Consumer Confidence in Technology Needed

Financial and digital services providers in Ghana need to work to guarantee consumer confidence in the technology platforms on which they deliver their products. Without consumer confidence in technology, usage of technology will go down and can become a disincentive for technology service providers.

Service providers need to ensure that consumers have access to secured networks and services, right to privacy and data protection as well as avenues for redress mechanism”, said Alan Kwadwo Kyeremanten, Minister for Trade and Industry, Ghana. He conveyed this during a policy dialogue organised by CUTS International Ghana as part of the activities to mark ‘World Consumer Rights Day 2017’ in Accra.

Robert Ahomka-Lindsay, Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Trade and Industry mentioned that the Ministry is taking three key steps in addressing consumer welfare issues: data protection, reviewing all regulations associated with industries and greater entrepreneurship and Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) development.

Justice Samuel Kofi Date Bah, retired justice of the Supreme Court of Ghana indicated that “the contemporary national and global environment provide much opportunity for innovation in both the digital and financial worlds. Regulators in these sectors must combine adequate consumer protection with empowerment of imaginative enterprise and entrepreneurship”.

Appiah Kusi Adomako, the Centre Coordinator for CUTS International, Ghana elucidated that consumer protection law is required to protect consumers of financial services. He complained about high interest rates, bank charges, ATM charges as well as deliberate non-disclosure of products information. He urged the Bank of Ghana to ensure that consumer rights in the financial services are respected.

Teki Akwetteh Falconer, Executive Director of the Data Protection Commission (DPC), in her remarks stressed on the need for privacy, integrity and trust as the main issues bordering consumers in the digital world. She emphasised that her outfit is working assiduously to ensure that data protection is linked with consumer protection law.

Dr Settor Amedeka, Head of Payment Systems at the Bank of Ghana emphasised that the core aim of the Bank of Ghana in relation to consumer welfare is to ensure financial and price stability. He added that the institution is working to ensure that violations are remedied, sanctions are applied and the consumer is given a voice in the financial sector.

He added, “In doing so, the Central Bank has charged all banking and other financial institutions to set up a complaint centre to collate all the views and concerns of consumers. A redress mechanism has also been put in place through the establishment of information centres either in banking halls or online to inform consumers of their rights”.

James Lartey, the Head of Communications at the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) was of the view that the blame should not be shifted only to regulators because consumers themselves sometimes do not uphold their rights and called for vigilance among consumers of goods and services.

Kafui Tsekpo from the Participatory Development Associates (Ghana) mentioned trust issues in both the digital and financial worlds, wide gap between interest rate on loans and interest on savings and as lack of transparency and information as the major issues bedevilling consumers in the both sectors. Thus this needs to be addressed to win.
More Mining Explorations
The stability in the copper prices has brightened Zambia’s mining sector outlook with world’s mining conglomerates, such as Rio Tinto and Anglo American intensifying mineral explorations. Mines and Mineral Development Minister Christopher Yaluma of Zambia said the country is still attractive to mining investors. He said in that the Zambian Government was doing everything possible to attract more investments in the mining industry. Yaluma urged existing mining firms in the country to intensify explorations to increase production in view of the raising copper prices.  

E-GP Enhances Transparency
The Electronic Government Procurement (E-GP) system is a strategic move to enhance transparency, efficiency and accountability in the management of public funds, Zambia Public Procurement Authority (ZPPA), Director General Denies Chisenda said. Speaking during the first quarter report presentation for the year 2017 in Lusaka, he said the use of the E-GP system would reduce the cost of doing business for both suppliers and the Government. Chisenda said the system would also help curbing malpractices in public procurement.

Economic Growth Catalyst
The African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET) said Africa’s agricultural sector can drive economic transformation in the continent if the challenges in the sector are properly addressed. Dr Yaw Ansu, Chief Economist at ACET said if Africa can better impact its people’s lives then it could raise agricultural productivity. This increase could positively impact on the lives of Africans. Moreover, commercialising agriculture will not only serve as a foreign exchange earner through exports to support other imports, such as equipment, but will also serve as a base for other forms of industrialisation.

Better Service Delivery
The Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) said it is upgrading and automating its business operations and processes to improve the service delivery while continuing to deliver revenue to the Government. ZRA Commissioner General Kingsley Chanda said the Authority has created a division that would be responsible for modernisation at the higher level in technology. Soon all the systems would be integrated to make it faster the tax payers to interact and transact with the Authority.

The mission of the Authority is to optimise and sustain revenue collection through the integrated and cost effective and transparent systems.

Banks on Cheap Credit
Ghana Government has begun informal talks with key financial institutions for reducing the cost of credit and make the same available to the private sector to spur growth, said Business Development Minister, Muhammed Ibrahim Awal.

The private sector has often grumbled about what it sees as unbearably high rates of interest on loans, which hold it back from realising its fullest potential. Awal believes that with the creation of a business-friendly environment, which includes improved macroeconomic indicators, banks can become enablers of growth, with the right deliberations and incentives.

One Stop Border Posts
The East African Community (EAC) is developing a Regional Training Curriculum to support the operationalisation of One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) within the bloc, which is a major capacity building tool for OSBP in the region. Partner States’ experts from the Revenue and Immigration Authorities are developing the tools aiming at training the OSBP officers on the rules and ways to operate in their different positions and different posts in cooperation with their different counterparts. The said Curriculum looks at how best to allow the different agencies to play their role and work together.
**Educate before Exporting**
An International Consultant, Jan Forest, has urged manufacturers in the export trade business to seek education on the customs and regulations of the US before exporting goods through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade initiative.

Education would enable the local companies to realise the full potential in the AGOA programme and position them well to be competitive to penetrate other international markets. “Companies in the country have not been able to maximise the opportunities under the AGOA trade initiative due to their lack of knowledge of the US customs and regulations”, Jan stated. (Graphic.com.gh, 09.02.17)

**EAC Trade Declines**
East African economies are seeking closer trade ties with countries outside the bloc as the volume of trade between the five-Member States diminishes. A trade report by the EAC Secretariat highlights a number of factors stifling intra-EAC trade while undermining regional integration process.

Non-tariff barriers (NTBs); poor infrastructure at the ports and on the main transport corridors; low value addition in the EAC region; and lack of a common position on the implementation of duty exemption regimes by the Member States have been identified as key factors distorting the Common External Tariff.

TEA, 22.03.17

**More Intra-ECOWAS Trade**
The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been advised to take advantage of the domestic market opportunities to trade more within itself. This, according to Gilbert Nii-Okai Addy, an International trade expert was one of the surest ways to reduce the vulnerability that they faced in the world competitive market.

He also called on governments to create enabling environment and be committed to tackle numerous infrastructural and institutional challenges that made it difficult to trade in the sub-region. (GNA, 29.01.17)

**Trade Barriers in EAC**
EAC Partner States have maintained restrictions on free movement of capital, according to the EAC Common Market Scorecard 2016. The greatest restriction across the EAC is capital controls, which affects other transactions under the Common Market Protocol.

The Scorecard states that only three of the 20 capital operations foreign sale by residents of shares or other securities of a participating nature, external borrowing by residents and repatriation of proceeds from sale of assets are free in all the Partner States. (TEA, 14.03.17)

**Ban on Timber Exports**
The Zambian Government should affect a total ban on the exportation of timber until better options are thought out, said Zambia Republican Party (ZRP) President Wright Musoma. Musoma said the ban was important for the Government to work our modalities to curb the illegal exportation of the *mukula* tree before this country turns into a desert.

He said there was rampant cutting and smuggling of *mukula* while huge amount of money was being paid to those in strategic positions to allow for the movement of the stock. Few trucks, which had been impounded were nothing compared to those that sneaked out of Zambia using the same illegal syndicate. (DN, 14.03.17)

**Imports Choking Market**
The Zambian Government will continue losing huge amount of money if the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) does not step up efforts to curb illegal imports of detergents.

More than 200 tonne of detergent paste whose brands and labels are questionable enter the Copperbelt market monthly.

Most of the products are entering the country without meeting import formalities. A check in most of the shops at Chisokone Market in Kitwe (Zambia) found piles of bags, which are being unpacked into smaller packs are sold between K2 and K5 each. (ToZ, 13.03.17)

**Impact of EU Trade Deal**
Tanzania wants a study conducted on the impact of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU) on the EAC. The demand reiterates Tanzania’s position that Kenya and Rwanda should not have signed the EPA in 2016.

Not much progress has been made on the matter before April 01, 2017 when the EU expects the EAC to sign up to the accord. Tanzania demanded that the EAC Secretariat conduct an analysis on the effects of the EPA on the community for raising the concerns on. (TEA, 23.02.17)
Cross Border Trade

Sellers of maize and other commodities from Ethiopia and buyers of staple from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda gathered in Addis Ababa in March 2017 for a grain buyer mission to enhance economic cooperation and integration among the countries.

Eastern Africa Grain Council (EAGC) Country Manager – Tanzania, Ikunda Terry said that the grain buyer mission has been organised by the Council in partnership with the East Africa Trade and Investment Hub.

The objective is to create a platform for knowledge sharing and networking on trade and investment programme between Ethiopia and Eastern and Southern countries.

(TG, 08.03.17)

More Intra-Regional Trade

Without much dispute, intra-regional trade of agricultural products plays an important role in regional integration, particularly the control of food insecurity in West Africa.

The permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel has released data related to volumes and values collected by professional private associations in each country.

The trade data collectors were positioned at exit points (borders) and in strategic markets of various countries in the region to collect data on cross-border trade, particularly on livestock and staple food.

(B&FT, 21.02.17)

Cross-border Markets

The Rwanda Government is looking to develop cross-border markets planned at key border areas to improve trade and Rwanda’s exports to the region. According to James Tayebwa, in charge of regional integration (cross-border trade) at Ministry of Trade, Industry and EAC Affairs.

Around eight cross-border markets will be constructed by the Government at different crossing points to facilitate trade between Rwanda and neighbouring countries – DR Congo, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania.

Regional buyers will be able to get goods at the border instead of travelling inland to procure them from factories or cooperatives across the country.

(TNT, 23.03.17)

New US-Africa Trade Policy

The President of US-Africa Business Centre at the US Chamber of Commerce, Scott Eisner, has expressed the desire of the chamber to make Africa the frontline of the US President Donald Trump’s administration in terms of trade policies.

Towards that, he said, the chamber will discuss with some key stakeholders in the new administration in America to push for the development of a US-African trade policy.

The US Chamber of Commerce, together with its affiliates in Africa like American Chamber of Commerce, Ghana, will initiate discussions with the key US personalities for the development of US-African trade policy.

(DG, 13.03.17)

Harmonised Standards

Experts during an EAC meeting urged African economies to harmonise standards for staple foods on the continent to promote and increase intra-African trade in grains and cereals.

Harmonised staple food standards in Africa will play a major role in promoting intra-African trade through removing technical barriers to trade hence ensuring food security.

Lack of standards is not good for trade because high costs and unpredictable rules make trade difficult. Moreover, this discourages investments by small farmers in increasing productivity and large investments by private companies in input supply and food marketing.

(TEA, 02.03.17)

New Trade Deal with UK

As suspected UK after Brexit will “do a free trade deal” with Ghana, its Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson said in Accra underpinning the argument of those who felt the country should have taken Brexit into account before signing the interim EPA with the EU.

Boris Johnson said that Brexit offers an opportunity for the two countries to take bilateral trade as a step further and that a lot of things matter both to UK and to Ghana in terms of tourism or security.

(B&FT, 17.02.17)

Guidelines by BUBU

Uganda has become the latest country in the region to introduce measures that protect procurement, contrary to the EAC’s Common Market Protocol. After unveiling a new push of the Buy Uganda, Build Uganda (BUBU) strategy, Kampala recently released guidelines on reservation schemes to promote local content in public procurement.

Finance Minister of Uganda Matia Kasaija said that the guidelines provide a mechanism for increasing the input of local labour, goods and services in the procurement of public sector projects within the country.

(TEA, 29.03.17)
Kenya’s bid to build a shared customs with its neighbours in East Africa remains in limbo as Tanzania continues to show reluctance to sign a crucial pact with the EU as deadline nears.

Failure to sign the deal as a bloc will result in a wave of taxes on products entering the EU market from Kenya making it uncompetitive.

According to the Economic Partnership Agreement, the East African nations will have to liberalise tariffs of imports from EU for products from East Africa for duty-free access in Europe.

(Kenya’s bid to build a shared customs with its neighbours in East Africa remains in limbo as Tanzania continues to show reluctance to sign a crucial pact with the EU as deadline nears. Failure to sign the deal as a bloc will result in a wave of taxes on products entering the EU market from Kenya making it uncompetitive. According to the Economic Partnership Agreement, the East African nations will have to liberalise tariffs of imports from EU for products from East Africa for duty-free access in Europe.)
Environment/Consumer Issues

**Action against Climate Change**

The cycle of drought in East Africa is projected to worsen in coming years as the effects of climate change take their toll on agricultural production.

Food and Agriculture Organisation’s (FAO) new report said that unless action is taken to make agriculture more sustainable, productive and resilient, climate change will seriously compromise food production in the region.

Ironically, industries in the agriculture sector are part of the problem, accounting for 21 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. East Africa, currently being ravaged by drought, is among regions facing the climate change threats. *(TEA, 16.03.17)*

**Firm Consumer Standards**

The World Bank Group has called on the Government of Ghana to urgently tighten its consumer protection standards, to promote the health, safety and security of consumers.

According to the World Bank Group’s Senior Director of Global Practice on Trade and Competitiveness, Anabel Gonzalez, Ghanaian authorities must dedicate serious attention to clear the country’s market of fake and substandard goods to safeguard the well-being of citizens.

Anabel Gonzalez said, “the Ghanaian Government must also make necessary investments like in laboratories and train personnel to verify compliance with those standards.” *(B&FT, 13.02.17)*

**Price Fixing Complaints**

The Competition Authority of Kenya will investigate supermarkets over rising customer complaints of price manipulation, where customers are misled to overpay for goods. The study will scrutinise the prevalence of dual price displays in retail settings and evaluate the time lag between changes in prices at the till relative to the shelf prices.

The study aims to map the average “route to retailer” from producers to the retail shelves, assess the level of competition and its determinants, including market power. The study will determine whether there are any strategic barriers to entry created by incumbent firms. *(BD, 30.01.17)*

**Regulation of 2,400 Tools**

The Zambia Bureau of Standards (ZABS) has targeted to regulate 2,400 tools from various sectors of the industry in 2017 from the 2,124 standardised in 2016, said Bureau Head of Marketing and Public Relations Hazel Zulu. She said the targeted number of instruments was in a bid to promote accurate measurements, enhance industrial efficiency and increase productivity for economic growth.

“Standardisation assures quality that ensures that industry can reliably use instruments to get the accurate measurement results required in industrial production for enhancing efficiency and productivity”, Zulu added. *(DN, 04.03.17)*

**Protect Tobacco Farmers**

A robust regulatory data base on tobacco will ensure that the Zambian Government collects enough revenue that will contribute significantly to the country’s gross domestic product, said Japan Tobacco International (JTI) Corporate Affairs Manager Litiya Matakala.

Matakala said that JTI was committed to working with the Government to address issues affecting the tobacco industry in the country.

He said that the long-term goal of the tobacco company was to ensure it supported the establishment of a transparent market structure and regulatory environment to ensure protection of the interests of growers, buyers and Government. *(DN, 29.03.17)*

**Better Services to Consumers**

The Acting Director General of the National Communications Authority (NCA) of Ghana, Joe Anokye, has charged Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) to work on improving Quality of Service (QoS) and ensure that consumers are satisfied.

According to Anokye, the Authority’s attention has been drawn to the QoS challenges, which range from call drops, poor quality of voice and slow internet services among others.

He informed the MNOs that their first line of action would be to resolve these issues within the Accra-Tema Metropolitan area, following which these efforts would be extended across Ghana. *(DG, 21.03.17)*

**Boycotting Banking Services**

Reviewing the high-interest rates on loans, improving ATM services and reducing the turnaround time at banking halls have emerged as some key concerns for customers’ banks in Ghana. The banks should attract more clients and maintain existing ones in the wake of increased competition in the industry.

Following the World Consumer Rights Day 2017, Citi Business News engaged customers on their impressions of services offered by their banks and the general indication of dissatisfaction with their banks with some considering the option for new ones if the status quo remains unchanged. *(http://citifmonline.com/16.03.17)*
UTS Nairobi held the National Reference Group 3 (NRG3) meeting at the Royal Tulip Hotel Nairobi, Kenya on March 13, 2017. The National Meeting is part of the activities under phase II of ‘Promoting Agriculture, Climate, and Trade Linkages in the East African Community (PACT-EAC2)’ project, being implemented by CUTS Geneva and other partner organisations in the EAC.

The objective of the meeting was to link recent research findings on agro-processing to relevant agro-processing policies in the pipeline to promote sustainable agro-processing in the region. The meeting brought together relevant stakeholders from the government, business community, civil society, media, academia, agro-processors, and farming communities, as well as representatives of regional and international organisations.

High level officials released national study entitled “Agro-industrial Development Policies: What Nexus to Climate, Food Security, and Trade?” These study analyses how agro-processing development can become more climate-aware, trade-driven and food security-enhancing, providing policy options for coherently harnessing the full potential of East Africa’s still nascent agro-industry despite climate change.

What policy improvements should we advocate for, and how? This question was at the heart of this event. Participants identified relevant policies where momentum exists for taking up certain recommendations of the study, and start planning an advocacy campaign for them to engage with policymakers towards the end. This was followed by a policy expert who provided an overview of relevant ongoing policy processes on which advocacy could focus on.

The NRG Members identified Food Nutrition and Security Policy (FNSP) as a policy to focus on during advocacy. Since the FNSP is at an advanced stage, other policies that have room for advocacy were identified as: Buy Kenya Build Kenya Policy and the National Investment Policy.

These policies should incorporate agro-processing and promote its sustainability by ensuring that it is climate aware, food security enhancing and trade driven. The policy actors that can be approached include Governors, Legislators, and Ministry officials. Advocacy activities can include but not limited to policy roundtables, participation in policy stakeholder forums, and disseminating Research Papers.

Another session on international trade and climate change negotiations played an important role in framing the policy space available to governments in developing agro-processing despite climate change. In this session, East African negotiators briefed participants about the state of play in these two negotiating fora as well as their implications for agro-processors.

In addition, debates during this session explored ways to achieve more coordinated positions across trade and climate change negotiations, which are increasingly interlinked. For instance, some climate issues like eco-friendly goods are being negotiated at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The end of the day was dedicated to featured joint initiatives of stakeholders who collaborated on making agro-processing more climate-aware, trade-driven and food security-enhancing.

Among other collaborations, African Women Agribusiness Network (AWAN) collaborated with Tangaza University Collage in Kenya jointly organised a side session to provide a platform for sharing ideas for increasing sales among agribusiness women.

The factors that were identified as key obstacles to increase sales among people in agribusiness included fear to venture into new markets; poor planning; over estimation of business performance; and setting low targets. Enzo prepared a training course on sales in collaboration with Tanganza University to benefit small scale agribusinesses. Participants in the session were provided with information on how to join and acquire benefit from the training.
Research Reports


This study looked at Kenya’s agro-industrialisation policies with a view to understand the nexus between agro-2 Agro-industrial Development Policies: What Nexus to Climate, Food Security, and Trade industrialisation, trade and food security, bearing in mind that climate change directly affects agriculture and food security. The study used secondary information and policy documents to analyse how integrated food security, climate change, and agro-industrialisation policies are structured in the country, and to what extent they are aligned to regional level policies.


This study proposed formulation and implementation of an agro-processing policy and strategy: According to the majority of people consulted while conducting this study, there is general consensus on the need to have a policy and strategy that is dedicated to support and promote a vibrant agroprocessing sector in Rwanda. In addition, it aims at mainstreaming gender in trade policy. It is important to ensure that gender is mainstreamed within trade policy.


Tanzania has begun implementing its second five-year development plan with a keen focus on industrialisation for economic transformation and human development. With efforts to promote agro-processing in the country, the link between climate, trade, and food security cannot be understated. This study attempts to identify and fill knowledge gaps on agro-industrial development related policies, and how they pertain to climate change, food security, and trade linkages in Tanzania.


The study is an analysis of Uganda’s agro-industrial policies and the extent to which they have mainstreamed climate change, food security, trade and gender. There has been resurgence in the efforts by many African countries in general, and Uganda in particular, to promote industrialisation in order to address the current development challenges.


Sources


The news/stories in this Newsletter are compressed from several newspapers. The sources given are to be used as a reference for further information and do not indicate the literal transcript of a particular news/story.