

Easing trade bottlenecks through digitalization

Some insights from ITC's work

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Starting from the end

4 points I'd like you to take away from this

1. There may be good reasons for processes to be cumbersome but there is none for them to be non-transparent or unpredictable
2. Invest in interagency cooperation to make digitalization efforts (even more) impactful
3. There is no such thing as a general “next step” — your best next step depends on your (country's) reality and what matters most for (your priority) businesses
4. Don't underestimate the impact of “small changes” — you can substantially improve traders' realities even where building new roads or bigger ports may not be feasible in the immediate

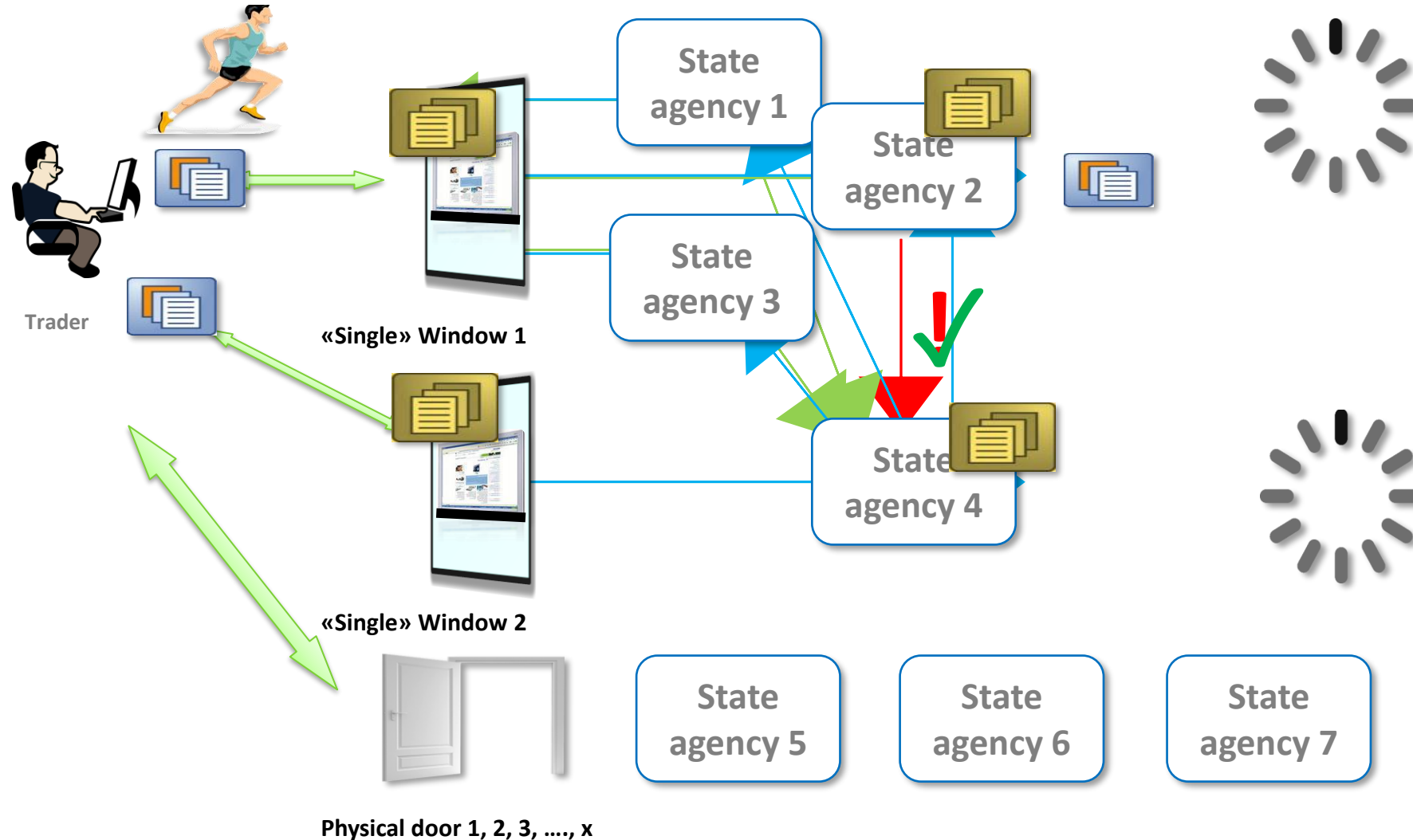




A few observations

- 1) All agencies do what they are **mandated** to → there is a good reason for the processes that are in place
- 2) What traders struggle *most* with is neither the time spent nor the cost involved in navigating the processes: it is the **unpredictability** thereof *
- 3) Not all traders are the same:
 - Some have workarounds (e.g. offices in the capital or the phone number of the minister)
 - The **impact differs**, for example depending on company size / profit margins

More common: Limited **interoperability**, overlapping platforms and **fragmentation** of paperless trade



So how could one **improve** the trader's journey?

- 1) **TRANSPARENCY**: make sure that all traders know where to “go” in what order, the corresponding process times and cost
- 2) **INTERAGENCY COOPERATION**: Make different actors work together (ideally even across countries), e.g. through direct exchange of information and documents
- 3) **DIGITALIZATION**: make things a little (ok... a lot) faster and easier, e.g. by enabling the electronic submission of applications and exchange of documents, e-signatures, etc.



So **what to prioritize?**

What are the **next steps** needed to strengthen the trade-related digital infrastructure?



Isn't it clear that I should be focusing on border agencies?

Well, it depends...

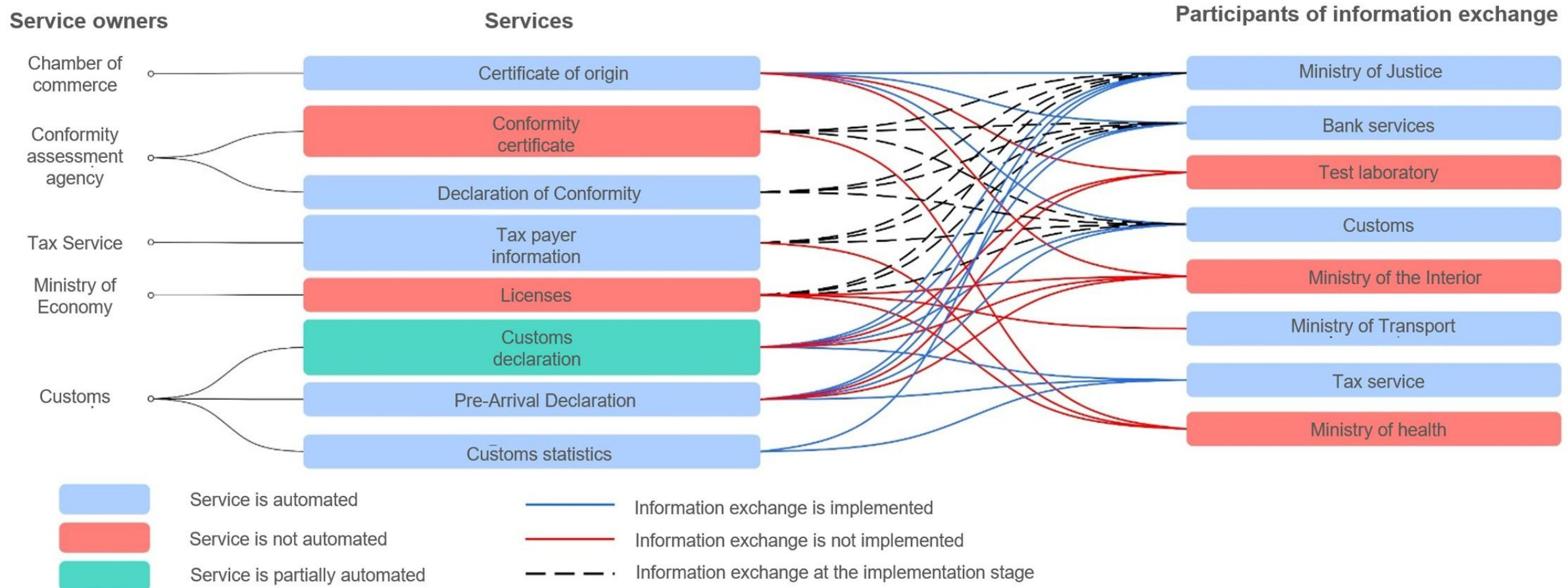
- 1) **What do you currently trade and where do you have the highest export/ trade potential in future?**
 - E.g. you may wish to concentrate on processes / agencies that are involved in services trade...
- 2) **Which development objectives do you try to achieve → which traders would you want to particularly support?**
 - E.g. MSMEs, women traders, large companies
- 3) **Which bottlenecks affect their competitiveness most? Which agencies and processes are involved?**



Examples of practical measures

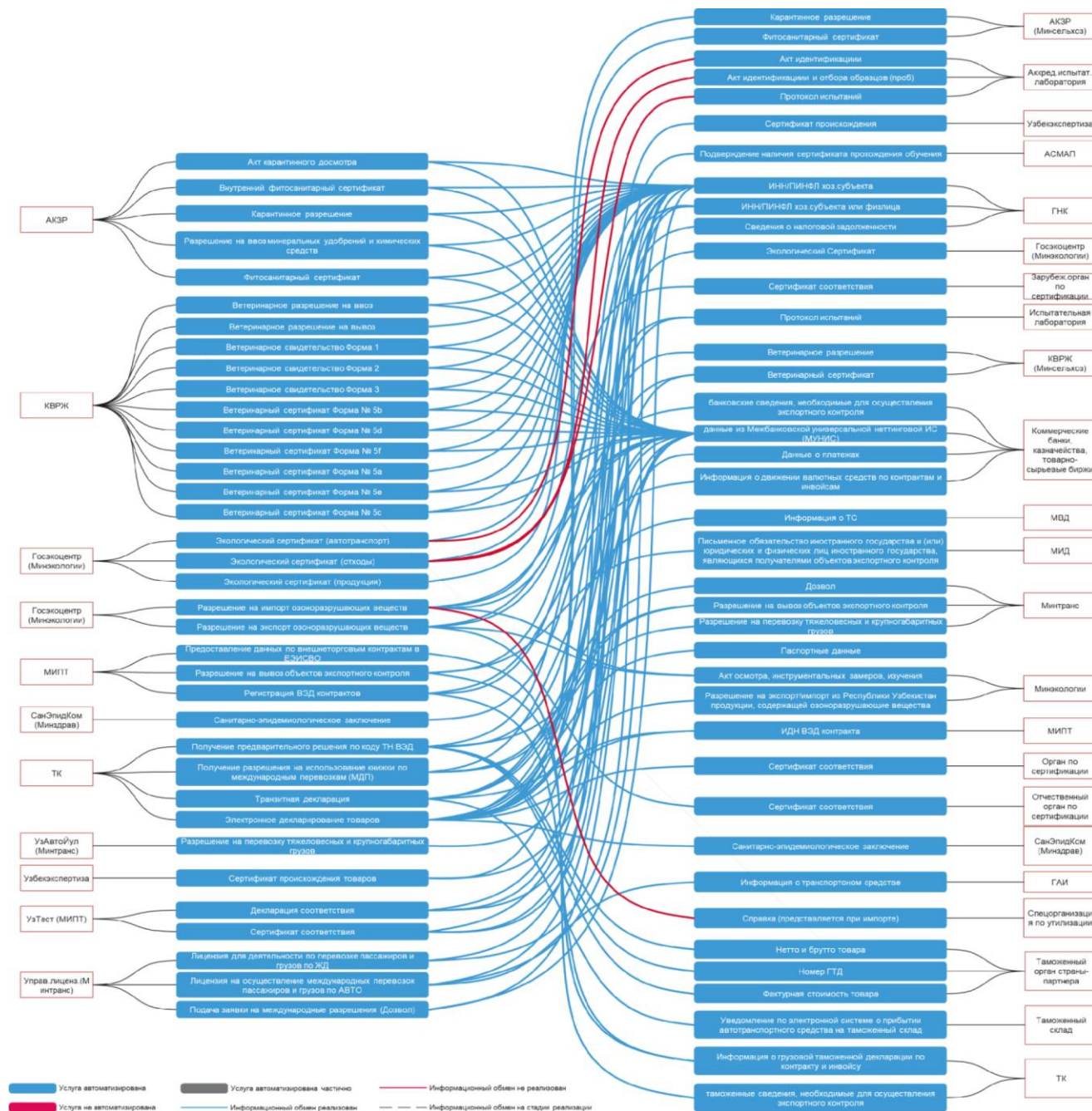
- 1) **Helping identifying digitalization needs and prioritization of efforts:** mapping information exchange and interoperability
- 2) **Simplifying targeted procedures** which have significant impact on trade cost
- 3) **Investing in transparency:** how real-time monitoring allows reducing cost for businesses and customs authorities alike
- 4) **Strengthening coordinated border management** through electronic queue management systems
- 5) **Deploying inclusive digital tools** for small-scale cross-border traders

Example 1 Mapping inter-agency and inter-department data/document exchange mechanisms



Example 1 (continued)

- Visual representation of all services, documents and process involved in the export/import procedure
- Detailed overview of the type of document/data exchange between government agencies and with the trader
- Clear vision over the main bottlenecks and main enablers of fully digital processes
- Example **Kyrgyzstan** (17 agencies mapped):
 - Integrating laboratory test results and accreditation into digital systems removed physical steps.
 - Time and processing costs fell by **50%**, enabling SMEs to plan shipments confidently, reduce spoilage, and redirect resources from paperwork to production.





Example 2: Sri Lanka: “Small action” – significant impact

The problem

- Obtaining the Certificate of Origin involves a lot of paperwork, physical collection and unpredictable time (and at times cost)
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The action

- **Digitalizing the preferential Certificate of Origin** eliminated couriers, paper signatures, and physical collection.
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The result

- Processing time dropped by **93%** and annual business costs decreased by **USD 4 million**, directly improving SME cashflow and ability to accept new orders.

Example 3: Trade and Logistics Performance Gateway: Investing in transparency

How transforming over 1 billion records from more than 40 agencies into 1,500 real-time performance indicators enabled quick, evidence-based action in Jordan

Border &
Supply Chain
Performance



Continuously measures shipment release times at airports, seaports, and land border posts in real time



Revenue
Management



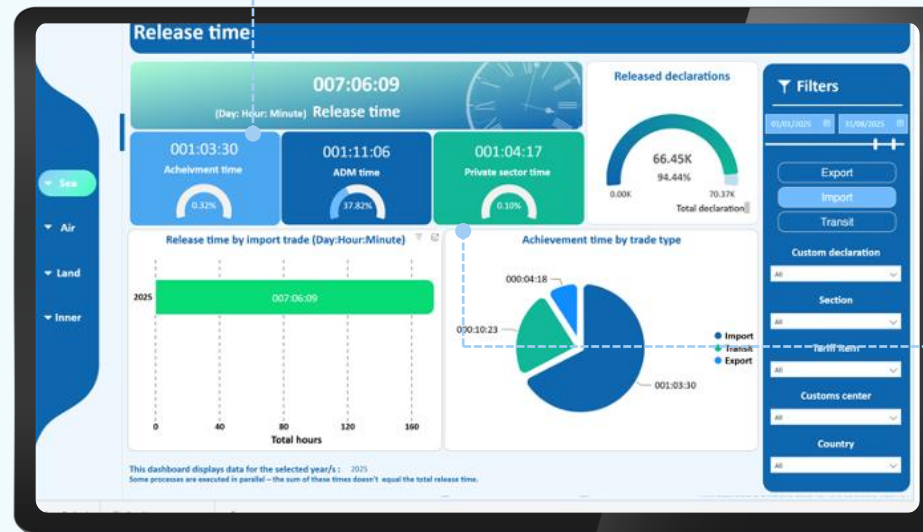
Special
Economic Zones



Risk
Management

Fore
Trad

Con



Highlights where delays occur in clearance processes, allowing immediate pinpointing of procedural bottlenecks

Example Jordan: For several weeks, traders had complained to the Minister of Transport about inconsistencies and major delays for specific products. Many discussions took place, with different actors blaming different factors, but without concrete evidence no action could be taken. On the day the Gateway was launched, the Chamber Head went back to the Minister with the same issue, but this time with precise evidence and real data. He could select the exact date, product, and border post, and show the time taken at each step, by each agency/actor, including logistics operators. Within 1 hour, the Minister took immediate action, the problem was resolved, and improved practices were put in place.

Example 3 (continued): Trade and Logistics Performance Gateway

How transforming over 1 billion records from more than 40 agencies into 1,500 real-time performance indicators enabled quick, evidence-based action in Jordan

Border & Supply
Chain Performance

Revenue
Management

Special
Economic Zones

Risk
Management

Foreign



Tracks customs declarations, inspection results, and risk channel assignments to ensure regulatory compliance



Flags high-risk shipments or unusual patterns in real time, enabling customs to focus on potential non-compliance and expedite low-risk cargo

In the dedicated Risk Management module, Customs can monitor performance in real time, percentage of inspections by product type and entry point and officer, accuracy levels, and historical trends. When the Director General of Customs checked this data for the first time and compared it over the last five years, he immediately noticed that a high share of transit goods were being inspected, with very low accuracy. Since transit cargo should almost never be inspected, or only a very small percentage, he took action on the spot. He called for a meeting with the responsible department and completely changed the mechanism, which led to a significant reduction in unnecessary inspections of transit goods.



Example 4: Strengthening coordinated border management

Example Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan corridor

The problem

- SMEs in LLDCs describe borders as a “black box”: **queues, unpredictable release times**, multiple agencies acting separately. **One extra day at the border can wipe out profits.**
-

The action

- **Introducing electronic queue management** at the border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan replaced chaotic physical lines with transparency and predictability.
-

The result

- **Lower transport fees, reduced spoilage, and more reliable delivery schedules** — critical for agrifood, textiles and light-manufacturing SMEs.



Example 5: Deploying inclusive digital tools for small-scale cross-border traders

The problem

- Women traders and small cooperatives often lack smartphones, connectivity, or confidence to use complex systems. They tell us they feel “**excluded from the digital border.**”
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The action

- **Deploying inclusive digital tools** such as digital logistics platforms for cooperatives, SMS assistants in local languages and interactive kiosks at OSBPs connected to trade portals.
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The result

- Better participation of small-scale traders in international trade, fewer informal payments, **faster crossings**, lower transport costs, and better access to export markets.



Ending with the end

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Thank you.