



DECEMBER 2019 NEWSLETTER

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About the TFWA Program

The Trade Facilitation West Africa (TFWA) Program is an initiative driven by multiple development partners that aims to improve existing trade facilitation measures in West Africa. The program strives to reduce the time and cost of trade borne by the private sector, especially by improving the movement of goods along selected corridors, and supporting small-scale traders – including women and other key stakeholders – with trade facilitation reforms and programs.

The TFWA Program brings together key development partners, including European Union, USAID, Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Government of the Federal Republic of

Germany to support countries in the region and regional bodies (the ECOWAS and UEMOA Commissions) in the implementation of a combination of targeted interventions and measures.

The TFWA Program is managed by the World Bank Group and the German Development Cooperation Agency (GIZ) – the program's implementing partners – with strategic oversight and guidance provided by a Steering Committee, chaired by the ECOWAS Commission and supported by the UEMOA Commission as deputy chair.

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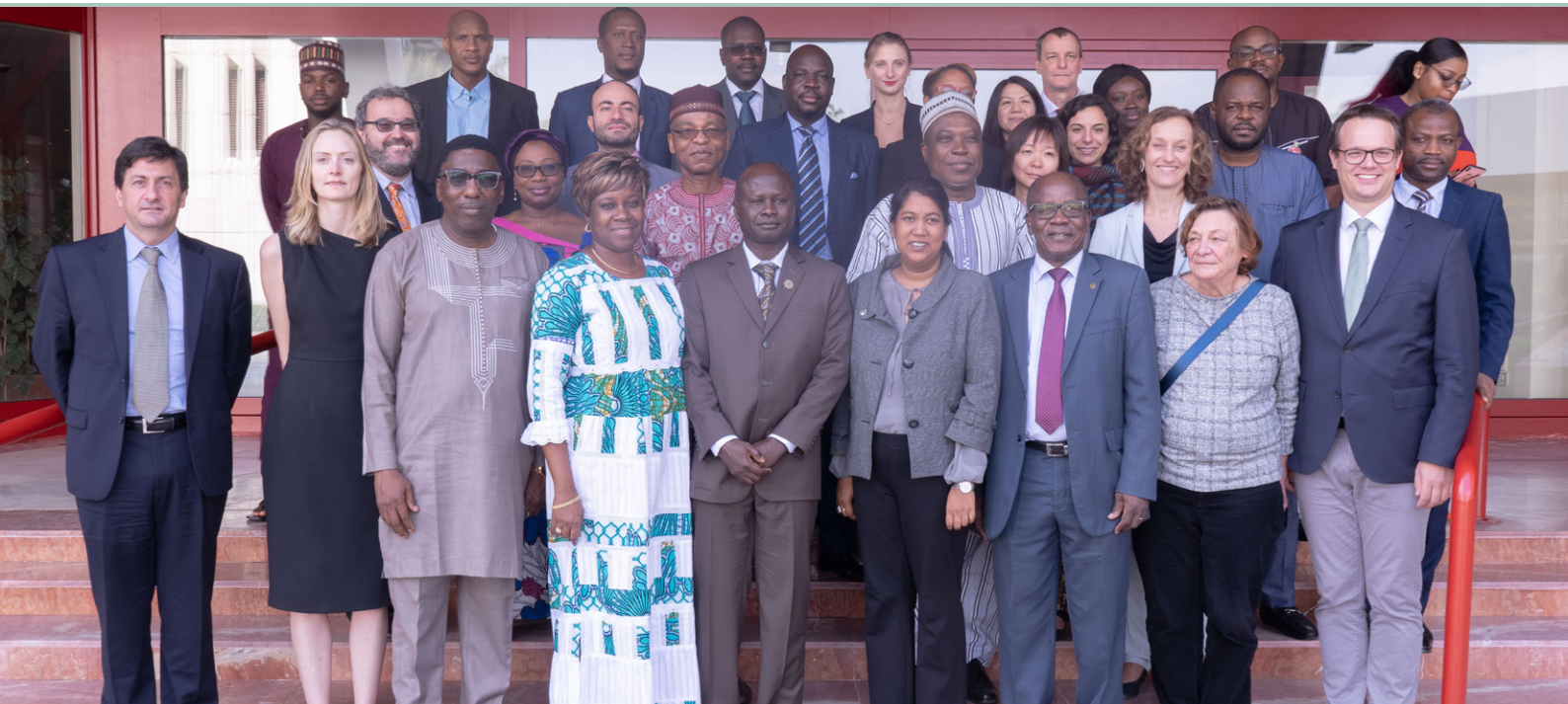
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TFWA program steering committee gathers to mark the program's first year

On December 6, 2019, the TFWA Program Steering Committee held its second meeting in Abuja. The Steering Committee governs the program and provides strategic oversight for the initiative. Meeting at least once a year, the Steering Committee works alongside the TFWA Program Technical Committee, which provides specific technical inputs to the Steering Committee and meets twice per year.

ECOWAS, UEMOA and program partners – including GIZ, the World Bank, the European Union, the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and USAID – took part in the meeting. During the opening ceremony, attendees acknowledged progress made in the program's first year. Chairs highlighted the important actions carried out by the program since its launch in September 2018, noting steps made toward the improvement and more efficient implementation of trade facilitation measures, the more efficient movement of goods along selected corridors, and the reduction of barriers for small businesses and women traders.

The meeting focused on a review of activities carried out during the first year of the program's implementation. It also covered activities planned for 2020, which aim to strengthen gains and inroads made to date. Following the successful meeting, the program bodies will come together again at the end of March 2020 in Burkina Faso.



Consultative meetings help advance regional transit guarantee regime

On October 21, 2019, the ECOWAS Commission, in collaboration with its TFWA Program partners, hosted a meeting with AFREXIM Bank. The meeting – which was held in Abuja – provided a platform to discuss modalities for a proposed regional transit guarantee regime in the ECOWAS region, developed by AFREXIM Bank. Meeting participants discussed ways to simplify transit procedures and introduce documentation consistent with international standards and best practices, thereby increasing confidence in the transit regime.

One day later, on October 22, 2019, ECOWAS Commission and TFWA Program representatives met with national transit guarantors to further discuss the concept. This meeting provided an opportunity for the regional transit guarantee regime – which will eventually replace national guarantors – to be discussed with these important national-level stakeholders. The main aim of the meeting was to present the proposed concept and discuss possible roles for national guarantors in the impending system.

Following these consultative meetings, the transit guarantee modalities proposed by AFREXIM Bank were presented to ECOWAS member states for discussion and validation. This meeting took place from November 13 to 15, 2019 in Abuja, and each ECOWAS member state was represented by two customs administration delegates. Other participants included representatives from the Regional Customs Network for Transit Trade (SIGMAT), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the World Customs Organization, and the UEMOA Commission. The meeting encouraged member states to thoroughly examine the new draft transit text, which supports the electronic environment and provides the legal basis for the full and community-wide implementation of SIGMAT.

At the end of the three-day meeting, a series of recommendations were made with a view to finalizing the draft automated transit legal text. As a next step and following a final review, another meeting will be convened in the early part of 2020 to validate the text.



ECOWAS trade liberalisation scheme takes center stage at regional meeting

On November 11 and 12, 2019, regional stakeholders came together to discuss the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS). The meeting, held in Abuja, aimed to identify and reduce the obstacles limiting the free movement of goods approved under the ETLS. At the same time, the meeting aimed to denounce bad practices related to ETLS implementation in ECOWAS member states, encouraging proper mechanisms to enforce the ETLS texts.

Representatives from national customs offices, the National Approval Committee, the private sector, export promotion agencies, the African Center for Trade, Integration and Development, Borderless Alliance, ECOWAS, and GIZ participated in the meeting. Over the two-day session, attendees shared recommendations for ECOWAS, member states, and the private sector. Specifically, participants identified bad practices related to the implementation of ETLS, making arrangements and outlining a strategy to resolve conflicts and ETLS disputes. In addition to creating this dispute resolution strategy, participants discussed cases of obstruction in suspension, reached agreement around a single levy for the community, and focused on making mutual assistance between customs administrations functional.

Beyond this valuable platform for discussion, the meeting provided an opportunity to launch the newly created ETLS web site. With TFWA Program support, the web site was designed to enhance ETLS implementation, serving as an additional resource for stakeholders in the region.



Women entrepreneurs meet with customs administrators and connect with available resources

On October 29 and 30, 2019, the TFWA Program organized a two-day regional meeting on ECOWAS customs procedures for women entrepreneurs from small cross-border enterprises. The main objective of this gathering was to establish a platform for the discussion and exchange of information with small business entrepreneurs. Within this scope, the program shared available resources to help facilitate the free movement of products at borders, ensuring participants enjoy the benefits that the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme offers to products originating in ECOWAS member states. The overall purpose of this workshop was to make citizens benefit from customs tools available to the community.

Led by the ECOWAS Commission, the meeting took place in Abuja. More than 60 women entrepreneurs and representatives from small cross-border enterprises, national customs offices, civil society, NGOs, and export promotion agencies participated in the event. Representatives from the ECOWAS Commission, GIZ, the World Bank, and the World Customs Organization also joined the workshop.

Importantly, the workshop served as a platform for exchange between women cross-border traders and customs administrations. During the workshop, participants suggested regional trade policy training and sensitization for women, improved coordination between agencies at border points, improved infrastructure at the borders to streamline the movement of goods, and simplified ECOWAS and other regional policies to facilitate easier compliance. As a result of the meeting, an action plan – to identify which activities are a priority to improve the free movement of small enterprise-sourced products – was developed and approved.



ECOWAS regional forum for national trade facilitation committees hosts inaugural session

On September 10 and 11, 2019, regional National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) representatives came together for the first ECOWAS Regional Forum for NTFCs. This gathering marked the inauguration of the forum, which will focus on trade facilitation reforms and was designed to serve as a regional exchange platform for key public and private stakeholders. At the same time, the forum will provide a launching pad for lobbying governments to pursue trade flow-friendly public policy objectives related to border controls, consumer protection, public health, security, and revenue collection.

In this inaugural meeting, forum participants discussed a number of important topics, including: regional trade facilitation initiatives within ECOWAS; national trade facilitation initiatives; member state status updates on ratification, categorization and notifications on the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement; and best practices in establishing trade facilitation committees. As a result of this first gathering, the forum successfully adopted terms of reference to establish a proposed Regional Trade Facilitation Committee, paving the way for the formalization of a body with a wholistic regional trade facilitation coordination mandate.

In addition to facilitating meaningful discussions and moving to establish a Regional Trade Facilitation Committee, the inaugural forum provided an excellent opportunity to share information and present members with available tools and resources. Specifically, the gathering provided a forum to highlight assistance related to the implementation of both national and regional trade facilitation reforms being offered by international partners, including the Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility, the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Empowerment Programme, and the TFWA Program. The forum looks forward to its next gathering, when stakeholders will again have an opportunity to come together and advance the regional trade facilitation agenda.

COUNTRY-LEVEL UPDATES



Burkina Faso



TFWA program supports regional rail interconnection in Burkina Faso and Côte D'Ivoire

From October 28 to 30, 2019, the customs commissions of both Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, SITARAIL (the company that provides rail transportation between the two countries), and the World Customs Organization met in Ouagadougou to develop a roadmap for rail interconnection implementation. Earlier in the year, in March 2019, customs interconnection became a reality for all traders working the Burkina Faso – Côte d'Ivoire road corridor. Since then, authorities from both countries have reported that – in an attempt to evade taxes due to the state – traders now prefer using the rail system, which is not yet fully computerized or interconnected. To help address this problem, the TFWA Program is providing support to customs authorities in both Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, advancing rail interconnection.

The main objectives of this meeting were to: (i) finalize the joint legal circular, which is needed to make rail interconnection a reality; (ii) agree on the various functional and technical specifications required to integrate rail operations; (iii) define timelines; and (iv) establish the operational transit supervision working group, which will conduct an ongoing audit of road interconnection and raise issues for resolution. All of the key stakeholders participating in this meeting demonstrated a strong resolve to launch rail interconnection on the Abidjan – Ouagadougou corridor by the end of September 2020. Meeting participants reviewed the key road interconnection issues facing customs authorities on the Abidjan – Ouagadougou corridor, and recommended an extension of road interconnection between Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Togo. Additionally, participants proposed revisions to the current legal text on interconnection, which is required for the successful introduction of rail interconnection. With productive discourse and a number of measurable takeaways, the next meeting is scheduled for January 2020.



Niger

TFWA program mission to Niger paves the way for future engagement

From October 21 to 26, 2019, the TFWA Program team met with key Nigerien stakeholders to advance the trade facilitation agenda in Niger. The mission aimed to re-engage Niger's National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) while also identifying ways to support the NTFC as it works to align trade facilitation reforms with World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA) obligations and the African Union African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

To achieve this goal, TFWA Program experts met with NTFC stakeholders and participated to a two-day NTFC workshop on October 23 and 24. The workshop – chaired by the Adviser to the Minister of Commerce – helped the NTFC establish a path toward maximizing benefits provided by international development initiatives, like the TFWA Program. Harnessing this international support would ensure Nigerien trade facilitation reforms continue to advance and meet international obligations.

Over the course of this mission, the team also helped establish a work plan focused on meeting WTO TFA notification requirements and official deadlines. With TFWA Program support, the NTFC decided to establish two working groups to coordinate stakeholder knowledge and interests. Considering fast-approaching deadlines – including the February 2020 deadline for the notification of final Category B dates – these newly established working groups should improve the committee's deadline adherence. Being aware of the high importance of this work to effectively promote trade in Niger, private sector representatives agreed to partly fund the next NTFC workshop to consolidate the working groups' inputs.

Based on the results of this mission, the TFWA Program is planning to assist Niger's NTFC to consolidate and validate the WTO notifications and also aims to share information on Niger's capacity building requirements in January 2020. In addition to these practical outcomes, the mission reaffirmed the strategic consistency between the WTO TFA's provisions, the NTFC's strategic role, and the AfCFTA's vision of robust regional trade integration and an inclusive approach to support small-scale traders – especially women – in designing trade facilitation reforms.

COUNTRY-LEVEL UPDATES



Sierra Leone



Sensitization workshop outlines trade facilitation agreement effects on Sierra Leone

From October 28 to 31, 2019, Borderless Alliance, the ECOWAS Commission, GIZ, and the Sierra Leone Ministry of Trade and Industry came together in Freetown to host a workshop under the TFWA Program umbrella. The workshop – which convened public and private sector stakeholders – aimed to sensitize participants on regional, continental, and World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreements (WTO TFAs) and their effects on Sierra Leone.

As part of this sensitization, the workshop facilitated a public-private dialogue on regional and continental trade protocols, discussing the TFA's benefits for the private sector, the ECOWAS Custom code, and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), among other topics.

The workshop attracted more than 100 participants over three days – 22 private sector representatives attended on the first day of the workshop, followed by 33 custom officers on day two, and 55 participants from the private sector, various ministries, and other institutions responsible for making trade policies coming together on day three.

During the sessions, Sierra Leone's Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry indicated that Sierra Leone had submitted its commitment to the WTO and rectified its AfCFTA agreement. As a next step, stakeholders agreed that the Ministry of Trade and Industry should organize sector-based meetings to improve understanding of the effects of these agreements on Sierra Leone's economy. The Ministry of Trade and Industry agreed to engage the private sector to discuss government-provided support for the private sector, ensuring the country's manufacturers can compete within the framework of the signed agreements.