EAC in cost cutting measures

BY ELISHA MAYALLAH

ARUSHA, TANZANIA—The cash-strapped East African Community Secretariat is set to cut its budget of $6 million this financial year.

In a conference last week, Mr. Lwirar Mwumuke, said, “Since taking over the office in May this year, I initiated several reforms to the Secretariat’s operations and programmes. The reforms target $6 million in travel savings in the Financial Year 2016/2017.”

However, he noted that the EAC, the East African Community’s leading multilateral forum, still considers the Secretariat to be an entity worthy of support on the basis of better accountability.

He said, “The implementation of these reforms are going on very well and already some positive results are being received. For example, for the first three months of implementation (May to August), we have already reduced the number of meetings by 16% from 588/768 in travel expenditure alone.

“We shall calculate again for the months September to October. The reforms focus on cutting any wastage, containing and reducing travel where all EAC Staff must spend 50% of their time in Arusha and also hold 25% of the meetings via video conference facility. We have also reduced the number of days for our meetings to a maximum of four.

Dear friends, it is no longer business as usual. The EAC, through its consultancy firm, Moore Stephens LLP based in London, undertook a Field Visit Assessment (FVA) on the EAC Secretariat’s operations and processes on the mentioned pillars. According to the findings, the EAC Secretariat has met the interaction-ally acceptable standards and successfully undergone the assessment as required by the European Union. The conclusion was that EAC applies appropriate rules and procedures in all material aspects for providing financial support to the EAC Secretariat, an agreement that is in accordance with the criteria set by the European Commission (the EU) executive.

Dr. Mwumuke said efforts are being made to raise money to bolster Secretariat operations in light of the strained financial situation of the member governments. One of these high level missions include negotiation with the EU is Brussels said where the future cooperation between EAC and EU was discussed and a grant totaling €15 million euro was committed to our work. These funds will support the following key priorities. Peace and Security; Rural Integration; Natural Resources; Institutional Strengthening; and Partner States’ actions will access 40 million euro for trade facilitation,” he said.

Dr. Mwumuke has also held strategic discussions with all Development Partners towards the EAC Partnership Fund, USAID, European Union, US, Aga Khan Foundation and United Nations, with the aim of re-creating the relationship between EAC and Development Partners.

Further bilateral discussions have been held with Ambassadors from Germany, USA, Belgium, France, Brazil and Ireland.

Regional legislators want more for agriculture

BY ELISHA MAYALLAH

ARUSHA, TANZANIA—The East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) last week added its voice to the push for more budgetary allocations to the agricultural sector in Partner States and to ensure legal and regulatory frameworks are responsive to the needs of the smallholder farmers, youth, women and other sectors.

According to a press release, the increase in budgetary allocations is in line with the Malabo Declaration and the Assembly says the target which is pegged at least 10% of GDP is not being met in the region.

The legislators are similarly urging the EAC Secretariat to institutionalise a Regional Agriculture Advisory Council to advise on the harmonization of the regional agricultural policy frameworks and programmes. Such a Council, EALA says, could comprise of EAC/EALA Secretariat and representatives from Partner States, academe, regional Farmer Organisations and Civil Society as well as consumers.

At the same time, Partner States need to increase the quality of investments by addressing national priorities connected with farmers while addressing existing challenges. Consequently, increased in the absorption rate in the agriculture sector with a correlation between budget allocation, agriculture returns and agricultural growth targets, is absolutely necessary.

The recommendations are contained in a report arising from the Agriculture Finance Policy Processes for improved public financing for agriculture at national and the East African Community level.

The meeting, attended by EALA Members from the Committee on Agriculture, Tourism and Natural Resources, Committee Chairperson from Partner States’ National Parliaments and CAADF focal points from Partner States.

Other Partners were from various organizations such as Trust Africa, ActionAid International, Agriculture, Non-State Actors Forum (ANSAF) and the Coalition of Non-State Actors on CAADF amongst others.

The meeting underscored the need for the EAC/EALA to expedite the implementation of the Malabo Declaration 2014-2025 by putting in place a regional food binding Protocol or instruments to ensure regional realization of its goals.

In the past, EALA contributed significantly to the discussions in the region by ensuring formulation of key recommendations to strengthen the agricultural sector in line with the Maputo Declaration on “Agriculture and Food Security” and Malabo Declaration on “Accelerated Agricultural Growth”.

The Assembly is also keen on taking up the issues of land which is a hindrance to agriculture development in the region and in Africa, in general as well as in overseeing the implementation of a regional legal framework on sustainable investment in agriculture.

During all these high level discussions, the Development Partners reaffirmed their strong commitment to supporting EAC, financial and technically, to achieve its overarching mandate and goal.

He said, “I wish to remind you that EAC is the only block in the continent that has a dream of walking the whole journey of integration. Our ultimate dream is to be a political union that is the most unique in shape and size, in the world.”

EAC has more than 45 projects and sub-secretaries that we are involved in (from natural energy, culture, citizen sensitization, immigration etc.) reporting and enhancing coordination, development partnerships who contribute 50% of the EAC budget we established the Project Coordination Unit to enhance how funds are managed and other funding sources. To ensure this, finance in terms of credit is to be considered in the near future.

The report of the meeting which was added to the House by Hon. Patricia Haji BAKUYI on behalf of the ATNR Committee further takes an inclusive analysis of the Partner States’ situations.

During the debate, Maryan Usai called on the region to support the small scale farmers by implementing the 10% budgetary increase per the Malabo Declaration.

Mike Sebitu remarked the relations between the Assembly and farmers’ organisations were very cordial and that the voice of the farmers continue to be heard by EALA. He said it was time for agriculture to be prioritized and that a value system that incentivizes agriculture should be embraced.

Skip Bose said agriculture was well toted by sufficient budgets, but ensuring the youth, women and other stakeholders are catered for through employment opportunities.

The conclusion was added that the Secretariat wants to join hands with all stakeholders, ensure the office in May this year, and functionalize the monitoring all expenditures alone.

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