

PRESS RELEASE

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EAC and TradeMark Africa Unveil Innovative App to Revolutionise Trade by Eliminating Non-Tariff Barriers

Bujumbura, Burundi, 08 December 2023: In a groundbreaking development for regional trade, the East African Community (EAC) Secretariat today unveiled a new mobile application (App) dedicated to the elimination of Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) – the *EAC NTBs App*.

This innovative App is set to revolutionise the region's trading landscape by streamlining the reporting, monitoring, and resolution of impediments traders face as they conduct business across borders.

The development of the EAC NTBs APP was funded by the Netherlands through TradeMark Africa (TMA).

The EAC NTBs App, seamlessly blending SMS, email, and phone reporting methods, offers economic operators a one-stop solution for effectively reporting Non-Tariff Barriers to trade. By streamlining the NTB reporting process, the App will aid traders and producers in tackling obstacles that impede their trade efficiency and competitiveness. Additionally, it ensures transparency and quick resolution of issues by engaging technical and policy-level mechanisms, such as National Focal Points, the National Monitoring Committees (NMCs) and the Regional Monitoring Committee (RMC).

Speaking during the launch of the App, EAC Deputy Secretary General in charge of Customs, Trade and Monetary Affairs, Ms. Annette Ssemuwemba said the EAC NTBs App marks a pivotal moment in creating a smooth trading environment across the EAC region.

"We are dedicated to eradicating the barriers that impede economic growth, and integration. This innovative solution serves as a powerful tool to empower traders, producers and economic operators offering them with a unified platform to promptly address and resolve NTBs," she added.

The Deputy Secretary General further noted that the removal of NTBs holds paramount significance in fostering a more efficient and equitable trade environment. Noting that these barriers, often in the form of procedural complexities, or administrative hurdles, hinder the smooth flow of goods and services across borders.

"Empowering the private sector to report NTBs encountered and enabling them to track the progress of the NTB through the App is key to enhancing the business environment in the region, it is our hope that this will be the turning point in effectively identifying and swiftly resolving NTBs in the region," Ms. Ssemuwemba.

"At TradeMark Africa, we believe in fostering a vibrant and conducive trade environment that propels economic growth and regional integration. This revolutionary app is a testament to our commitment to providing strategic solutions in digital trade," emphasised Director, Trade Policy, and Trade Facilitation, Benedict Musengele.

NTBs pose a major problem for traders and producers, as they can reduce profits and limit market access. NTBs include issues that can hinder trading effectively such as discriminatory requirements for special licenses and permits, excessive paperwork, complicated customs procedures, and bureaucratic delays at borders.

A recent EAC Regional Meeting Committee (RMC) report (2023) estimated the direct costs of NTBs at USD16,703,970 and total trade impact at USD94,918,000 decreasing trade by an average of 58%.

However, since 2017, EAC has resolved 89.5% of the reported NTBs (EAC Time Bound Programme report, 2023). In addition, there has been a relatively steady decrease in reported NTBs. In recent years, from 2021 to 2023, the number of reported NTBs complaints has remained stable, ranging between 8 and 11 cases annually with a significant improvement in the resolution of NTBs reported to an average of 88.3 days. Between June 2022 and June 2023, a total of 16 NTBs complaints were reported within EAC. Out of these, 9 NTBs have been resolved while 7 complaints remained in progress. A significant number of NTB complaints were addressed (56.25%) and resolved within the given timeframe. However, a notable portion of complaints, specifically (43.75%) were still in progress by end of June 2023.

The EAC NTBs App allows the users to report the complaints in one of the three (3) EAC official languages; English, Swahili and French and can be downloaded from the Apple Store, Google's Play Store, and other Android devices.

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About the East African Community Secretariat

The East African Community (EAC) is a regional intergovernmental organisation of seven (7) Partner States, comprising the Republic of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Kenya, the Republic of Rwanda, the Republic of South Sudan, the Republic of Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania. For more information, please visit: www.eac.int

About TradeMark Africa (TMA)

TradeMark Africa (TMA), formerly TradeMark Africa, is a leading African Aid-for-Trade organisation that was established in 2010, with the aim to grow intra-African trade and increase Africa's share in global trade, while helping make trade more pro-poor and more environmentally sustainable.

TMA operates on a not-for-profit basis and is funded by: Belgium, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Ireland, the MasterCard Foundation, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. TMA works closely with regional and continental inter-governmental organisations, national Governments, the private sector, and civil society.

Since its inception, TMA has delivered substantial gains for trade and regional economic integration in East Africa and the Horn of Africa, including a reduction of 16.5% in cargo transit times on the Northern Corridor from Mombasa to Bujumbura, and a reduction of an average of 70% in the time taken to cross selected one stop border posts. TMA officially launched its continental-wide shift and rebrand in West Africa in January 2023, with Ghana being the first country of operations in the region.

In 2022, TMA set up a catalytic finance company – Trade Catalyst Africa – that will pilot commercially viable projects for creating trade infrastructure (both physical and digital) as well as increasing access to Trade Finance for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Both TCA's and TMA's headquarters are in Nairobi, Kenya. Offices in: EAC Secretariat - Arusha, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Rwanda, Somaliland, Tanzania, and Uganda, with operations in Mozambique, South Sudan, and Zambia. For more information, please visit www.trademarkafrica.com