



DIGITALISING THE COORDINATION AND MONITORING OF TRADE FACILITATION REFORMS

An UNCTAD tool created thanks to the financial support from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office via Her Majesty Revenue and Customs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

A DIGITAL TOOL TO MITIGATE THE CHALLENGES TO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF NATIONAL TRADE FACILITATION COMMITTEES

In 2016, UNCTAD launched its Empowerment Programme for National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFC) with the purpose of training NTFC members and assisting them on the preparation of their multi-year roadmaps for the implementation of key trade facilitation reforms, including those stipulated in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. However, once the roadmap documents were prepared and validated, it transpired that the NTFC Secretariat lacked the skills as well as a concrete methodology to monitor the implementation of that work plan. Despite all efforts, the accountability of actions was not clear, and documentation was lost each time a critical figure within the NTFC (its chairperson or its Secretariat) left the organization. New members were not systematically trained on their duties, and, in many cases, work needed to start from scratch, impeding a smooth progress of the country's trade facilitation agenda. All these factors, contributed to a lack of engagement and motivation of NTFC members, a situation made worse when there was not a correct representation of members or frequent replacement of those.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the situation even further, with many Committees becoming dormant due to the lack of tools that will allow NTFCs to perform their duties online.

To tackle all these challenges, improve the Committees' operationalisation, and increase the prospects of NTFCs to be sustainable in time, UNCTAD created its Reform Tracker for National Trade Facilitation Committees.

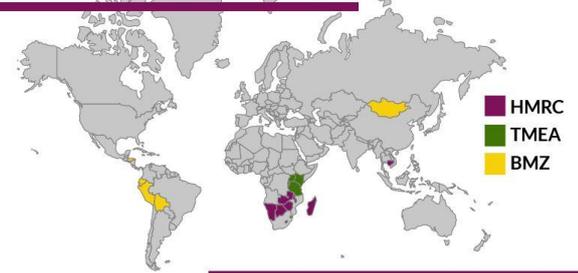
THE REFORM TRACKER IS AN ONLINE PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOL TO FACILITATE NTFCs' WORK IN THEIR ROLE AS COORDINATORS OF TRADE FACILITATION REFORMS. IT HELPS NTFCs TO ORGANIZE INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR MEMBERS AND SYSTEMATICALLY INFORM THEM ABOUT THE LATEST UPDATES RELATED TO TRADE FACILITATION INITIATIVES. IT ENABLES COORDINATED INTER-AGENCY IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIORITY TRADE FACILITATION PROJECTS BY INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS FROM THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS. ALSO, IT AUTOMATES TASK DISTRIBUTION, RESOURCE PLANNING, TEAM COLLABORATION AND REPORTING, AMONG OTHERS. THE PLATFORM'S SHARED WORKSPACE FACILITATES PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AND ALLOWS FOR SYSTEMATIC KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AT NTFCs, GIVING NEW MEMBERS ACCESS TO CURRENT AND PAST PROJECTS TO HELP THEM QUICKLY GET ACQUAINTED WITH THEIR ROLES.

A MULTI-DONOR EFFORT

The establishment of the Reform Tracker has been made possible with the support of several UNCTAD led projects and different donors. The first version of the tool was created and piloted in Kenya with the financial support of Trademark East Africa (TMEA).

The HMRC financed programme has supported the set-up of the Reform Tracker in nine countries. By March 2022, an additional 10 countries had set up the tool with the financial support of TMEA and the German Ministry of International Cooperation (BMZ).

The set up of UNCTAD Reform Tracker has been supported by different donors



A DEDICATED UNCTAD TEAM TO SUPPORT EACH NTFC

The success of establishing the Reform Tracker rests on the active follow-up by UNCTAD specialists. Every week, UNCTAD experts meet with the NTFC secretariats of the countries using the Reform Tracker. Such weekly support is not limited to training users of the tool, but also includes a range of advisory services on how to successfully run the NTFC, and in the implementation of trade facilitation reforms in accordance with the provisions of the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement.

FROM NTFCs TO NTFCs

The Reform Tracker was designed to be user-friendly and can be easily tailored to each country's needs. With regular feedback from the ground, every feature in the tool responds to a need expressed by trade facilitation practitioners.

Based on that direct feedback, the tool is in continuous improvement with new features released every month. The Implementation check list and the statistical dashboard are the most celebrated ones as they provide concrete indicators of development for beneficiary countries.

A quarterly meeting for country administrators was established in September 2021 to exchange best practices and foster South-south cooperation among practitioners of the Reform Tracker. The events organised in September and December 2021, as well as March 2022 have been proven a success among the community and have gathered each time more than 120 participants from over 19 countries.

RESULTS

UNCTAD Reform Tracker has been instrumental to monitor an increased alignment with WTO TFA measures in Partner countries, not just on Article 23.2 but also on other WTO TFA Provisions.

BY THE END OF MARCH 2022, THE SETUP OF THE REFORM TRACKER IN THE NINE PARTNER COUNTRIES HAD RESULTED IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF 327 REFORM TEAMS (GATHERING OVER 885 REFORM TRACKER USERS) AND THE PLANNING OF 1661 TASKS, WHICH DEMONSTRATE CONCRETE STEPS TOWARDS THE SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONALIZATION OF NATIONAL TRADE FACILITATION COMMITTEES. BY END OF MARCH 2022, OVER 2500 CHANGES AND 21.000 PAGE VISITS (1400 AND 9800 RESPECTIVELY IS THE TOTAL FOR THE NINE PARTNER COUNTRIES) WERE RECORDED IN THE REFORM TRACKER AND NEARLY 40.000¹ EMAILS NOTIFICATIONS WERE SENT USING UNCTAD'S MONITORING TOOL. MOREOVER, A TOTAL OF 27 B&C PROVISIONS² WERE INDICATED AS "DONE" IN THE NINE PARTNER COUNTRIES HAVING SET UP THE REFORM TRACKER, WHICH CORRESPONDS TO AN AVERAGE OF THREE PROVISIONS PER COUNTRY.

It is expected that these numbers will exponentially increase as the UNCTAD Reform Tracker keeps being deployed further in existing and new countries during Phase IV of the Programme and in the scope of other UNCTAD projects.

The Reform Tracker, and its deployment with continuous coaching sessions provided by UNCTAD, has been instrumental to ensure an appropriate use of the Early Warning Mechanism included under the WTO TFA and the compliance with other legal obligations deriving from the Agreement. In fact, a total of 24 notifications were sent by the Partner countries during the scope of the Programme and four countries made use of the Early Warning Mechanism, following UNCTAD advice on the matter.

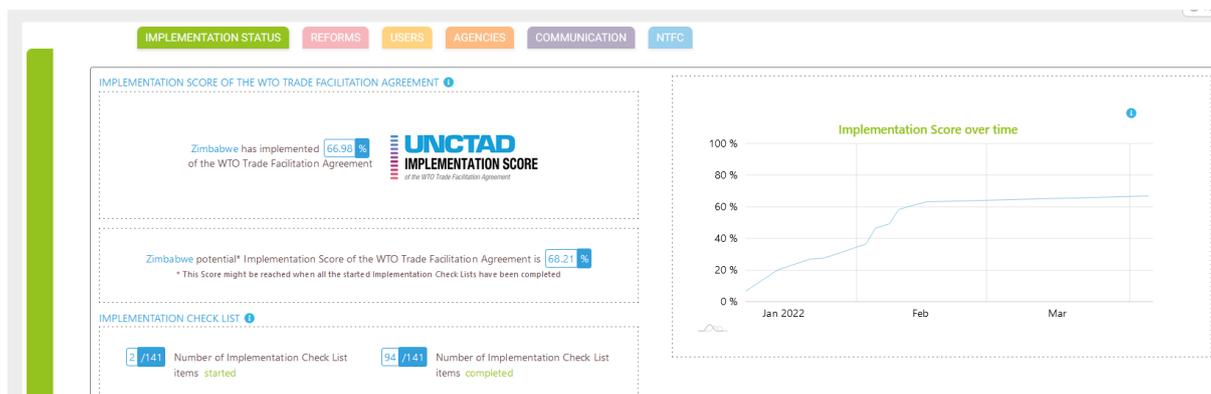
Moreover, within its first year of existence, the Reform Tracker has already proven successful in enabling knowledge transfer within the Committees. It was instrumental to ensure a smooth transition of personnel in the NTFC Secretariats of Botswana and Namibia in early 2022. Moreover, as a cloud-based system, Namibia's NTFC was grateful to have in the Reform Tracker a secured back-up for its data, given that Secretariat's computers were recently stolen from their offices.

¹ Total data for all 19 countries using the Reform Tracker.

² B&C provisions are those that were reported as not yet being implemented by developing and least developed countries.

FILLING UP THE GAP FOR MORE ACCURATE INDICATORS OF TRADE FACILITATION IMPLEMENTATION

Thanks to the development of UNCTAD Implementation Score of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement³, countries have access to a more accurate and updated picture of the implementation status of the Agreement.



Moreover, this indicator has been used as a baseline for Phase IV of the Programme and will be instrumental in measuring progress in the upcoming phase of the Programme.

³ The UNCTAD Implementation Score of the WTO TFA is a methodology that calculates a country's implementation rate of the WTO TFA. The Score relies on the overall assumption that some Provisions are more difficult to implement than others.

The Score is built on three groups of attributes:

1. Number & frequency of actors involved in implementation
2. Complexity of implementation; and
3. Legal nature of the WTO TFA Provision

Each measure is given an overall complexity score that includes the sum of assigned scores for all three dimensions.

The Implementation Score will be automatically updated each time an Implementation Check List item is validated.

TESTIMONIALS



JOELINE MODESTE HARINIAINA

PERMANENT SECRETARIAT OF NTFC
MADAGASCAR, MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY,
COMMERCE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS

"Following the disruptions to the work of the NTFC of Madagascar during the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of digitalizing our work became more relevant than ever. Thus, the Reform Tracker has become the perfect tool to remedy the challenges we have been facing. The platform offers the NTFC a suitable instrument for the inclusive and comprehensive monitoring of NTFC activities in real time, a task which was previously not always possible to perform."



GOFAONE GABOSITWE

BOTSWANA UNITED REVENUE SERVICE AND
MEMBER OF BOTSWANA TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
ON TRADE FACILITATION

One critical area where National Trade Facilitation Committees have often been found wanting is with regards to monitoring and evaluation of implementation of their work plans. The introduction of the Reform Tracker as a tailor-made solution is therefore a laudable development, worthy to be taken advantage of.



GUGU DLAMINI-ZWANE

MEMBER OF THE SECRETARIAT OF
ESWATINI TRADE FACILITATION
COMMITTEE

I think UNCTAD is outshining in terms of supporting the National Trade Facilitation Committees. Each organization should identify one area where they can outperform themselves and I think this is what UNCTAD is doing here with the Reform Tracker.

