (roads, sustainable irrigation systems, solar based electrification, and information and communication technology).
- Invest in public transportation infrastructure to support cross-border trade.
- Support the development of transportation cooperatives to take food from the farmgate to the market, utilizing refrigerated trucks. This would provide farmers with a guaranteed service to transport their goods from the hinterland to the market. Transportation cooperatives could potentially enable greater efficiencies in the transportation of agroecological products as well as provide dignified jobs.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should:

- Support women traders/women trade associations to improve the level of value addition to agroecological products.
- Support women traders/women trade associations with access to finance through a mix of interest free loans and low interest, medium term credit facilities.
- Support women traders/women trade associations with capacity strengthening in environmentally friendly packaging, branding and marketing.

Challenge: Trade infrastructure and the regional policy landscape do not adequately support trade in agroecological products.**Action: Improve trade infrastructure as well as the policy landscape.**

To strengthen trade in agroecological products within the EAC, there is a need for countries to invest in drastically improving “soft infrastructure.” By “soft infrastructure,” we refer to the practices and norms of civility, clearance procedures, and deployment of appropriate ICT solutions that may enable trade efficiency. Across the various borders, improvements in soft infrastructure can have positive outcomes on cross-border trade.

Governments should:

- Strengthen support for small-scale cross-border trade through improving “soft infrastructure”
- Strengthen capacity of customs officers, revenue authority agents and other state actors at cross border points, so they appreciate their role as **enablers** of trade, especially small-scale cross-border trade.
- Revise existing policies at national level to strengthen support for agroecology and the trade in agroecological products. This could include incentives for agroecological entrepreneurs supplying local, regional (sub-national), national and the EAC markets.
- Improve physical infrastructure at border posts to provide adequately user-friendly service for small-scale cross-border traders. By designing infrastructure interventions to better serve the needs of small-scale traders, a significant element of cross-border trades is empowered to conduct more trade. For instance, small-scale traders may benefit from access to cold storage facilities at border posts.
- Increase access to affordable and appropriate storage facilities and cold rooms at border points.
- Implement mutual recognition of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) certification: Policy interventions should include mutual recognition of SPS certifications, subsidies for small traders, and regional harmonization of broader agroecological standards to facilitate smoother trade across East African Community (EAC) borders. Expanding certification criteria will enhance market access, reduce trade barriers, and ensure fairer opportunities for smallholder farmers.

Recommendations for AFSA

The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) should:

- Collaborate with its members to develop medium to long term programmes to scale up the organization of producers into cooperatives, associations and other structures. Strengthening the capacity and capabilities of organized producers to grow economic and political power by improving their organizational, business, and influencing capacity will be the strategic priority.
- Strengthen its citizen-consumer centered programming to increase citizen led advocacy for pro-agroecology public policy, budget expenditure and implementation (e.g. government procurement of agroecological products for school feeding programmes and public institutions as well as payment of premium prices for agroecological products. The latter could be financed in part through taxes on inorganic pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides and fungicides).
- Work with member organizations in each of the countries in this study to pilot a government led systems for the identification and verification of agroecological products at the local government level in at least three districts/counties.
- Commission a follow up to this study to include more countries cross-border trading points. For example, Tanzania-Burundi and Tanzania-Uganda borders should be included. Given security challenges for some countries in the EAC it may not be possible to include South Sudan and areas of the DRC, but Rwanda should be included more comprehensively, and Burundi should be included. If security concerns are not a cause for concern, Somalia should also be included.
- It is important that a follow-up study is more targeted and does not include elements best studied separately. For example, studying the socio-economic impact of agroecological is best approached as its own district study. Such a study requires a methodological approach that does not easily co-exist with a study designed to track the trade in agroecological products across borders of the EAC. Similarly, a comparative analysis of agroecological and conventional products it perhaps best approached as a separate study. Therefore, the recommendation that emerges from the learning from this current study is to approach the critical knowledge gaps identified in the TOR for this study and this study itself as three discrete elements for further study.
- Commission a study to explore the viability of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) as a mechanism for improving identification and verification of agroecological products. This study should explore the application of PGS in EAC member countries; This study should analyse the benefits PGS provides, its limitations, and the experiences of stakeholder, especially small holder farmers and consumers.

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Annexes

Annex 1 Methodology

Selection of countries and cross-border trade points

The initial research concept was for a study of cross border trade in agroecological products that would include all eight countries of the East African Community (EAC). It was not possible to include all the countries nor all the cross-border points where trade occurs. During the project inception period, it was realized that resources available and timeline necessitated reducing the scope of the work by limiting the number of countries and cross borders. The research team decided to take a two-pronged approach to the study. The first prong would address three of the eight EAC countries substantively and two other countries less substantively. The second prong, which would happen, later, would cover the two countries which were only partially included during the first prong of the study and the three EAC countries which were not included in the first prong.

The selection of the countries and borders for the first prong of the study were based on the following criteria:

- East African Community (EAC) members with the highest recorded volumes of trade in the most recent year data was available.
- Visible public attempts by the governments of the identified country and/or CSOs in the selected country to promote agroecology in public policy and/or in practice.
- Documented presence of agroecological enterprises in the selected countries.
- Countries included in the study posed minimal risk to the physical safety of the research team.

Country	Volume of trade in 2023	Presence of Agro-ecological Enterprises	Agroecology in Public Policy	Risk levels for researchers
Kenya	\$8.66* billion	Yes	Yes	Low risk
Tanzania	\$1.184 billion	Yes	Yes	Low Risk
Uganda	\$2.2 billion	Yes	Yes	Low Risk
Rwanda	\$0.879 billion	Yes	Somewhat	Low Risk
Democratic Republic of Congo	Data not available	Yes	Somewhat	Medium to highs Risk

* This data is for Kenya in 2024.

It is on this basis of the criterial above that Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda were identified as the key countries for the first prong of the study, with the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda included provisionally.

Cross border trade points

After deciding on the countries, the research team selected the borders. Given the many cross border trade points, it was also necessary to limit the research to a specific number of them. To select the borders a literature was conducted to identify the borders with the largest volumes of trade. Beyond the aforementioned criteria, the research team was also cognizant that given the different sizes of some of the countries and the numbers of borders they shared, some countries may be over-represented. For example, Tanzania borders eight countries, so it would be easy for Tanzania to end up having more than two border points included in the study. The selection of border points was based on the significance of trade flows through posts. Additionally, the presence of government agencies such as Customs Office was another factor in selection. The research team decided to focus on border points that connected the EAC countries participating in the study. Also, the team decided to try to minimize over representation of any countries. Therefore, although the Mutukula border between Tanzania and Uganda could have been included, that would have led to both countries being represented at three separate points.

Official cross-border trade points

Country	Total number of official cross-border trading points	Selected number of official cross-border trading points
Democratic Republic of Congo	12	1
Kenya	12	2
Rwanda	17	1
Tanzania	28	2
Uganda	19	2

The number of official cross border trading points captured here are subject to revision.

Data Collection

This study took a mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative approaches for data collection and analysis. The mixed method approach was based on convergent parallel design. That is, qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis took place simultaneously. This was then followed by a process of relating and comparing the findings to lead to an interpretation. This approach enables the collection of data on sale volumes of agroecological products as well as the market value. This data allows us to ask: ***What volumes of agroecological products are being traded across the borders of the countries of the East African Community? What is the economic value of these agroecological products?***

The research set out to answer this question by purposively identifying agroecological and/or organic producers. Given that many actors are not familiar with the term “agroecology” or use the term interchangeably with “organic,” it was necessary to initiate the research process with flexibility and inclusivity.

Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative part of the research utilized a survey tool with mainly closed questions. This tool was administered using kobotoolbox. Convenient sampling was utilized for this process. Essentially, the research team went to the market and/or an area identified as a trader hub and engaged traders who were immediately available to participate in the survey.

Qualitative Data Collection

It is important to share a briefly the research methodology, specifically regarding measuring volumes. To identify and assess the volume of trade in agroecological products, several steps were taken. First, the research team engaged with local government officials, particularly the officers responsible for agriculture and for trade. This was followed by engagement with the Customs office at the border. This provides some preliminary information on what products were being traded across the border.

Second, the research team conducted observations at local markets and the border point to observe what products were moving across the border. This was followed by engagement with traders in local and/or territorial markets. Here, the team identified the leader of the market and engaged that person. The support of the market leader was important in gaining “acceptance” by the market traders to conduct the study. The primary objective was to identify if any of the products being traded could be considered “agroecological.” If “agroecological products were identified, then the research team sought to find out if the trader was selling any of these products across the border. If yes, then the research team sought to understand what quantities of those agroecological products were being traded across the border. To gain an understanding of the volume, the research team utilized a survey tool, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions with traders.

The findings from the survey tool, KIs and FGDs provided some insights into the volume of trade. The first two tools provided volumes of agroecological products traded by individuals. The FGD allowed traders to discuss and agree on what volumes they think were accurate reflections on their volume of trade. The FGD also enabled the research team to compare the findings from individuals with those of the FGD participants.

The next step involved a process of deliberately counting the movement of goods across the border, where the research team observed and counted the movement of a specific product across the border by different types of vehicles. This was done for brief time intervals of twenty to thirty minutes.¹¹² What this step did was to allow the researchers to gain insights into how much trade, especially non-recorded cross-border trade, may be taking place.

During the next step, the research team engaged with revenue collectors at the border crossing. These are key actors at the border crossing who track the number of vehicles transporting goods across the border. This institution is also able to provide information on the types of vehicles and the amount of goods they can transport. The research team collected data on the average number of trucks (of different sizes), cars and motorbikes that cross the border daily.

What is important to note is that there is sometimes a major gap between the number of vehicles recorded as crossing the border and the actual number. For instance, the data from the revenue authority often indicated fewer motorbikes crossing the border daily, which was less than what the research team observed. In one extreme example, during only one observation period of thirty minutes, our research team counted more motorbikes crossing the border than the revenue authority had estimated to cross the border in an entire day.

Duration of Field based research

¹¹² Admittedly this was not as a systematic process as the research team would have liked. This observation and counting did not happen at a specific time each day. Research constraints also did not allow for this process to be done for a period of at minimum two weeks. Still, it provided some important insights regarding the volume of trade.

Data collection took place over a period of approximately 30 days. Approximately one week was spent at each border. (Resource constraints did not allow for the implementation of the initial research design where the research team would spend 18 days at each of the borders).

Data Collection instruments

Data Collection utilized a number of questionnaires designed for different stakeholders. For example, there were questionnaires for national government, local government, civil society organizations, farmers and traders. A survey tool was developed and administered using kobotoolbox. (The study tools are available upon request).

Data Limitations

Data collected is limited because (1) every exit/entry point where trade occurs is not captured, especially of non-formal trade flows; (2) accurate estimation of the quantities is difficult; (3) there were also challenges with estimating the volumes of fruits; and (4) trade at night was not captured at all;

Limitations of the Study

The EAC is comprised of eight countries. Ideally, it would be great to have included all eight countries in this study. To do so, however, was not possible at this time. The study focuses on four borders. Many other borders between the selected countries could have been included. It was not possible, however, to include these other borders at this time. Furthermore, even the extent to which the research team can trace the trade in agroecological products is limited. Although, for example, the Mpondwe border between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda is a focus of this study, it was not possible for the research team to travel to Kinshasa as part of this research. Similarly, if tracing the trade in agroecological products to the closest point to consumption would be ideal, resource constraints made it impossible to do so. Therefore, a limitation to this study is the research methodology, which arise from time and financial constraints. The study is not as comprehensive as would have been desired, especially in terms of the number of borders included and also the limited inclusion of two of the countries: Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda.

Another limitation of the study is due to access to information. Trade in agroecological products does not seem to have been documented widely. The preliminary review of the literature, both academic and grey, seems to have considerable gaps. On the one hand, this is an opportunity to produce important insights regarding the trade in agroecological products. On the other hand, this lacuna in the literature is a limit to this study in that there is not an existing body of knowledge, upon which this study can build. This challenge of access to information also extends to getting data on trade volumes and values from borders posts and from the relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies.

Finally, in trying to minimize the reliability of data limitation, when identifying and calculating the volumes of agroecological products being traded across the selected borders the researchers were careful not create any unintentional incentives for producers/traders to distort the truth about the “agroecologicalness” of products. To ensure that there was no overrepresentation of agroecological products, the research team initially considered reducing the volumes provided by traders and entrepreneurs by 20 percent to account for inappropriate claims. However, during the study it was evident that the volumes identified in the study would be less than the actual

trade in agroecological products. Therefore, the research team presents the volumes and value of agroecological trade as provided.

As is the case for all studies, the empirical material collected determine how reliable the results. The findings of this study do not allow for wide scale generalizations. The data provided, however, does provide resources that maybe be useful in the development or further research.

Annex 2: Demographics of Respondents

The total number of respondents engaged in this study are 252; For this study, the research team conducted 53 key informant interviews (KIIs) and nine focus group discussions (FGDs), which included 92 persons. Surveys were conducted with a total of 107 respondents.

The research team was comprised of four researchers and three core enumerators. Core enumerators refers to those who were engaged for the full duration of the study. Additional field enumerators were engaged at the local level. Those engaged to serve as field enumerators were staff from local government authority were engaged to support data collection at border points and at territorial markets where appropriate. The following provides a breakdown of how many people, in addition to the core research team, were engaged at the various border points. Busia 5; Mpondwe 3; Namanga 2; Tarakea 1; Rusumo 5.

Stakeholders engaged

The table below presents a list of the various stakeholders who were engaged throughout the study.

Table 1A. Stakeholders engaged by country

Name (first name; last name)	Institution	Position
Tanzania		
Thomas Laiser	SHIWAKUTA	Lobbying and Advocacy Officer
Paul Joseph Parmet	Longido District Council	Principal Trade Officer (Head of Trade and Marketing)
Prisca Mbaga	East African Community	Senior Trade Officer
Remigius Elias Kawishe	Ngara District Council	Agricultural Officer II
Thadei Anaclet	Tanzania Plant Health and Pesticides Authority	Agricultural Field Officer (Kabanga OSBP)
Francis Osodo	Tanzania Forest Services	Forest Product Inspector (Rusumo OSBP)
Mohammed	Tanzania Plant Health and Pesticides Authority	Agricultural Field Officer (Rusumo OSBP)
Yohanes Gwagilo	Tanzania Revenue Authority	Custom Officer (Namanga)
Emmanuel Alphonse	Tanzania Plant Health and Pesticides Authority	Agricultural Field Officer (Namanga OSBP)
Richard Masandika	MVIWAARUSHA	Coordinator
Agripina Gebra Mushi	Avocado Trader	Avocado Trader
Dr Never Mwambela	Plant Biodefenders	CEO

Name (first name; last name)	Institution	Position
Petro Matulanya	TanTrade	
Magala Patrick Lubinza	TanTrade	
Emmanuel Miselya	Ministry of Trade	
Marie Angélique Umulisa	Head of International Trade Department	EAC Secretariat
Hon. Françoise Uwumukiza	Committee on Agriculture, Tourism, and Natural Resources (ATNR)	Chairperson
Nicodemus Ajak Bior	EALA	Senior Public Relations Officer (SPRO)
Fahari Gilbert Marwa	EAC Secretariat	Principal Agricultural Economist
Adrian Raphael Njau	Executive Director	East African Business Council
Kain Mvanda	Good Food for Cities programme	Director East Africa
EGNESTA ANORDI	RUSUMO WOMEN CROSS BORDER TRADERS ASSOCIATION	Chairperson
Editha PASCHAL	Cross-border trader-Rusumo	Cross-border trader-Rusumo
Gresia EDWIN BUTO	Cross-border trader-Rusumo	Cross-border trader-Rusumo
Leonia Joel	Cross-border trader-Rusumo	Cross-border trader-Rusumo
Rwanda		
Antoine Kajangwe	Ministry of Trade and Industry	Permanent Secretary
Olivier Manzi	Ministry of Trade and Industry	Cross Border Trade
Dr. Alexandre Rutikanga	Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources	Chief Technical Advisor Ministry of Agriculture
Lise Chantal Dusabe	Rwandan Organic Agriculture Movement	Executive Director
Jean Bayara	Gatuna and Rusumo cross Border trader	Territorial Market-Rusumo Cross-Border Market leader
Annonciata MUKARUTESI	Rusumo Women Cross Border Traders Association	Chairperson
Diane UWIZEYE	Rusumo Women Cross Border Traders Association	Cross-border trader
MUKASHIRIMPAKA Josephine	Rusumo Nyakarambi Traders Association	Territorial market leader
François Munyentwari	Association for Cooperation, Research, and Development (ACORD)	Executive Director
Kanyangoga John Bosco	Trade Links	Consultant
Yvette NYINAWUMUNTU	Save Generations Organization	Executive Director
Thacien MUNYAMAHAME	World Resources Institute	Coordinator
Jean Bernard Mukudente	Farm and Environment Magazine (FEM)	CEO
RWIRIRIZA Jean Marie Vianney	Rwanda Youth in Agribusiness Forum	CEO
Faustin Vuningoma	Rwanda Climate & Dev't Network	CEO
Pascal N. Rushemuka,	Sustainable maize-legume based cropping systems for food security in the eastern and southern regions of Africa (SIMLESA)	Scientist and SIMLESA Country coordinator
Zahara Mukakalisa,	Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Board	Agronomist
Jacqueline Tuyisenge,	Agrotrade consults	Socio-economist
Uganda		
Godwin Muhwezi	URA-Mpondwe	Customs In charge
Okello Richard Okot	Ministry of Trade	Assistant Commissioner External Trade
Tsibuhirwa Juliet	MAAIF	Fisheries Officer, Mpondwe OSBP
Baluku Julius	MAAIF	District Production Officer-Kasese

Name (first name; last name)	Institution	Position
Masereka Festo	MAAIF	District Fisheries Officer-Mpondwe
Sunday Bob George	MAAIF	Senior agricultural officer, Food Security and focal person, Organic Agriculture
Kule Adonia	MAAIF	Commercial Officer - Mpondwe
Musa Kombi	Ministry of LG	District Inspector-Kasese
Muhimo Eric	COMESA	COMESA Focal Person-Mpondwe - Kasese
Kiiza Judith	Mpondwe Market	Tomatoes trader
Akello Juliet	Mpondwe Market	Silver Fish
Nabwire Brenda	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Sanyu Alice	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Badru Zuhruu	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Pamela Kalulu	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Tebaise Olivia	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Amoit Jane	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Nafula Angela	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Zira Babu	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Natocho Suzan	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Nabwire Clementina	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Nangira Florence	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Namaganda Mwatumu	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Night Christine	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Were Juliet	Busia Market	Agricultural produce trader
Dr. Wycliff Walumbe	Agroecology Farmer	Mpondwe-Kasese
Kazimoto Jackson	Mpondwe Market	Fish bi-products trader
Muhindo Moreen	Mpondwe Market	Beans trader
Muhammad Amri	Mpondwe Market	Fish Farmer
Muhindo Wilson	Mpondwe Market	Nileperch farmer
Eunice Wanga	Busia Trader	Trader
Annet Auma	Busia Trader	Trader
Dorcus Okumu	Busia Trader	Trader
Masiga Geoffrey	Busia Trader	Trader
Sanyu Alice	Busia Trader	Trader
Ruth Apiyo	Busia Trader	Trader
Mariam Babu	Busia Women Cross Border Traders Cooperative	Chairperson
Richard Koko Makhuno	Busia Crossborder Traders Associations	Site Coordinator - Kenya
Pandasi Standley	Mpondwe Cross-border Traders - Mpondwe	Chairperson
Badru Zuhr	Cereals – Busia Cross-border Co-operative	Chairperson
Elias Mutsanja	Mpondwe-Lhubiriha Traders Council (MLTC)	Secretary
Jude Thadeus Ssebuliba	PELUM-Uganda	Programme Manager, Agroecological Market & Business Development
Kabanda David	Centre for Food and Adequate Living Rights (CE-FROHT)	Executive Director

Name (first name; last name)	Institution	Position
David Iribagiza	Information Sharing and Networking – Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)	Program Manager
Chariton Namuwoza	NOGAMU	Director
Asiimwe Lina	EASSI	Trade Policy Analyst and Market access Officer
Kenya		
Digolo Frank	URA-Busia	Customs Agent
Agnes Oningo	Ministry of Agriculture	Busia County Director Agroecologist Department,
Francis Othieno Waga	Clearing Agent – Customs	Busia Border
Diana Teela	Agroecology Farmer	Busia-Kenya
Manea Masake	Agroecology Farmer	Busia-Kenya
Isaiah Odanga	Agroecology Farmer	Busia-Kenya
Cosmas Ochieng	EcoFix	Managing Director
Mercy Chepngetich	Tunza Nyuki	Founder
Belita Chengoli	Busia Trader	Trader
Richard Makhulo	Busia Trader	Trader
Hellen Mukanda	Busia Trader	Trader
Eliud Otenge	Busia Trader	Trader
Justus Lavi Mwololo	Kenya Small Scale Farmers Federation	General Secretary
JANNET MURUKA NABWIRE	EASSI	Field Coordinator-Busia and Malaba
Racheal Mohmoh	Action For Development Africa	Executive Director
Joseah Rotich	Ministry of Trade	Director External Trade.
DRC		
Paolo Cerutti	Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF)	Unit Head
Trésor BADISUNGU	Network for Food Security and Sovereignty in the DR Congo	CEO & Chairman
Mr. Justin KIMONA BORONGE	Federation of Enterprises in Congo	Managing Director
CLAUDINE MAWAKANI NKEMBI	Biofarm	Director
Louis Nyembo	Trade Information Desk Officer	Mpondwe

Traders Demographics

Table 2A: Frequency Distribution by Age and Gender				
		Female	Male	Total
Age		%	%	N
15 – 24 years		6	0	3
25 – 34 years		22	17	20
35 – 44 years		47	28	39
45 – 54 years		22	36	31
55 – 64 years		2	15	9
65 years or older		0	2	1
Total		100	100	107
Gender not reported: 2				
age not reported: 4				

Table 3A: Respondents by Occupation/Enterprise Type

Occupation/Enterprise Type	No.	Percent
Farmer (agroecology practitioner)	20	19
Trader (buying and selling in territorial markets)	27	25
Other	1	1
Multiple occupations (farmer, Trader, Aggregator, retailer or other)	54	50
Occupation not reported	5	5
Total	107	100.0

Table 4A: Frequency Distribution by Gender and How long Trading

	Female	Male	Total
Years of Trading	%	%	N
<=5	49	26	38
6-10	20	34	30
11-15	24	19	22
16-20	4	11	8
21 and above	2	8	5
Years not reported	0	2	4
Total	100.0	100.0	107

Annex 3. Defining Agroecology

Box 1. Defining Agroecology

What is agroecology?

The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) define agroecology as the science of applying ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable food systems.¹¹³

Agroecology may refer to farming practices, the science of sustainable agroecosystems and to a social movement focused on the equitable transformation of food systems¹¹⁴.

“Agroecology is a way of life and the language of Nature that we learn as her children. It is not a mere set of technologies or production practices.”¹¹⁵

“Agroecology is the integration of research, education, action and change that brings sustainability to all parts of the food system: ecological, economic, and social. It's transdisciplinary in that it values all forms of knowledge and experience in food system change. It's participatory in that it requires the involvement of all stakeholders from the farm to the table and everyone in between. And it is action-oriented because it confronts the economic and political power structures of the current industrial food system with alternative social structures and policy action. The approach is grounded in ecological thinking where a holistic, systems-level understanding of food system sustainability is required.”¹¹⁶

113 IPES Food. (2020). The Added Value(s) of Agroecology: Unlocking The Potential for Transition in West Africa; [IPES-Food_FullReport_WA_EN.pdf](#)

114 See: Altieri, M (1995) Agroecology: The science of sustainable agriculture, 2nd edition, Westview Press, Boulder, CO;

115 The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, 'Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology, Nyéléni, Mali: 27 February 2015', Development 58, no. 2 (1 June 2015): 163–64, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-016-0014-4>.

116 Gliessman, S. (2018). Defining Agroecology. Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, 42(6), 599–600. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2018.1432329>

Box 2. The High Level Panel of Expert's (HLPE) thirteen principles of agroecology

Recycling

Preferentially use local renewable resources and close as far as possible resource cycles of nutrients and biomass.

Input reduction

Reduce or eliminate dependency on purchased inputs and increase self-sufficiency.

Soil health

Secure and enhance soil health and functioning for improved plant growth, particularly by managing organic matter and enhancing soil biological activity.

Animal health

Ensure animal health and welfare.

Biodiversity

Maintain and enhance diversity of species, functional diversity and genetic resources and thereby maintain overall agroecosystem biodiversity in time and space at field, farm and landscape scales.

Synergy

Enhance positive ecological interaction, synergy, integration and complementarity among the elements of agroecosystems (animals, crops, trees, soil and water).

Economic diversification

Diversify on-farm incomes by ensuring that small-scale farmers have greater financial independence and value addition opportunities while enabling them to respond to demand from consumers.

Co-creation of knowledge

Enhance co-creation and horizontal sharing of knowledge including local and scientific innovation, especially through farmer-to-farmer exchange.

Social values and diets

Build food systems based on the culture, identity, tradition, social and gender equity of local communities that provide healthy, diversified, seasonally and culturally appropriate diets.

Fairness

Support dignified and robust livelihoods for all actors engaged in food systems, especially small-scale food producers, based on fair trade, fair employment and fair treatment of intellectual property rights.

Connectivity

Ensure proximity and confidence between producers and consumers through promotion of fair and short distribution networks and by re-embedding food systems into local economies.

Land and natural resource governance

Strengthen institutional arrangements to improve, including the recognition and support of family farmers, smallholders and peasant food producers as sustainable managers of natural and genetic resources.

Participation

Encourage social organization and greater participation in decision-making by food producers and consumers to support decentralized governance and local adaptive management of agricultural and food systems.

Source. HLPE Report 14. Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. 2019.

Criteria for verification of agroecological products

For this study, the research team utilized the HLPE principles of agroecology to develop 12 criteria for the identification of agroecological products. These twelve criteria were divided into two categories: critical criteria and other criteria. Producers and agroecological entrepreneurs were asked to indicate which of the principles they followed in the production process. **For a product to be acceptable as an agroecological product, the first three “critical criteria” and then at least any other three criteria, for a total of at least six of the twelve criteria would have been met.**

Critical Criteria

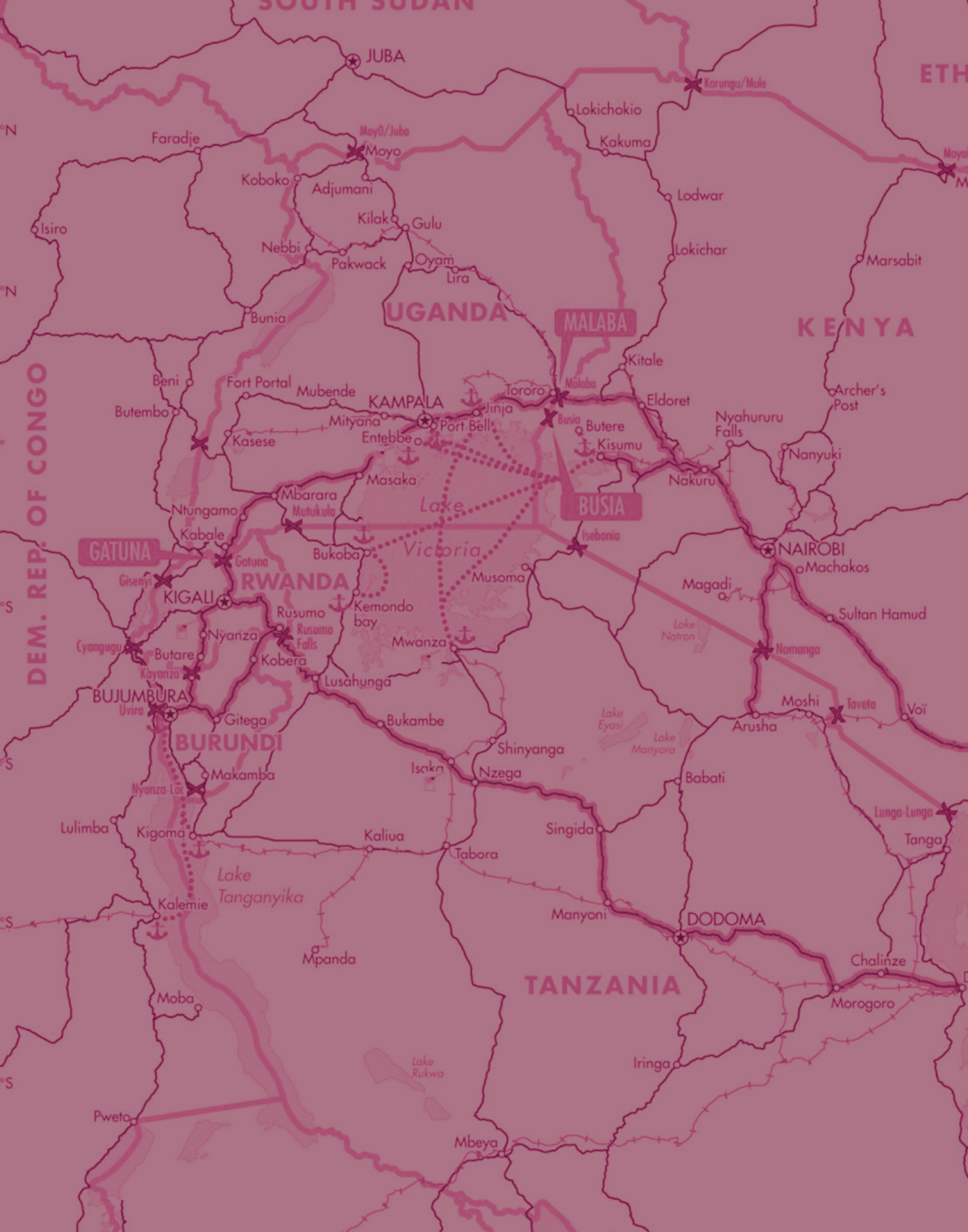
1. Agro-toxins, synthetic industrial agriculture inputs (fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides etc.) **are not used.**
2. Indigenous/local and OPV seeds are used and promoted; genetically modified organisms (GMOs) seeds are not used or promoted
3. Soil health is promoted on the farm through any of the following: use of animal manure, green manures or composting and other means (e.g. bio fertilizers).
4. Water conservation practices: Rainwater harvesting and storage; Mulching; Use of drip irrigation, bundts, Zai pits etc.;
5. Actively promotes biodiversity; agroforestry; mixed cropping; crop rotations; integrated crop and animal production.
6. Deliberate promotion of direct linkages between producers and consumers.
7. Economic diversification; farmers deliberately integrate value-adding activities (e.g. drying of fruits and/or vegetables); economic diversification may also include vertical integration where farmers organized collectively engage in a related business (e.g. transportation or marketing); Another emerging type of economic diversification is agri-tourism.

Additional Criteria

8. Co-creation of knowledge – producer actively involved in knowledge co-creation and sharing.
9. Enables household/community food and nutrition sovereignty; That is, agroecological farmers/entrepreneurs and their households consume agroecological products with positive household nutrition outcomes.
10. The agroecological enterprise (AEE) supports dignified livelihoods for all food system actors, especially small-scale food producers, (e.g. treats employees fairly, offers fair prices, and engages in fair trading).
11. Connectivity: AEE operates in ways that are connected and embedded in the local community. AEE deliberately uses short value webs/networks which promote and practice fair trade.
12. Land and Natural Resources: The AEE deliberately and consistently supports the needs and interest of peasants, small holder family farmers and farm workers, recognizing their rights as stewards of natural and genetic resources.

Annex 4. Agroecology policies at the County level in Kenya

No.	Policy/strategy	Overall policy/strategy goals
	Murang'a County Agroecology Policy 2022-2032	The policy sets to achieve five objectives i.e., (i) To support sustainable and participatory approaches to introduction of agroecology production systems and practices in the County; (ii) To support increased awareness on health benefits to life and environment, prioritize marketing strategies, data/information and consumption for agroecology products in Murang'a County; (iii) To support increased productivity and incomes through collaboration with research, education institutions and technology integration of agroecology with conventional agriculture; (iv) To promote adoption of agroecological approaches for sustainable soil systems and agricultural practices in the county ; and (v) To implement standards of production in the sub sector that is in line with both national and internationally set market standards.
	Vihinga County Agroecology Policy of 2024	The policy evolves around five objectives i.e., (i) To promote agroecological practices for a resilient agriculture and food system in the County; (ii) To promote production and utilization of safe and diverse foods for improved nutrition; (iii) To enhance inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups in agroecology; (iv) To enhance access to agricultural markets and financial services for agroecology products and actors; (v) To strengthen co-creation and participatory adaptive research on agrobiodiversity in the Vihiga ecosystem.
	Busia County Biodiversity Policy of 2016-2023	The policy aims at restoring and managing biodiversity, through community empowerment, and inclusive approaches. Its broader objectives include: (i) promoting effective conservation and facilitate structured access to biodiversity resources and associated ecosystems; (ii) ensuring equitable sharing of benefits accrued from utilization of biodiversity in Busia County; (c) mainstreaming biodiversity research in county development planning and implementation in Busia County.



DEM. REP. OF CONGO

ETH

JUBA

Faradje

Mayo/Juba

Moyo

Lokichokio

Kakuma

Karungu/Mule

Lodwar

Lokichar

Marsabit

UGANDA

MALABA

KENYA

Beni

Fort Portal

KAMPALA

Tororo

Kitale

Eldoret

Archer's Post

Butembo

Mubende

Mityana

Entebbe

Port Bell

Butere

Kisumu

Nyahururu Falls

Nanyuki

Masaka

BUSIA

Nakuru

GATUNA

RWANDA

KIGALI

Lake Victoria

Isebania

NAIROBI

Machakos

Gisenyi

Nyanza

Rusumo

Kemondo bay

Musoma

Magadi

Sultan Hamud

Cyangugu

Butare

Kayanza

Kobera

Lusahunga

Mwanza

Lake Natron

BUJUMBURA

Uvira

Gitega

Makamba

Bukambe

Shinyanga

Nzega

Arusha

Moshi

Taveta

Voii

Nyanza-Lac

Lulimba

Kigoma

Makamba

Kaliua

Tabora

Singida

Babati

Lunga-Lunga

Tanga

Lake Tanganyika

Kalemie

Mpanda

Moba

TANZANIA

DODOMA

Chalinze

Morogoro

Iringa

Mbeya

Pweto

Lake Rukwa