



EAC Secretariat

PRESS RELEASE

REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND PRIVATE SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS PREPARE JOINT RESPONSE TO COVID-19

East African Community Headquarters, Arusha, Tanzania, 30th May, 2020: The apex bodies of the private sector and civil society organizations met on 29th May, 2020 through the virtual tool, MS TEAMS.

The half-day meeting, which was attended by representatives of the East African Civil Society Organizations Forum (EACCSOF), the East Africa Law Society (EALS), the East African Local Government Association (EALGA) and the East African Health Platform (EAHP) discussed joint Covid-19 responses of these apex bodies to mitigate the virus, which has impacted the entire world including the EAC region.

The apex bodies discussed the agenda for the Regional Dialogue Committee (RDC) meeting, which will prepare possible interventions of the RDC to suit the needs of the region and developed a joint work plan for the Incubator for Integration and Development in East Africa (IIDEA) for the period June 2020 to June 2021 and agreed on a joint statement for the Regional Apex Bodies on Covid 19 impacts and responses in the region.

Mrs. Generose Minani, Principal Gender and Community Development Officer, EAC, commended the apex bodies of the RDC for the strategic approach they have taken to continue working and complementing government efforts during the Covid-19 crisis and lockdown situation. She urged them to strategize together on how to push the implementation of the consultative Dialogue Framework (CDF) in the region while scaling up their respective responses to the Corona Virus crisis in the region.

Mrs. Minani informed the meeting that the Social Sectors Directorate at the EAC Secretariat had developed a draft response, mitigation and adaptation for children and young people, developed a regional health, nutrition, education and social protection and is forming a regional gender based working group to address the gender-based violence and its related effects on the key groups in the region. She further urged the apex bodies to embrace virtual meetings to conduct their business while coping with the lockdown and post Covid-19.

Mr. Charles Omusana from the private sector and Investment Promotion Department, EAC noted that “the impact of Covid-19 had been felt across all key sectors in East African Community such as manufacturing, trade, tourism, transport, agriculture and education and exposed challenges as well as opportunities.”

“The use of ICT and digital solutions has become the new norm of doing business especially for the private sector and small and medium enterprises (SMEs),” said Omusana.

Furthermore, Omusana highlighted that the department had plans to develop an EAC buyers and sellers platform that will promote EAC products to a wider audience, develop an EAC e-business registry which will provide opportunities for information sharing, establish an online registration and harmonize procedures for registration of companies across EAC Partner States and develop an i-guide (Investment Guide) to share investor information and promote the investment opportunities that the EAC offers.

Mrs. Martha Makenge, Ag. Executive Director, EACSOF, shared that creating public awareness on measures of Covid-19 to the citizens and engaging state agencies on the need to strengthen health systems and capacity to respond to Coronavirus was the response the organization provided.

Mrs. Makenge urged the EAC Partner States to implement a debt moratorium and divert resources meant for debt repayments towards rebuilding the public health system and investing in critical social service sectors. She also emphasized the need for implementing a regional emergency fund towards social relief measures on Covid-19 and increase subsidies for small-scale farmers to enhance regional food security.

“IIDEA partners are proactively continuing work, adjusting project initiatives, plans and in addition providing response to mitigate Covid-19. We can see that in spite of difficulties, regional organizations focus on finding solutions, in particular to secure provision of services and trade in food products and also to use new digital technologies supported by various regional EAC-GIZ projects,” said Dr Kirsten Focken, Cluster Coordinator, GIZ-EAC Programmes.

“IIDEA which supports private sector and civil society organizations to engage on the implementation of the EAC Common Market have also contributed to mitigate Covid-19 through recorded awareness and behavioral change mechanisms. Examples are the dissemination of information and communication materials on corona virus to citizens, digitally marketed women and youth enterprises producing health protective equipment such as masks and sanitizers and mapped health facilities at border points relevant for providing care support to Covid-19 patients for the border communities,” Dr. Focken added.

Ms. Gertrude Rose Gamwera Aijuka, Ag. Secretary General, EALGA, highlighted the need for increased involvement, support and reinforcement of the Border County and Local Governments on matters of border security, control and management of mobility of people and goods which promotes cross border trade and safety of citizens during this period.

According to Mr. David Sigano, Programme Officer, EALS, the institution had provided support to the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) in the launch of online Court proceedings and virtual training of lawyers intending to appear before the Court and undertaken a baseline study on the impact of COVID-19 to cross-border small scale traders across the region. Moreso, EALS had launched an online library of legal resources and is preparing a special COVID-19 Edition of the East African Lawyer Magazine to be released in June 2020.

Ms. Jonniah William, Executive Director, EAHP, called for a regional approach to health security and promotion by adopting a two-pronged approach where common social and scientific information, education and communication to raise public awareness and guide practices. She alluded that the proposed approach will utilize the COVID-19 and Ebola experiences to strengthen health systems and facilitate fast but quality assured services allowing detection, warning and referral in a safe and human-centred manner.

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