POLICY BRIEF FOR YOUTH AGRIPRENEURS

Trading Made Simple: **Your Guide to the EAC Simplified Trade Regime**

A practical explainer for young cross-border agribusiness traders in East Africa | **Sep. 2026**

Why This Matters to You

If you are a young trader moving farm produce, livestock, or small manufactured goods across an EAC border, the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) is likely the single most useful trade rule you can learn. It was built for people like you — small-scale, informal traders — not large importers. Used correctly, it can mean skipping duties, avoiding a clearing agent, and clearing the border with one free document instead of a full customs declaration[1].

What is the STR?

The STR is a fast-track customs process under the EAC Customs Union (and mirrored under COMESA) for small consignments of goods produced within the region. It rests on three simple building blocks[2]:

- **A value threshold:** your consignment must be worth US$2,000 or less[3].
- **A Simplified Certificate of Origin (SCOO):** a free, single-use document proving your goods were grown or made in the EAC.
- **Simplified procedures:** paperwork is handled at the border by a Customs Officer or a trained Trade Information Desk Officer, so you generally don't need to pay a clearing agent[4].

Quick Facts

Quick fact	What it means for you
Consignment limit	US$2,000 or less, per trip, per transaction
Your goods must be	Grown or made within the EAC (not imported from outside the region and re-sold)
Document you need	A Simplified Certificate of Origin (SCOO) - free, one per trip
Who fills it out	A Customs Officer or Trade Information Desk Officer at the border — you usually do not need to hire a clearing agent
What you save on	Import duty (plus, in Kenya, the Import Declaration Fee and Railway Development Levy)

[1] Kenya Revenue Authority. (2023). *Simplified trade regime for micro, small and medium enterprises: MSME information pack.* https://kratv.kra.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/MSME-information-Pack_CBC-2792023.pdf
[2] Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. (2025). *Current threshold for the simplified trade regime.* https://www.comesa.int/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/CURRENT-THRESHOLD-FOR-THE-SIMPLIFIED-TRADE-REGIME-STR1.pdf
[3] African Trade and Knowledge Hub / TRAPCA. (2025). *Frequently asked questions on trading within EAC.* https://www.atkh.trapca.org/faqs/
[4] East African Community–Germany. (n.d.). *EAC simplified guide for MSMEs on cross-border trade.* https://strapi.eacgermany.org/uploads/62cd15406373a361542459_d458a93278.pdf

Quick fact	What it means for you
What you still pay	VAT, excise duty and withholding tax where applicable — the STR does not remove these
If you go over US$2,000	You must use the standard import/export process instead — with a full customs declaration and duties

What You Can Trade Under the STR

Only goods on an agreed *"Common List of Goods"* qualify — if what you are carrying is not on that list, you cannot use the STR no matter how small the value. The list is set at the specific border you cross, not published as one single EAC-wide document, but the categories most commonly included are:

- Fresh, unprocessed, semi-processed and processed agricultural produce — fruits, vegetables, roots and seeds
- Livestock, poultry, meat, meat products, eggs and milk
- Organic chemicals
- Plastics and articles of plastic
- Textiles and fabrics
- Glassware
- Motor vehicle parts
- Paper and printed matter
- Machinery and mechanical appliances

Practical tip: for fresh produce and other crop-based perishables, you may be exempted from presenting some export, import, or phytosanitary certificates — but your goods can still be inspected and must meet health and phytosanitary standards, so keep them clean, well-packed, and disease-free before you travel.

How to Use the STR at the Border — Step by Step

1. Check your consignment's total value. If it is US$2,000 or less and made up of EAC-origin goods on the Common List, you qualify.
2. Go to the border post and find the Customs Officer or Trade Information Desk Officer — look for the Trade Information Desk if the border has one.
3. Ask for a Simplified Certificate of Origin (SCOO) for your consignment. It is free and issued on the spot — you do not pay for it and cannot reuse it for a future trip.
4. Present your goods for the standard health/phytosanitary check if you are carrying crops, livestock, or animal products.
5. Cross with your SCOO. On the importing side, your goods should be exempt from import duty (and, in Kenya, also the Import Declaration Fee and Railway Development Levy).
6. Remember that VAT, excise duty and withholding tax are not covered by the STR — budget for these if they apply in the destination country.

Worked Examples

These illustrative scenarios show how the US$2,000 threshold plays out in practice.

Trader	Consignment	Outcome under the STR
Amina	600 kg of onions grown in western Kenya, worth about US$650, sold to a trader across the border in Uganda	**Qualifies.** At the border, Amina gets a free SCOO confirming Kenyan origin, pays no import duty in Uganda, and does not need a clearing agent.
Joseph	A mixed shipment of day-old chicks and eggs from a youth poultry cooperative in Tanzania, worth US$1,200, sold to a buyer in Rwanda	**Qualifies,** since the value is under US$2,000 and the goods are of Tanzanian (EAC) origin — though live animals and eggs must still pass the required health/phytosanitary checks even under STR.
Grace	A larger consignment of dried beans worth US$2,500 shipped from Uganda to Kenya	**Does not qualify** — the value is above the US$2,000 threshold, so Grace must use the standard import/export procedure with full customs declarations and applicable duties, or split the shipment into smaller qualifying batches on separate trips.

What the STR Does Not Cover

- Consignments valued above US$2,000 — these must go through the standard import/export process with full customs declarations[5].
- Goods not on the Common List for your specific border crossing, even if the value is small[6].
- VAT, excise duty and withholding tax — the STR only removes import duty (and related levies in some countries), not domestic taxes[7][8].
- Non-tariff barriers unrelated to customs duty — things like inconsistent standards, costly certification, or unclear documentation can still slow you down even with an SCOO in hand, and youth and women traders continue to raise these as obstacles in EAC trade forums[9].

Looking Ahead

There is an active policy conversation about raising the US$2,000 threshold and further digitizing STR paperwork, with a review reportedly targeted for around end of 2025[10]. Trader associations are also pushing EAC governments to accept national ID cards as valid travel documents for cross-border movement, and to simplify or reduce the cost of SPS/TBT certification for small traders[11]. Staying connected to your national trade association or the EAC Trade Information Desk at your usual border crossing is the best way to hear about these changes as they happen.

Where to Get Help

- Ask for the Trade Information Desk Officer at your border post — this is the fastest way to get an SCOO issued correctly.

[5] Kenya Revenue Authority, "Simplified Trade Regime for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises — MSME Information Pack," 2023, https://kratv.kra.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/MSME-information-Pack_CBC-2792023.pdf
[6] African Trade and Knowledge Hub / TRAPCA, "Frequently Asked Questions on Trading Within EAC," 2025, https://www.atkh.trapca.org/faqs/
[7] Kenya Revenue Authority, "Simplified Trade Regime for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises — MSME Information Pack," 2023, https://kratv.kra.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/MSME-information-Pack_CBC-2792023.pdf
[8] EAC-Germany, "EAC Simplified Guide for MSMEs on Cross-Border Trade," https://strapi.eacgermany.org/uploads/62cd15406373a361542459_d458a93278.pdf
[9] East Africa Business Council, "East Africa Cross-Border Trader Associations Forum calls on governments of EAC Partner States to eliminate NTBs hindering youth and women in agri-food trade," 2025, https://eabc-online.com/east-africa-cross-border-trader-associations-forum-calls-on-governments-of-eac-partner-states-to-eliminate-ntbs-hindering-youth-and-women-in-agri-food-trade/
[10] African Trade and Knowledge Hub / TRAPCA, "Frequently Asked Questions on Trading Within EAC," 2025, https://www.atkh.trapca.org/faqs/
[11] East Africa Business Council, "East Africa Cross-Border Trader Associations Forum calls on governments of EAC Partner States to eliminate NTBs hindering youth and women in agri-food trade," 2025, https://eabc-online.com/east-africa-cross-border-trader-associations-forum-calls-on-governments-of-eac-partner-states-to-eliminate-ntbs-hindering-youth-and-women-in-agri-food-trade/

- Contact your national revenue authority (e.g., Kenya Revenue Authority, Uganda Revenue Authority, Tanzania Revenue Authority) for the specific Common List of Goods that applies at your border.
- Reach out to your national cross-border trader association for updates on STR reforms and threshold changes.