

1) Background Information:

BIEAC-II Regional Workshop on

Theme: "Strengthening the Role of Civil Society in Deepening EAC Regional Integration: *Perspectives from the BIEAC Project*"¹

27-28 May, 2010; Hotel Lamada, Nairobi, Kenya

a) Objectives

The aim of the BIEAC project is to empower and strengthen civil society in the EAC in their roles as proactive agents in the promotion and deepening of regional integration in EAC. The regional workshop has therefore been planned with two major objectives:

- to provide a forum to share the BIEAC Phase-II research outputs with the civil society and other stakeholders from all five EAC countries involved in and/or relevant to the implementation of the project in order for them to use it in their advocacy initiatives of promoting and enhancing the benefits of EAC regional integration; and,
- to provide a discussion forum to deliberate on various aspects of the involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs) in regional integration in EAC

Therefore, the specific aims of this workshop are to:

- provide CSOs with an opportunity to share their experiences in working on trade and to showcase best practices and effective tools to help target groups;
- identify in more detail the obstacles facing CSOs but also opportunities opened to them in contributing to the elevation of the trade pillar of EAC integration, and, specifically, on the thematic issues of the BIEAC researches;
- identify in more detail methods and/or support measures that will help CSOs in EAC to work on trade-related issues more effectively and to highlight these to policy-makers; and
- update CSOs on the importance of integration programmes EAC is currently engaged with and to strategise for their engagement in the ongoing processes

b) Background and Context

The East African Community (EAC), with an agenda of attaining economic, social and political integration, currently comprises five Member Countries - Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda –with a total population of approximately 126.6 million people (July, 2008 estimates). This big market is even set to expand with a population of more than half a billion should the current tripartite discussions between the EAC, COMESA and SADC end at integration of the three blocs. There are immense opportunities but also challenges for the people of Eastern African region to produce and trade goods and services within and beyond

¹For full Project Background, see http://www.cuts-international.org/ARC/Nairobi/BIEAC/pdf/GRC-BIEAC_Backgroundpaper.pdf

EAC borders to other African countries and, equally significantly, to European markets under the auspices of economic partnership agreement with the European Union. And, with the expanded trade the EAC stands a better chance of scaling up regional development and poverty alleviation.

An important aspect of regional development and poverty alleviation through regional integration is the degree to which the entire process is complemented by proactive involvement of the non-state actors, especially, civil society.

The “Building an Inclusive East Africa Community” project was initiated by CUTS, with the financial support from the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ). It is being implemented over two years between December 2008 and September 2010, with both outreach and research partners in all the EAC Partner States. The general aim of the project is to empower civil society organisations (CSOs) in the EAC to identify their roles and engage proactively in the integration processes of the EAC. In particular, it was initiated to empower CSOs to be able to identify challenges relating to,

- the implementation of the internal EAC integration (Customs Union and Common Market);
- agreeing to future terms for cooperation and external trade as may be influenced by the required adjustments to the EAC common external market (CET) and external trade terms such as those relating to the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the region’s Tripartite engagement with SADC and COMESA;
- the possible socio-economic adjustments which may result from the forces of integration forcing redistribution of resources away from some basic social sectors hence the need to support those within sectors which may be impacted negatively; and, lastly,
- the need for equity where it would be desirable to ensure that these developments most effectively contribute to promotion of inclusive developments and poverty reduction in the region, without marginalising some groups/sectors.

The expectation is that by engaging the civil society in the policy dialogue and, where necessary, implementation processes of important integration programmes in the EAC, it will provide at least two benefits. Firstly, the collective actions emanating from engagements with the civil society will respond to the needs and aspirations of the people of EAC and, secondly, it will generate the local ownership needed for the implementation of those actions to be politically sustainable in the region.

Following the commitment to Partner States contained in Article 127 of the Treaty Re-establishing the EAC, an East African Civil Society Organisations’ Forum (EACSOFF) has been established as an autonomous body serving as an umbrella body of all Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and CSOs in the region, mandated to facilitate avenues for active engagement between Civil Society and the Community and its organs. Trade is an important theme under EACSOFF but its profile must be raised, perhaps, above all else considering that it is the major driving factor why many countries elect to integrate.

During the research dialogue preceding the BIEAC phase-II, a long list of trade-related research issues was drawn following interactions with BIEAC Project Partners, other CSOs, research institutions and EAC Secretariat. These stakeholders felt that either these trade-related research issues had not been adequately researched and needed to be deeply researched or they had been researched but remain in technical formats that cannot be used for effective policy advocacy. The need to synthesize work that has been done in the region into popular languages for ease of policy advocacy and wider public sensitization, therefore, arose. The other important lesson that emanated from the research dialogue was the limited capacity of CSOs in the region to comprehend most of the trade-related issues they enlisted themselves. However, because of the limited project funding, only a few research issues were selected for BIEAC phase-II, leaving a huge gap of capacity to be built among the CSOs involved in trade-related working areas. Therefore, the one fundamental question we will need to debate over in this workshop is: *“How can we strengthen the role of civil society to help elevate the position and contribution of ‘Trade’ as a major driving factor of regional integration among EAC Partner States and between EAC region and other regional economic communities”?*

c) Format

The discussions in this workshop will be facilitated by presentations from BIEAC project partners and from participants in form of sharing their experiences and raising critical questions as well as proposals, particularly, on the subject mainstreaming the participation of CSOs in regional integration. The presentations to be made fall under the following thematic papers:

- *Accession of Burundi and Rwanda into EAC and Implications for Private Sector Development*
- *Informal Cross-Border Trade and Implications for the EAC Growth and Integration*
- *Harmonisation of East African Community Taxation Systems: Proposals for a Tax Regime fostering Small Business Development*
- *Integrating Migration with Development in EAC: Policy Challenges and Recommendations*
- *State of Non-Tariff-Barriers in Trading within EAC: Status, Challenges and Way forward in 2010 and Beyond*
- *National Competition Policy and Law versus the Regional Competition Law Act: Status and Way Forward on Addressing the Implementation Challenges*
- *Analysis of Policy Challenges for EAC Integration*

d) Outputs

The primary output of this workshop will be revised research papers in the BIEAC Phase 2 themes, which will be used to formulate a collective regional CSO response to communicate to policymakers involved in the EAC regional integration. The CSO advocacy document will highlight how to enhance the role of CSOs, the challenges they face in working on trade and the recommended policy measures from the undertaken researches. In particular, the outputs will be as follows:

- An advocacy document, which will be used to promote CSO engagement in the ongoing regional integration. This advocacy document will highlight the role of the various CSOs, the challenges they face in working on trade and poverty and the recommended support measures, which will enhance their effective of engagement in trade policy-making processes;

- Improved capacity, expertise and strategic-thinking amongst CSOs to carry out advocacy on trade and poverty related policy issues;
- Improved information sharing, cooperation and agreement on alliance building and formation of a regional network bringing together CSOs working on trade and poverty related policy issues;
- Increased support amongst policy-makers and donors to engage CSOs in trade and poverty policy-making and provide them with effective capacity building support

e) Participants

These have been drawn from the BIEAC project partners and other CSOs from the project countries working on trade, poverty and sustainable development programmes. They also include policymakers and private sector stakeholders from the region, representatives from inter-governmental, donors, academics and media.

f) Venue and Date

The conference will be held in Nairobi, Kenya at Hotel Lamada on 27-28 May, 2010.