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East African Community Common Market and Competitiveness of Agricultural Processing Micro Small and Medium Sized Enterprises of Member States: A Study of Uganda's Participation in the EAC.

This study aimed at assessing the impact of East African Community (EAC) Common Market on the competitiveness of Agro-processing Micro Small and Medium sized Enterprises (MSMEs), taking a case of Uganda's participation in the EAC. The objectives of the study were; to establish how the EAC Common Market had facilitated Agro-processes of MSMEs, identify the challenges faced by MSMEs and possible solutions. The assessment was done in border posts of Mutukula, Malaba, Busia and Katuna where 120 respondents were purposively chosen from Agro-processing Micro Small and Medium sized Enterprises. The researcher held discussions with officials from the Ministries of Trade Industry and cooperatives, Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries and East African Community Affairs. The study employed a multifaceted data collection approach using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The data were analysed using Ms Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings of the study revealed that there is significant facilitation of MSMEs competitiveness by the EAC Common Market through creation of a bigger market, reduction in tariffs and Non-Tariff Barriers, improvement in infrastructure, sharing of skills and better production technology amongst the partner states and free movement of goods within the EAC among others. However, the findings established that there is limited awareness about the freedom, rights and opportunities arising from the EAC Common Market protocol. The respondents recommended the need for Government of Uganda to strengthen outreach programmes on EAC Common Market, enhance linkages between large corporations and MSMEs, provide Business Development Services, quality and standards improvement, lower tariffs on power, rehabilitate and maintain community access and feeder roads among others. These efforts by government will empower the MSMEs to improve their internal processes to enable them to compete and benefit more from the EAC Common Market. The researcher in conclusion agrees that the EAC Common Market can enhance the benefit and competitiveness of Agro-processing MSMEs in the regional and international markets if efforts are put in place to strengthen their operations and processes.

Key Words: East African Community, Common Market, Agricultural Processing, Micro Small, Medium Sized Enterprises, Member States.