

How the Eswatini National Trade Facilitation Committee turned results oriented with assistance from the Accelerate Trade Facilitation Programme

Introduction

The Accelerate Trade Facilitation Programme in Eswatini has made significant strides in enhancing the capacity of the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) and implementing specific trade facilitation measures. This success story outlines the contributions of the UK financed Accelerate Trade Facilitation Programme, implemented by UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Customs Organization (WCO), demonstrating how their collaborative efforts have led to substantial outcomes and impacts.

Initial challenge

The Eswatini National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) was established in 2013 in anticipation of the imminent signing of the WTO Bali Declaration, which led to the approval of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. To formalize its mandate, the Government of Eswatini subsequently established the NTFC through Government Gazette No. 207 of 2019, later revised and extended through Government Gazette No. 241 of 2023.

The Committee convened, but not on a regular basis, and struggled to engage other border agencies and the private sector in its activities. The NTFC faced challenges in obtaining inputs from various agencies, making it difficult to have a clear understanding of their progress in implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.

The Secretariat did not feel equipped to address these challenges. To overcome these issues, it became essential to raise awareness among NTFC members about the importance of trade facilitation reforms for the country's development and the improvement of the business environment in the Kingdom.

Capacity Building and Initial Support

Recognizing this need for enhanced capacity, UNCTAD began supporting the NTFC of Eswatini in 2020 with a specialized six-month capacity-building programme, comprising 12 webinars and 10 learning modules. This programme was completed by 20 NTFC members, with further training programmes completed by additional 29 stakeholders, laying the foundation for future reforms. This foundational training aimed to enhance the NTFC member's ability to understand trade facilitation and their roles to advance trade facilitation efforts.





Building the foundation

In 2021, the NTFC of Eswatini embraced a new tool—the Reform Tracker. Developed by UNCTAD experts, this web-based project management and monitoring tool was designed to streamline trade facilitation reforms. Through weekly coaching and training sessions, the Reform Tracker set up included a comprehensive gap analysis, revealing Eswatini's WTO TFA implementation score of 41.98% by 31 March 2022. Eight provisions were marked as completed, and the Reform Tracker included 50 tasks for implementation. However, the journey was not without obstacles.

Challenges and resilience

In late June 2021, Eswatini faced a period of unrest, which disrupted normal business. Together with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, these events significantly stalled the work of the NTFC, which was unable to meet during this period. The work of the NTFC was put on hold, casting a shadow over the progress made.

March 2023 brought a renewed sense of purpose. UNCTAD piloted its intensive training for NTFC Secretariats and Chairpersons in Johannesburg. This programme aimed to reinforce the capacity of the Secretariat and Chairpersons of Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Brightwell Nkambule, Commissioner-General of the Eswatini Revenue Service and Chairperson of the NTFC, described the training as an eye-opener. Inspired by the insights gained, Mr. Nkambule committed to reinvigorate the NTFC of Eswatini.

Revitalization of the NTFC

Following the Secretariat Training, the NTFC of Eswatini began holding regular quarterly meetings, breathing new life into its activities. Acknowledging the need for a tangible work plan, the NTFC sought UNCTAD's assistance in drafting a Trade Facilitation Roadmap for 2023-2026. This roadmap, adopted in December 2023, also included goals related to green trade and vulnerable groups such as women traders, the youth, and SMEs. The roadmap became a living document, continuously updated through the Reform Tracker.

Enhanced Implementation and Notifications

With the roadmap in place, Eswatini was able to prioritize and understand its trade facilitation activities more effectively. This clarity enabled them to request extensions and implement certain provisions earlier than initially planned. As a result, Eswatini requested further support from UNCTAD to draft several notifications to the WTO TFA. UNCTAD provided capacity building on institutional arrangements, which strengthened the NTFC and embedded these practices within their operations. Consequently, Eswatini successfully presented four notifications to the WTO TFA Committee, achieving a cumulative 10 years earlier implementation of certain provisions. This outcome highlights the significant progress made in institutional arrangements for trade facilitation, facilitated by UNCTAD's support.



Strengthening the framework

In 2024, Eswatini reconnected with UNCTAD to redraft roadmap indicators and use the Reform Tracker for monitoring. A series of training sessions led to the development of a robust monitoring plan, presented to the NTFC in March 2025. This plan facilitated the operationalization of the NTFC Roadmap, transitioning goals into actionable projects, such as the Joint Action Plan for Cross-Border Management between Eswatini and South Africa. The Eswatini Revenue Services, as co-chair of the NTFC, presented a detailed plan for translating the roadmap's seven strategic goals into measurable deliverables.

"The Eswatini Committee for Trade Facilitation is now stronger than ever. We meet regularly and are advancing the trade facilitation agenda with renewed confidence and purpose. This progress would not have been possible without the support of the Accelerate Trade Facilitation Programme. International backing for trade facilitation committees, particularly in Least Developed Countries, is essential to foster sustainable and equitable global trade—and must continue to ensure long-term success."

Khetsiwe Dlamini, NTFC Secretariat Eswatini, November 2024



Results and Impact

By the end of March 2025, Eswatini had 273 tasks planned in its Reform Tracker, a WTO TFA implementation score of 52.47%, and 18 provisions marked as completed. These achievements reflect the Programme's success in transforming capacity building into sustainable, long-term trade facilitation reforms. The enhanced collaboration between the NTFC, border agencies, and the private sector, facilitated by UNCTAD's support, including the strong championing and lobbying of counterparts by the Co-chairs, has led to a significantly improved trading environment. The institutional strengthening provided by UNCTAD enabled Eswatini to effectively implement technical measures, such as the ones implemented with support from WCO, and fulfil its obligations, demonstrating the tangible impact of the Accelerate Trade Facilitation Programme on the country's trade facilitation landscape.



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