



MARCH 2021 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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TFWA Program Hosts Panel on Trade and Gender at UN Women CSW65



The TFWA Program took part in UN Women's 65th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65) by hosting a panel discussion on cross-border women traders. Taking place on March 18, the event gave panelists an opportunity to explore how to prioritize women traders during post-COVID economic recoveries. Despite women's active roles as economic players, women traders in West Africa struggle to retain equal footing in their economies, and the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated many of these challenges.

The event welcomed distinguished speakers including Dr. Bolanle Adetoun (Director, ECOWAS Gender Development Centre), Alejandro Alvarez de la Campa (Manager, IFC), Naa Densua Aryeetey (Senior Manager, Ghana Shippers' Authority), Ewokolo Jeme (Gender Expert and Training Coordinator, GIZ/TFWA), and Dr. Barbara Ky (Director, UEMOA Gender Department), and was moderated by Maiko Miyake (TFWA Program Manager).

Beyond being an admirable objective, gender equality was described by most panelists as an economic necessity. Panelists highlighted key gender gap statistics and showcased best practices for improving trade conditions for women. The speakers also explored how to mainstream gender into trade policies, strategies, and programs, recognizing the importance of a new generation of trade interventions, such as the TFWA Program, which emphasizes gender, women traders as key project beneficiaries, and targeted interventions that make it easier, cheaper, and faster for women to

trade across borders. Panelists delved into their own institutions' gender mainstreaming efforts to address gender inequality in trade and trade facilitation, providing great insights and interesting lessons learned for the audience.

All speakers emphasized the need to increase means for collecting sex-disaggregated trade data to better quantify and identify gender gaps. UEMOA's Dr. Barbara Ky stated: "when trade policies are inclusive, they support equality which leads to positive economic growth and poverty reduction." Additionally, the panelists noted that—not surprisingly—women traders were among those hit hardest by the pandemic, as border closures and mobility restrictions imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 also resulted in a dramatic collapse of demand for goods and reduced opportunities to access customers and markets. In this sense, the panel acknowledged the important role that initiatives such as the TFWA Program can play in driving post-COVID-19 recovery, both by supporting relief measures and also by encouraging innovative trade solutions.

All panelists concluded that women's economic participation remains critical to a resilient and sustainable recovery from the pandemic, calling for increased collaboration, more consultations with women traders, and further specialization in gender analyses to sustainably and effectively put women first.

TFWA Program Rolls Out SSCBT Interviews for Alternative Credit Scoring



Traders' associations across Nigeria and Senegal were interviewed to better profile Small-Scale-Cross-Border Traders (SSBCTs) and to better understanding the alternative data they generate to access financial products and services. These interviews—initially piloted in two countries and conducted via a consulting firm—are part of the second phase of the TFWA Program's credit-scoring study launched to improve SSCBT access to finance through tailored credit scoring mechanisms.

SSCBTs still face significant challenges in accessing capital for their businesses and often remain unbanked, unable to obtain credit scoring, and with low-to-no financial inclusion opportunities. These factors confirm the relevance of exploring alternative means of credit scoring and aim to create the foundational research needed to encourage micro-finance institutions to offer financial products to SSCBTs. To date, the consulting firm has held several consultations with local traders' associations with the goal of contrasting data from previous mapping exercises with alternative data usage metrics.

Additional SSCBTs from Senegal and Nigeria will be interviewed and constituted in panels before the program produces a Credit Reporting Framework. Based on these interviews, a Regional Alternative Data Landscaping Report will also be published.



NTFC Mali Hosts its First Training Sessions on the Maturity Model



As part of the implementation of its work plan, in particular the component relating to the implementation of the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation, the TFWA Program has initiated discussions with the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) in Mali. These discussions led to the organization of five training sessions between December 11, 2020 and February 24, 2021. These sessions are the first since the establishment of the NTFC-Mali by Inter-ministerial Order N-0934/MCC/MEF/MT-SG of April 5, 2009.

All five sessions focused on presenting the TFWA Program's Maturity Model and the self-evaluation of NTFC-Mali based on that Maturity Model. Three virtual sessions, facilitated remotely by the TFWA Program, focused on the presentation of the Maturity Model, its stages, and the technicalities of the self-assessment. The two face-to-face trainings were focused on the practical exercise of the NTFC self-assessment. These two sessions took place at the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment Promotion on February 17 and 18, 2021.

The workshops aimed to support the NTFC-Mali by:

1. Identifying a benchmark of progress in relation to its level of maturity;
2. Supporting the operationalization of its mandate through the conception and development of an action plan; and
3. Regularly monitoring the progress of the maturity level.

The training was attended by all NTFC members, including a Ministry of Women representative.

It was highly appreciated by the audience and enabled participants to:

- Assess the founding text of the NTFC-Mali in relation to standard and good practices in this area;
- Propose corrective actions so that the NTFC-Mali can meet the standards, in particular: the clarification of the mandate of the Permanent Secretariat, the constitution of the NTFC's working groups, the inclusion of gender CSOs, and the creation of an exchange link between the AfCFTA and Doing Business; and
- Assess the level of effort to be provided at each stage of the Maturity Model.

The next steps are:

- Consolidate the NTFC-Mali self-assessment report and transmit it to the TFWA Program;
- Develop and enact new text incorporating the proposed corrective actions for NTFC-Mali;
- Develop an action plan, which is validated and assessed; and
- Draft an annual activity program, including the provision of technical assistance needed to operationalize and strengthen the NTFC in Mali.

Training of Trainers on SIGMAT Underway

From November 30 to December 4, 2020, the training of trainers on the Interconnected Management System of Goods in Transit (SIGMAT) was held in the meeting room of the general directorate of customs of Mali. The training was attended by many directors including the customs deputy director, customs administration central directors and customs staff, presidents of the freight forwarders associations of Mali, and the president of the Mali customs union.

Hosted in Bamako, the main objective of the workshops was to provide adequate training to around twenty customs technicians that will then be responsible for building capacity of Malian customs staff throughout the country. The ultimate goal is to use these trained ambassadors to make SIGMAT operational in all goods transit and destination offices.

By the end of this first training session, attendees obtained extensive knowledge of SIGMAT and the application system for computer agents and system technicians.

This will allow the customs administrators to:

- Share information and data in real time;
- Improve waiting times;
- Increase revenue by reducing transit and transport costs;
- Increase customs revenues; and
- Facilitate and secure international trade.

The next step will be to extend the training to other customs officers throughout the country. This next stage will build capacity with customs agents and customs brokers at the main pilot sites prior to the launch of SIGMAT on the Bamako-Dakar and Bamako-Abidjan corridors. Looking forward, these sites include the towns of Diboly, Kayes, and Kati on the Dakar-Bamako corridor, and Zégoua, Sikasso, and Bamako/Faladié on the Abidjan-Bamako corridor.



Togo Customs Office Participates in Virtual TFWA Mission



In early March, the TFWA Program conducted a virtual mission in Togo to support the Togolese Customs Office/ Office Togolais des Recettes (OTR). Despite the ongoing pandemic, this virtual engagement allowed the TFWA team to work with the OTR and help build its performance around good governance and voluntary compliance.

The OTR Commissioner General requested the TFWA Program's support to review and strengthen OTR operations toward systematically adopting a customer-centric approach to organizational performance. With this in mind, the program aims for an integrated and systemic transformation that will cover: i) governance; ii) holistic quality assurance; iii) voluntary compliance of economic operators to customs and tax regulations; and iv) conforming and increasing partnerships and cooperation with the private sector and with other border agencies. The end goal is to improve OTR operations and engagements with stakeholders.

Based on discussions during the virtual mission, the TFWA team would initially start by assessing and auditing the quality of the administration system. Next, the team

would work to improve OTR client management by knowing, managing, and improving communication and client loyalty.

The OTR is a key partner and important focus for the TFWA Program. Optimizing the OTR's organizational structure and shifting the office toward a culture of service—thus enhancing partnerships and further building OTR staff capacity—can change the cross-border trading ecosystem and catalyze easier, more efficient, and more cost-effective trade facilitation in the sub-region.

Malian Freight Forwarders and Customs Prepare SIGMAT Communications Campaign

In March, members of Malian Customs' SIGMAT project team met with members of the Bureau of the National Federation of Freight Forwarders of Mali (FETRAM) to discuss the launch of a SIGMAT Mali communications campaign. During the meeting, FETRAM offered to issue a manifest for SIGMAT operationalization to the Customs Directorate, confirming its commitment to trade facilitation and accompanying trade measures. For optimal cooperation, FETRAM also recommended that Customs further explain the SIGMAT mechanisms to forwarding agents in subsequent meetings.

The Regional Customs Network for Transit Trade—or SIGMAT, for short—is a Customs Interconnection Project that aims to use information technology to facilitate trade, transport, and the free movement of goods within the region.

It offers huge benefits to governments, financial institutions, and the private sector by paving the way for shared information, data in real time, reduced waiting times, and increased revenue thanks to reductions in transit and transportation costs.

The TFWA Program is exploring how to support communications efforts around SIGMAT and has agreed to help launch, promote, and publicize SIGMAT in Mali. The TFWA Program aims to build visibility and recognition of the SIGMAT project among decision-makers, economic operators, and the general public by supporting the implementation of a national communications plan. The program will also continue enhancing collaboration between stakeholders in the Malian trade facilitation ecosystem and looks forward to launching SIGMAT across additional markets in West Africa.

