

EAC's 'heavy reliance' on imported fertilisers raises concern

By James Karuhanga

THE EAST African region still relies heavily on imported fertilisers, the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) heard on Tuesday.

The issue came up as MP Christophe Bazivamo (Rwanda) tasked the East African Community (EAC) Council of Ministers, the central decision-making and governing organ of the EAC, to explain issues regarding the region's commitment to boosting agriculture, in general, and the level of fertiliser production.

Bazivamo asked: "Can the Council of Ministers explain to this August House whether we have fertiliser production plants in every Partner State? What's the level of production of fertilisers in the EAC?"

He noted that in the Malabo Declaration, African countries committed to allocate at least 10 per cent of their respective budgets to agriculture, and to eliminate hunger by 2025.

In June 2014, African leaders met in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, where they adopted the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods. The declaration is framed around key commitments to transform agriculture across the continent over the next decade.

Dr Susan Kolimba, Tanzania's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs who was sitting in as substantive Chair of the Council, told the Assembly that the Kenyan government is currently in

the process of constructing a \$1.2 billion fertiliser plant in Eldoret under a public-private partnership involving Toyota Tsusho East Africa Company.

Dr Kolimba said: "It is expected that the plant will contribute towards significant reduction in the cost of the fertilisers to be manufactured and distributed in Kenya and the EAC bloc."

Construction works, she said, will be implemented in two phases with the first section expected to be commissioned later this year.

Once completed, the fertiliser plants in Eldoret will produce Nitrogen Potassium Calcium (NPK) Diammonium Phosphate (DAP), urea and Calcium Ammonium Nitrogen (CAN) fertilisers.

In Tanzania, Dr Kolimba said, Minjingu Organic

Hyper Phosphate, a high grade and reactive natural fertiliser rich in minerals such as Silica and Calcium, is produced 106 kilometres southwest of Arusha, along the Arusha-Dodoma highway.

Minjingu Mines and Fertiliser Ltd has a capacity of 100,000 tonnes per annum. Officials say Minjingu Rock Phosphate, due to its unique composition, has proven to be very beneficial to cash crops like coffee, tea, tobacco, and sugarcane, particularly in the acidic soils found in large parts of Tanzania.

"Minjingu currently exports beneficated rock phosphate to South Africa, Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda. The mine recently added a granulliser plant that adds value by converting the beneficated rock phosphate into ready-to-use fertiliser. It will produce 30,000 tonnes of fertiliser annually."

Regarding the question of the level of fertiliser production in the region to meet demand by farmers, she acknowledged that "apart from the on-going initiatives in Kenya and Tanzania, EAC still relies heavily on imported fertilisers."

Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi currently have no fertiliser production plants,



A staffer at a fertiliser depot at Magerwa, a Gikondo-based public bonded warehouse. The east African region still relies heavily on imported fertilizers. File.

Dr Kolimba said.

But, according to Bazivamo, increasing availability and access to inputs by farmers is "one of the most important strategies" to increase agriculture production.

Plans for a fertiliser plant in Tororo, Uganda, using the naturally available phosphates are yet to bear fruit.

Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda subsidise their fertiliser pricing in a bid to augment fertiliser use to at least 50 kilograms per hectare per year. Over dependence on imports continues to push up the prices and discourage smallholder farmers in the region, experts say.

Dr Charles Murekezi, Director General of agriculture development at Rwanda's Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, told *The New Times* that local production remains a challenge, especially due to lack of raw materials.

"We now import approximately forty metric tonnes of inorganic fertiliser per annum as we must continue increasing agricultural productivity," Murekezi said.

"It is necessary given the situation where we have small pieces of land. We subsidise for staple food crops to ensure food security."

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Police search for missing journalist

Rodrigue Rwirahira

RWANDA NATIONAL POLICE has launched a search for John Ndararasa, a journalist who went missing three weeks ago.

Ndararasa worked as Chief Editor at Sana Radio, a Christian radio station.

Speaking to *The New Times* yesterday, Celestin Twahirwa, the police spokesperson, said Police had opened investigations into Ndararasa's whereabouts with initial reports suggesting that he could have travelled outside the country.

"Upon receiving reports of his disappearance, the police immediately

launched investigation and search especially now that we hear he might have travelled outside the country, we are engaging members of the family on a number of details," he said.

Justin Kagame is a friend to Ndararasa.

In an interview, Kagame recalled that on the eve of his disappearance on August 8, he received a message from Ndararasa, saying he had some business to do in Kampala, Uganda.

Ndararasa sent the message while at Gatuna border, indicating he was to return the next day, but since then his phone went off, said Kagame. He said that several ef-

orts to reach members of his family have been futile.

The New Times' efforts to talk to Ndararasa's sister were also fruitless as her known number could not go through.

Ndararasa, who has been residing in Gatenza, a Kigali suburb, is known for his passion for music and history, and has featured in a song "Rwanda" with the renowned singer Massamba Intore. The journalist has also released three solo songs, including Arasesekaye, Nyobora and Ntitezabibagirwa.

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