

# Extending a helping hand

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**STEPHANIE WILCOCK** has worked in the area of Trade and Economic Development with USAID for 11 years and has led USAID's efforts to increase trade and competitiveness in the East Africa region for the last four years. The assistance provided by her division also contributes to the accomplishment of USG Aid-for-Trade commitments under the World Trade Organisation. She has Masters degrees in Economics, Public Administration and Anthropology.

**T**he US Government (USAID) is a strong partner of the East African Community (EAC). In the past ten years the EAC has recorded significant achievements, including the implementation of the Free Trade Area, the Customs Union and the Common Market. When fully implemented, these achievements will dramatically increase the competitiveness of the region's businesses, increase food security and allow the region's citizens to realise a more prosperous future for their children.

The United States has a long history of extending a helping hand to those people overseas struggling to make a better life, recover from a disaster or striving to live in a free and democratic country. It is this caring that stands as a hallmark of the United States around the world – and shows the world our true character as a nation.

USAID's assistance to Africa works to help African governments, institutions and organisations mobilise innovative approaches to resolving challenges in health, education, economic growth, agriculture and the environment. In East Africa, USAID works with the EAC to reduce the time and cost of trade regionally, broker business links between the region's business men and women, increase the availability of food and protect the region's delicate ecosystem.

## Reducing the time and cost of trade

In 2010, USAID supported the launch of the EAC Customs Union. The EAC Customs Union will



The Masai River  
at sunset

allow East Africans to move their goods with fewer delays and less expense. USAID is also working with EAC to ensure that implementation of the Customs Management Act is consistent with standards set by the World Customs Organisation and the WTO.

In 2006, USAID developed a customs software called the Revenue Authorities Digital Data Exchange (RADDEX), which allows customs officials to communicate virtually across borders – saving time, money and increasing transparency. Currently all declarations at Malaba (Kenya/Uganda), Busia (Kenya/Uganda), and Song'we (Tanzania/Malawi) are completed using RADDEX. USAID and the EAC are now collaborating to develop RADDEX 2.0, which will be a truly regional platform, allowing a wide range of data to flow seamlessly between the five EAC Member States. The 2010 World Bank Doing Business East African Report cites RADDEX as a success in the effort to strengthen coordination between the region's customs officials.

USAID is also supporting development of an EAC trade database that will give all EAC member states on-line access to trade statistics and information on the rules and requirements for trade. The trade data will be invaluable to the region's policy makers and businesses.

## Increasing food security

The free movement of staple foods is critical to meeting the food security needs of the region. All agricultural commodities (save for sensitive products) are traded without tariff under the EAC Customs Union, a first step towards a 'food without borders' policy that has gained support from private and public sector stakeholders. Another step forward is the formation of harmonised standards for agricultural trade. Today all EAC countries have published EAC maize standards which were developed with support from USAID. With USAID support, the EAC is now developing 23 additional standards for food crops traded in EAC. The new standards will hopefully be approved by the EAC in the next year.

The EAC introduced a Simplified Certificate of Origin (SCO) in 2007. The SCO provides an avenue for smallholder farmers to move goods worth less than US\$500 across EAC borders without having to pay duties. The farmers simply need to show that their goods originated in an EAC member state. With one

piece of paper (the SCO) a farmer can move up to US\$500 of horticultural goods from Kigali, Rwanda to Nairobi, Kenya without having to pay any duties. Through policies like the Simplified Certificate of Origin, the EAC is making it easier for smallholder farmers to get food from farm to market.


### **Protecting the Mara River Basin**

USAID is partnering with the Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC) to implement a trans-boundary biodiversity programme in the Mara River Basin. The wildlife that draws tourist from all over the world to Kenya and Tanzania relies on the healthy functioning of this uniquely integrated and rich ecosystem for their existence. The survival of this ecosystem depends on the flow of the Mara River. LVBC is responsible for facilitating and promoting sustainable cross-border management of the Mara River Basin. As a regional, intergovernmental organisation, the LVBC is strategically placed to harmonise policies for the conservation of this globally treasured area.

Since 2009, USAID and LVBC have partnered with the Tanzanian and Kenyan governments and other key stakeholders to implement the Biodiversity

Action Plan which was adopted by EAC Ministers. The Action Plan addresses threats to biodiversity hotspots in the Mara River Basin and identifies ways to sustainably manage these habitats. Working with a range of stakeholders including governments, private sector and regional organisations, the LVBC is also conducting a Mara River Environmental Flows Assessment that will contribute to the establishment of a legally binding minimum river reserve which will both provide for human consumption and protect this delicate ecosystem. Finally, USAID is partnering with the LVBC to establish a trans-boundary agreement to ensure water flows to sustain the biodiversity of the Mara-Serengeti ecosystem and will encourage implementation of harmonised river basin management practices and policies.

### **USAID and the EAC: A long-lasting partnership**

USAID and the EAC have been strong partners for almost a decade and this partnership is only getting stronger. USAID looks forward to working side-by-side with the EAC in the coming years to realise the promise of regional integration and improve the quality of life for all East African citizens. 

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