

The

Eastern Africa

Journal of Policy and Strategy

GLOCEPS

Weekly Influential Bulletin (WIB)

Monday 30th March - Friday 3rd April, 2026

THEME:

Building Resilient Food Systems in Eastern Africa Through Regional Integration

Eastern Africa faces escalating food insecurity driven by Red Sea tensions, the Houthi conflict, global supply disruptions, and recurrent climate shocks. Governments must advance regional integration to strengthen food system resilience across production, storage, and distribution. Coordinated strategic grain reserves, managed transparently with rotational and digital systems, can stabilize supply. Deepening trade integration through the East African Community and African Continental Free Trade Area, alongside harmonized standards and improved logistics, enables efficient food movement. Regional approaches to input diversification, climate-resilient agriculture, research, extension, and alternative transport corridors reduce systemic vulnerabilities.

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Strengthening Food System Resilience in Eastern Africa Amid Global Supply Chain Disruptions

Escalating insecurity in the Red Sea, partly linked to the Houthi movement and broader tensions within the Iran–US–Israel conflict, poses a growing threat to Eastern Africa’s food security. This is achieved by disrupting critical maritime trade routes, increasing freight and insurance costs, and amplifying volatility in global commodity markets. For countries in Eastern Africa, this translates into higher prices for imported staples, fuel, and fertilisers, key inputs that underpin domestic food production systems. The region’s vulnerability is exacerbated by structural challenges, including heavy reliance on food imports, limited agro-processing capacity, weak storage infrastructure, and exposure to recurrent climate shocks such as droughts and floods. These overlapping risks underscore the urgent need to reposition food security as a matter of strategic resilience rather than short-term supply management, particularly in the face of increasingly unpredictable geopolitical and economic environments.

To address these vulnerabilities, governments must prioritize strengthening strategic grain reserves through transparent,

rules-based, and efficiently managed systems. This includes adopting rotational stocking mechanisms to minimize post-harvest losses, integrating digital monitoring tools to enhance accountability, and coordinating reserves at both national and regional levels to enable timely redistribution during supply shocks. However, stockpiling alone is insufficient.

There is a parallel need to accelerate regional food trade integration under frameworks such as the East African Community, which can reduce dependence on extra-regional imports by facilitating the movement of food from surplus to deficit areas within the region. This requires harmonizing standards, reducing non-tariff barriers, and investing in cross-border infrastructure and logistics systems that improve efficiency and lower transaction costs.

Equally important is the diversification of agricultural inputs, particularly fertilisers, whose prices have become increasingly volatile due to global supply disruptions. Eastern African countries should pursue alternative sourcing strategies, including



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regional production, blended fertiliser use, and organic substitutes, to reduce exposure to external shocks. At the same time, scaling up climate-resilient agriculture through drought-tolerant crop varieties, expanded irrigation, and climate-smart farming practices can help stabilize yields and reduce vulnerability to environmental stress. Strengthening agricultural research institutions, extension services, and farmer financing mechanisms will be critical to ensuring widespread adoption and long-term sustainability.

Finally, enhancing alternative supply corridors, including overland and multimodal

transport routes, can reduce reliance on vulnerable maritime chokepoints such as the Red Sea. Strategic investments in regional connectivity, port infrastructure, and logistics coordination can help maintain supply chain continuity during disruptions. Taken together, these measures represent a shift from reactive crisis response to proactive resilience-building. By integrating strategic reserves, regional trade, input diversification, and climate adaptation, Eastern Africa can better withstand prolonged global supply chain disruptions and future geopolitical shocks, ultimately safeguarding food security, economic stability, and regional development.

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Unlocking Eastern Africa's Food Security Through Intra-Regional Trade Integration

Eastern Africa's food paradox reflects deep structural weaknesses in regional markets where surplus production exists alongside persistent hunger and chronic undernourishment. Countries such as Uganda and Tanzania frequently record surplus staple outputs while Kenya and Somalia encounter recurring deficits that contribute to food insecurity. Recent estimates indicate that about one in four people in Eastern Africa remains chronically undernourished, illustrating that production alone does not guarantee food security. This paradox signals that food availability must be matched with efficient distribution systems if regional food security is to be realized.

Current cross-border trade systems remain fragmented and inefficient, raising transaction costs for traders and undermining the responsiveness of food markets. Traders often face inconsistent regulatory requirements that increase costs and create informal barriers that disadvantage small and medium-scale traders. These barriers contribute to market segmentation, where food supplies cannot move quickly and predictably from surplus to deficit regions.

When transport costs, delays, and administrative burdens are high, food prices become more volatile and less accessible to vulnerable populations.

Addressing these challenges requires prioritizing investments in efficient transport corridors that link surplus-producing areas to deficit markets. Upgrading transport infrastructure, including rural feeder roads and major regional trunk roads, will reduce transit times and lower the cost of moving food across borders. Improved border facilities with streamlined procedures can enhance predictability for traders and reduce opportunities for arbitrary charges that erode trading margins. Coordinated development of storage facilities and aggregation centres along key corridors can help reduce post harvest losses and strengthen market responsiveness.

Harmonizing sanitary and phytosanitary standards across Eastern African states is essential to reduce non-tariff barriers that fragment food markets. When standards are aligned, quality assurances move with goods, and traders face lower compliance uncertainty when

accessing neighbouring markets. This regulatory alignment encourages formal trade and expands the pool of buyers and sellers participating in regional food markets. Harmonized standards also reduce the incentives for informal trade that often escapes regulatory oversight and deprives governments of necessary revenue.

The African Continental Free Trade Area presents a transformative framework for deepening trade integration by removing tariff and non-tariff restrictions on agricultural goods. Full implementation of AfCFTA protocols can strengthen regional supply chains and attract private sector investment in food value chain infrastructure. Connecting Eastern African markets to continental value chains expands

market opportunities for producers and enhances regional economic resilience. Policy coordination that brings together ministries of trade, agriculture, and finance can support evidence-based planning and responsive regulatory frameworks.

Strategic intra-regional integration will not automatically resolve all food insecurity challenges in Eastern Africa. However, by opening markets, reducing trade costs, stabilizing prices, and linking producers to broader value chains, the region can turn its food paradox into an opportunity for sustainable food security and economic resilience. Institutional coordination and investment in infrastructure will be key to realizing this potential.

Wednesday 1st April 2026

Digital Agriculture: Securing Eastern Africa's Food Systems

Digitalization offers a strategic pathway to address food insecurity in Eastern Africa by transforming how agricultural systems are managed, monitored, and integrated into broader value chains. The region continues to face persistent challenges, including climate variability, low productivity, fragmented markets, and limited access to timely information. By leveraging tools such as satellite data, AI-driven early warning systems, and precision agriculture, digital agriculture can significantly enhance the

ability of farmers and policymakers to anticipate risks, optimize production, and reduce post-harvest losses. These technologies enable real-time monitoring of weather patterns, soil conditions, and crop health, allowing for more informed and adaptive decision-making at both farm and policy levels.

At the farm level, precision agriculture technologies ranging from mobile-based advisory services to sensor-driven irrigation

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systems allow farmers to optimize input use, including water, seeds, and fertilisers. This not only improves yields but also reduces costs and environmental degradation. AI-driven advisories, delivered through accessible digital platforms, can provide tailored recommendations on planting cycles, pest control, and harvesting strategies, enhancing productivity and resilience. At the same time, digital platforms are expanding access to critical services, including extension support, financial services such as credit and insurance, and market information. This reduces information asymmetries and strengthens farmers' integration into local and regional markets, ultimately improving incomes and food availability.

Beyond the farm, digitalization plays a critical role in strengthening entire agricultural value chains. Data analytics can improve supply chain coordination by predicting demand, optimizing storage and transportation, and reducing inefficiencies that contribute to food loss. Governments and regional bodies can also use digital tools to enhance food security planning, including monitoring national food stocks and coordinating responses to emerging shortages. In this sense, digital agriculture is not only a productivity tool but also a strategic enabler of systemic resilience, particularly in a region increasingly exposed to climate and market shocks.

However, the transformative potential of digital agriculture is contingent on addressing several

structural barriers. Affordability remains a key constraint, as many smallholder farmers lack access to smartphones, reliable internet, or the financial resources to adopt new technologies. Connectivity gaps, particularly in rural areas, further limit the reach of digital solutions. In addition, low levels of digital literacy can hinder effective use, even where technologies are available. Without deliberate intervention, there is a risk that digitalization could deepen existing inequalities by benefiting more resourced farmers while excluding the most vulnerable.

To overcome these challenges, targeted public-private investment is essential. Governments should prioritize expanding rural digital infrastructure, including broadband connectivity and energy access, while incentivizing private sector innovation in affordable, locally relevant technologies. Investments in localized data systems are also critical to ensure that digital solutions are context-specific and responsive to local conditions. Equally important is scaling farmer training and extension services to build digital skills and trust in new technologies.

Ultimately, digital agriculture offers a pathway to move Eastern Africa from reactive food crisis management to proactive, data-driven resilience. By integrating technology across production, distribution, and governance systems, the region can strengthen food security, enhance productivity, and build more inclusive and sustainable agricultural economies.



Photo Credit: Waya Media

Strengthening Eastern Africa's Food Security through Strategic Grain Reserves

Eastern Africa continues to face serious food security challenges driven by climate extremes, market volatility, and demographic growth. According to a 2025 World Bank analysis, approximately 62.9 million people, about 25 percent of the population in seven IGAD countries, experienced high levels of acute food insecurity in 2024. The 2025 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report by UN agencies estimated that 673 million people globally were hungry in 2024, with Africa showing the highest regional prevalence above 20 percent of its population. These figures illustrate the structural vulnerabilities in food production, distribution, and access across the region.

Strategic Grain Reserves in Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda can play a critical role in stabilizing staple food supplies and prices during droughts, climate disruptions, and supply shocks. Evidence from the 2025 joint World Bank, World Food Programme, and FAO report highlights that well-managed reserves are most effective when integrated into broader food security strategies with clear governance, transparent release mechanisms, and linkages to social protection programs.

Despite their potential, reserves face operational constraints that reduce their effectiveness. Storage losses caused by inadequate infrastructure, pest infestations, and poor logistics limit available stocks during crises. Funding gaps hinder the acquisition and maintenance of grains and storage facilities. Coordination inefficiencies across ministries, agencies, and regional frameworks undermine timely decision-making. At the regional level, discussions on establishing an East African Community strategic grain reserve remain largely at the framework stage. Collective action through a regional reserve could enhance resilience by facilitating cross-border redistribution, reducing localized shortages, and strengthening market stability.

Addressing these challenges requires prioritizing investment in modern storage infrastructure, transparent governance structures, and harmonized policies across countries. Capacity building, monitoring systems, and financial support are essential to transform reserves from reactive safety stocks into proactive instruments that stabilize markets and protect vulnerable populations. Comparative experience from



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countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya demonstrates that strategic management, fiscal autonomy, and strong institutional oversight significantly improve the effectiveness of national reserves.

Ultimately, nationally and regionally coordinated strategic grain reserves can serve as a critical pillar of Eastern Africa's food

security resilience. By integrating reserves into broader market and social protection systems, governments can not only buffer shocks and protect vulnerable populations but also strengthen long-term food system stability and resilience in line with sustainable development and regional cooperation objectives.

Friday 3rd April 2026

Bolstering Trade and Agricultural Integration for Resilient Food Security in Eastern Africa

Enhancing food security in Eastern Africa requires a deliberate integration of trade and agricultural policies to build systems that are stable, affordable, and resilient to both internal and external shocks. Despite significant agricultural potential, the region continues to face persistent food insecurity driven by fragmented markets, trade barriers, post-harvest losses, and uneven production patterns. Strengthening the link between agriculture and trade is therefore essential to ensure that food moves efficiently from surplus to deficit areas, reducing volatility and improving access. Regional frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provide a critical opportunity to address these challenges by reducing tariffs on essential food commodities and facilitating smoother cross-border trade.

However, tariff reduction alone is insufficient. A major constraint to intra-regional food trade lies in non-tariff barriers, particularly inconsistent and restrictive sanitary and phytosanitary standards. Harmonizing these standards across Eastern African countries can significantly reduce delays, lower transaction costs, and increase the predictability of trade flows. This is especially important for perishable agricultural goods, where time-sensitive movement is critical. In parallel, strengthening customs processes and improving regulatory coordination can further enhance trade efficiency and market integration.

Infrastructure development is another key pillar of resilient food systems. Poor road networks, limited storage facilities, and inefficient transport corridors contribute to significant post-harvest losses and high food prices. Strategic investments in rural roads, cold storage, and logistics systems can reduce waste, improve market access for farmers, and stabilize supply. In addition, establishing and coordinating regional food reserves can act as a buffer during periods of shortage, enabling the timely redistribution of food supplies across borders. These reserves must be managed transparently and integrated into broader regional response mechanisms to ensure effectiveness.

Aligning trade integration efforts with agricultural development strategies is equally critical. Frameworks such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) provide a foundation for strengthening domestic production through increased investment in agriculture, improved productivity, and enhanced resilience to climate shocks. By linking CAADP goals with trade facilitation measures, countries can ensure that increased production translates into improved food availability and affordability across the region, rather than being constrained by market inefficiencies.

An inclusive approach is also necessary to ensure that the benefits of trade and agricultural integration are widely shared. Small-scale traders,

many of whom operate informally and play a crucial role in cross-border food distribution, should be supported through simplified trade regimes, access to finance, and improved market information systems. At the same time, strengthening data systems to monitor food flows, prices, and supply dynamics can enable more responsive and evidence-based policymaking.

Ultimately, bolstering trade and agricultural integration represents a shift from fragmented national approaches to a coordinated regional strategy for food security. By reducing barriers, investing in infrastructure, aligning policy frameworks, and promoting inclusive participation, Eastern Africa can build more resilient food systems capable of withstanding shocks while ensuring sustainable access to food for its populations.



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