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## Roadmap for Building a National Trade Information Portal



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction .....	1
2. What is a Trade Information Portal (TIP)? .....	2
A. Transparency is the best tool to fight red tape.....	2
A.1 Administrative complexity hampers international trade.....	2
A.2 Why are administrative procedures so complicated?.....	3
A.3 Trade thrives on transparency .....	4
A.4 Definition of a Trade Information Portal.....	5
B. Key principles to make procedures easy to understand.....	11
B.1 Present information from the user's point of view.....	11
B.2 Describe the reality of administrative practice.....	12
B.3 Provide sufficient information .....	12
C. Structuring a TIP to effectively describe procedures.....	12
C.1 Starting from what the operator is looking for (home/filters).....	12
C.2 Listing and sequencing all procedures that apply to a trade operation.....	13
C.3 Describing the procedures step-by-step .....	14
C.4 Detailing each step (contacts, requirements, result, etc).....	16
C.5 Presenting the information in a standardized way .....	16
D. Enrich with add-on features.....	16
D.1 Customs tariffs module .....	17
D.2 Foreign trade statistics.....	18
D.3 Market information and export opportunities .....	19
D.4 Regional Trade Information Portal (RTIP).....	19
D.5 Useful links and resources (WCO, WTO, ASYCUDA, etc.).....	20
3. How to implement a Trade Information Portal .....	21
A. Success factor one: Technology, choosing simplicity .....	21
A.1 Design and user experience.....	21
A.2 Content Management System (CMS).....	21
A.3 Hosting and maintenance.....	22
B. Success factor two: Ensuring strong and sustainable institutional anchoring.....	22
B.1 Strong lead agency .....	22
B.2 Role of the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC).....	22
C. Success factor three: The need for a strong team .....	24
C.1 National coordinator.....	24
C.2 Documentation officers.....	24
C.3 IT Management.....	24



D.	Success factor four: Organizing documentation .....	25
D1.	Collect data.....	25
D2.	Integrate data into the TIP.....	26
D3.	Review the documentation.....	27
D4.	Validate and certify information.....	28
E.	Success factor five: Updating procedures .....	29
E.1	The primary responsibility of the TIP team.....	29
E.2	Raising awareness among the administrations concerned.....	29
E.3	The central role of the NTFC.....	29
4.	Use and operate a TIP .....	30
A.	Facilitating the understanding of trade procedures.....	30
A.1	Promoting the TIP to the business community.....	30
A.2	Disseminating information on other sites (embedding and APIs).....	34
A.3	Responding to requests (enquiry points).....	35
B.	Simplifying procedures using trade information .....	36
B.1	Using a TIP to identify simplification measures .....	36
B.2	Using the TIP to implement and measure the impact of simplification measures .....	36
B.3	A tool for regional integration .....	40
5.	Conclusion: Getting started with a TIP .....	43

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>CMS</b>	Content Management System
<b>EAC</b>	East African Community
<b>IT</b>	Information and Technology
<b>ITC</b>	International Trade Center
<b>NTFC</b>	National Trade Facilitation Committee
<b>NTIP</b>	National Trade Information Portal
<b>RTIP</b>	Regional Trade Information Portal
<b>TFA</b>	Trade Facilitation Agreement
<b>TIP</b>	Trade Information Portal
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
<b>WCO</b>	World Customs Organization
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization

## BOXES

<b>Box 1</b>	Costly compliance at the border: Complex customs procedures.....	2
<b>Box 2</b>	The TFA at a glance .....	3
<b>Box 3</b>	Root causes of administrative complexity .....	3
<b>Box 4</b>	The creation of administrative complexity.....	4
<b>Box 5</b>	Why is transparency important for trade? .....	5
<b>Box 6</b>	National Trade Information Portal may come in many shapes.....	7
<b>Box 7</b>	UN Trade Information Portal .....	9
<b>Box 8</b>	Describing procedures step-by-step.....	15
<b>Box 9</b>	Estimate your customs duties online .....	17
<b>Box 10</b>	Using data visualization to show-case trade statistics .....	18
<b>Box 11</b>	Tools to explore market opportunities for exportation .....	19
<b>Box 12</b>	Promoting trade transparency at regional level .....	20
<b>Box 13</b>	Kenya's NTFC: a leading role in TIP management.....	23
<b>Box 14</b>	Data collection must be as close as possible to practice (Mali) .....	26
<b>Box 15</b>	Upload the data (Benin) .....	27
<b>Box 16</b>	The documentation cycle - a continuous effort .....	28
<b>Box 17</b>	Launching a trade portal: making an impact.....	31
<b>Box 18</b>	The Nigeria TIP leaflet (key information at a glance).....	32
<b>Box 19</b>	KenTrade on Twitter: almost 10'000 followers! .....	33
<b>Box 20</b>	Connecting with the business community (Rwanda) .....	34
<b>Box 21</b>	Communication strategy - measuring impact .....	35
<b>Box 22</b>	Embedding trade information on partner sites (Kenya).....	36
<b>Box 23</b>	UNCTAD's 10 principles to simplify administrative procedures .....	37
<b>Box 24</b>	Working session on simplifying import procedures (Mali).....	39
<b>Box 25</b>	Calculating the administrative burden cost .....	40
<b>Box 26</b>	The Regional Trade Facilitation Index in ECOWAS (pilot) .....	41

## 1. Introduction

Import, export and transit entails cross-border transactions with two or more countries. For economic operators, ensuring an uninterrupted flow of their goods at the border always poses a series of challenges. Despite significant improvements in terms of trade facilitation nationally and internationally, completing formalities and processing trade documentation remains complicated for most firms, especially smaller ones. Often, due to lack of transparency, complicated or redundant procedures, and unharmonized legal frameworks, exporters and importers alike spend substantial time and resources securing the correct trade documents to comply with customs formalities and regulations.

Recognizing the root causes of inefficiencies in cross-border procedures, and building on its decades' long experience developing digital government solutions for investment and trade, UNCTAD developed the Trade Information Portal (TIP) - an online tool aimed at improving transparency and supporting traders' with completing trade-related requirements and formalities. To date, UNCTAD has assisted 30 countries in establishing TIPs, with 22 of them currently operational and eight being implemented. In 2017, Kenya was the first country to launch a TIP built using UNCTAD's technology and methodology. Since then, traders have benefited from continuously improving time and cost savings. At the time of publication, the Kenyan government through its National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) has – by analysing the user's step-by-step guides to trade-related procedures in the TIP - simplified 49 procedures, eliminating 50 steps and 70 required documents, allowing traders to complete 23 new steps online instead of in-person. Recognizing these benefits, 12 more countries have expressed an interest in UNCTAD technical assistance to develop their own TIPs.

The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)'s transparency provisions lists the mandatory items that members need to publish online (Art 1.2), namely: “(a) a description of its procedures for importation, exportation, and transit, including procedures for appeal or review, that informs governments, traders, and other interested parties of the practical steps needed for importation, exportation, and transit; (b) the forms and documents required for importation into, exportation from, or transit through the territory of that Member; (c) contact information on its enquiry point(s).” The Agreement does not explicitly mention a TIP as a requirement, but as demonstrated in this guide, the most sensible way to fulfil these obligations in the prescribed “non-discriminatory and easily accessible manner” is for a country to offer the trading community a user-centric central site with step-by-step guides to trade-related procedures as a central feature.

The obligation to comply with the Agreement's transparency measures is one of the key drivers for the rising numbers of TIPs around the world. However, not all TIPs are the same in terms of design, structure and quality. UNCTAD's approach is centred on the principles that the information has to be presented from the user's point of view and that traders should always have access to step-by-step guides to navigate trade-related procedures. This methodology has proven effective in facilitating trade, namely by helping governments simplify their rules and procedures and comply with the various provisions of the TFA.

As a result, this publication sets out the importance of placing the user at the centre as the primary customer and how a TIP system should be structured to ensure that the needed information is packaged, delivered, and received in a manner that is always easy to follow. The guidance set out in this document reaffirms that a central repository for trade information is the most effective way of complying with Article 1 of the TFA, and that step-by-step guides to procedures are key to ensuring transparency and make trade-related procedures more efficient.

The first substantive chapter, “What is a Trade Information Portal (TIP)?”, elaborates how a TIP can be pivotal to fostering transparency, offers a TIP definition, and an in-depth look at its fundamental structure. The following chapter focuses on the implementation, i.e., the process and requirements of designing, constructing, and sustaining a fully operational TIP system. The final chapter explains

how to operate a TIP to deliver benefits for the trading community by making sure economic operators are aware of it and that the government uses its functions to identify, implement and monitor trade facilitation reforms and their impact.

## 2. What is a Trade Information Portal (TIP)?

### A. Transparency is the best tool to fight red tape

#### A.1 Administrative complexity hampers international trade

**Administrative constraints are not just an incidental hassle** that firms must learn to live with. They have a direct and profound impact on world trade and economic growth due to direct time and cost implications. They impair the functioning of all economies and disproportionately affect weaker ones.

At the country level, **obtaining trading authorizations, licenses and permits is often rendered difficult because of opaque, ambiguous and/or burdensome procedures.** This affects all traders, entrepreneurs and investors, but especially micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) who have access to fewer resources to overcome this administrative complexity and for which the associated financial burden is higher.

#### **Box 1 Costly compliance at the border: Complex customs procedures**

UNCTAD (2017) estimated that an average customs transaction involves:

- 20–30 different departments
- 40 documents
- 200 data elements (30 of which are repeated at least 30 times)
- the re-entry of 60–70% of all data at least once

With the lowering of tariffs across the globe, the cost of complying with customs formalities has been reported to exceed in many instances the cost of customs duties.

In the context of foreign trade, administrative complexity is further heightened since the trader not only has to comply with the domestic regulations and standards to import, export and transit goods and services but also with the ones that apply to the origin, transit or destination country.

For economies in the developing world, **administrative inefficiencies within border regulating agencies can be roadblocks to their integration into the global economy** and may severely impair export competitiveness or the inflow of foreign direct investment. This is why the business community in developing countries calls for the removal of administrative barriers, particularly in trade among developing countries, which accounts for 40 percent of the trade in manufactured goods (WTO, 2014).

**Reducing time and cost constraints in trade is the main rationale behind the WTO TFA** (see Box 2) which came into force on 22 February 2017. Acknowledgment of the administrative complexity and its economic impact led WTO members to ratify the largest trade agreement in recent WTO history. In 2015, WTO estimates showed that the full implementation of the TFA could reduce trade costs by 14.3% and boost global trade by up to \$1 trillion per year, with the biggest gains achievable for least-developed countries (LDCs). Full implementation will potentially reduce the average importation time by 47%. Cuts in export time will be even more dramatic, estimated at a 91% reduction from the current average.<sup>1</sup>













<sup>1</sup> [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/tradfa\\_e/tradfa\\_introduction\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tradfa_e/tradfa_introduction_e.htm)



## Box 2 The TFA at a glance

Bureaucratic delays and “red tape” pose a burden for moving goods across borders for traders. Trade facilitation—the simplification, modernization and harmonization of export and import processes—has therefore emerged as an important issue for the world trading system.

WTO members concluded negotiations at the 2013 Bali Ministerial Conference on the organization's landmark TFA, which entered into force on 22 February 2017 following its ratification by two-thirds of the WTO membership. The TFA contains provisions for expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. It also sets out measures for effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues. It further contains provisions for technical assistance and capacity building in this area.

	<b>ARTICLE 1</b> Publication and Availability of Information		<b>ARTICLE 7</b> Release and Clearance of Goods
	<b>ARTICLE 2</b> Opportunity to comment, information before entry into force and consultations		<b>ARTICLE 8</b> Border Agency Cooperation
	<b>ARTICLE 3</b> Advance Rulings		<b>ARTICLE 9</b> Movement of goods intended for import under customs control
	<b>ARTICLE 4</b> Procedures for appeal or review		<b>ARTICLE 10</b> Formalities connected with importation, exportation and transit
	<b>ARTICLE 5</b> Other measures to enhance impartiality, non-discrimination and transparency		<b>ARTICLE 11</b> Freedom of transit
	<b>ARTICLE 6</b> Disciplines on fees and charges imposed on or in connection with importation and exportation and penalties		<b>ARTICLE 12</b> Customs Cooperation

Source: [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/tradfa\\_e/tradfa\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tradfa_e/tradfa_e.htm)

## A.2 Why are administrative procedures so complicated?

A procedure is a process through which laws and regulations are administered in practice. Multiple factors (legal, governmental, organizational and technological) can affect how the procedures are applied. If procedures are overly complicated, it is likely because of the **discrepancy between the laws themselves and the way they are interpreted and implemented**. Over-interpretation of the law at the discretion of officials and the prioritization of regulatory controls may create many differences in the clearance process, resulting in unnecessary complexities.

## Box 3 Root causes of administrative complexity

- Multiple administrations involved in each procedure
- Poor coordination between administrations (e.g., multiple administrations requesting the same information)
- Different interpretations of the law (from one administration to another, or even from one officer to another)
- Priority given to control (even if ineffective) over customer service and facilitation

Each institution involved in a procedure is governed by one or more laws. The more institutions involved in each procedure, the more there are laws that are intertwined, each bringing their own set of requirements for economic operators to fulfil. Laws and regulations tend to mirror the scattered organization of public administration in a country. They are usually drafted from the administration's point of view and are structured according to its own internal distribution of roles.

In an ideal world, the discrepancy between laws, regulations, and the way they are applied in practice is kept to a minimum. In reality, however, the numerous managerial decisions to be made on how regulations are implemented relate to the administrative structure of the country (e.g., degrees of devolution/decentralization) and the organizational structure/capacity of the institutions in charge of overseeing them. These managerial decisions lead to deviations, from insignificant to major, in the way procedures are applied in practice.

Finally, officials from different government agencies may apply the same procedures very differently, so iterations of the same procedure might co-exist.

#### **Box 4 The creation of administrative complexity**

The diagram illustrates the distance between law as a political objective to the reality on the ground (procedures applied in practice).

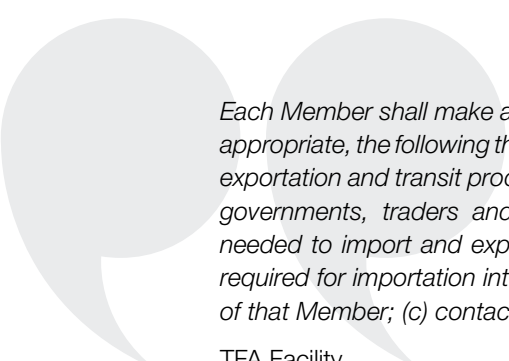


### **A.3 Trade thrives on transparency**

The best solution to simplifying interpretation and avoiding the repetition of unnecessary controls is to create publicly and freely accessible procedures with a single, clear and unequivocal description. This principle, called “administrative transparency”, is based on the notion that to be able to simplify processes, it is necessary for all involved to know them.

**The principle of transparency is the logical and natural starting point for tackling red tape and bureaucracy.** Transparency, that is, access to clear, precise and detailed information without major constraints, is the most effective tool for tackling complex procedures and should be the basis of all future reforms and simplifications.

In this regard, the very first article of the TFA relates to the publication of trade information. **Transparency is seen as the cornerstone of trade facilitation reforms.** Article 1.2 sets the minimum amount of information that each Member State is obliged to publish online. It reads:



*Each Member shall make available, and update to the extent possible and as appropriate, the following through the internet: (a) description of its importation, exportation and transit procedures, including appeal procedures, that informs governments, traders and other interested parties of the practical steps needed to import and export, and for transit; (b) the forms and documents required for importation into, exportation from, or transit through the territory of that Member; (c) contact information on enquiry points.*

TFA Facility

**A Trade Information Portal (TIP) must illustrate the national commitment of public administration to administrative transparency and the implementation thereof.** It should be seen (and built) as the most effective tool for realizing this principle and forming the foundation for continued efforts to simplify trade-related procedures.

A clear, easily accessible description of trade procedures is an essential prerequisite for facilitating trade:

- **For economic operators**, trade becomes simpler because the necessary steps, requirements, and contacts making up the procedures are clearly described
- **For national authorities**, a good understanding of existing procedures is a precondition to ensuring effective coordination between agencies and to implementing any simplification policy

A TIP must achieve transparency by disseminating clear, precise and comprehensive information widely to the trading community and by becoming a tool underpinning governments' efforts in implementing trade facilitation reforms.

#### **Box 5    Why is transparency important for trade?**

### **Why is transparency important?**

*Transparency can help to resolve many of the problems faced by traders*

#### **Lack of transparency leads to:**

- Cost of collecting information
- Cost of simplification
- Lack of predictability
- Mistrust in the trading system
- Corrupt and discriminatory practices
- Multiple fees and charges
- Unfair and unpredictable decision-making

#### **By providing equal and unfettered access to relevant information, transparency contributes to:**

- Certainty and predictability
- Reduction in corruption
- Fair application of rules
- A healthy business environment

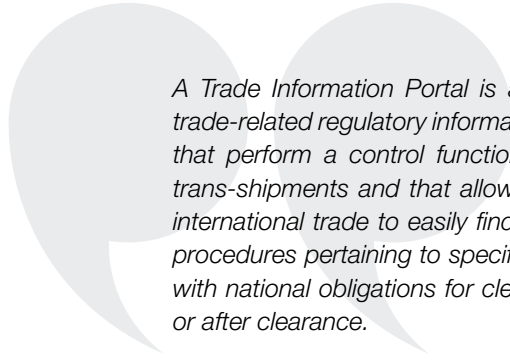
Source: ITC, UNCTAD (2019)

## **A.4    Definition of a Trade Information Portal**

Several systems go by the name TIP. Some are, for example: commercial trading platforms; repositories of trade-related services providers; providers of statistical information on trade flows, etc.

Experts of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) in its 2021 recommendation 38 on TIPs, agreed on the following definition emphasizing the importance of such a tool for regulatory trade environment and transparency<sup>2</sup>:

<sup>2</sup> See UN/ECE publication code ECE/TRADE/465 [https://unece.org/trade/uncefact/tf\\_recommendations](https://unece.org/trade/uncefact/tf_recommendations)



*A Trade Information Portal is a website that aggregates and publishes all trade-related regulatory information originating from the government agencies that perform a control function in relation to imports, exports, transits or trans-shipments and that allows importers, exporters or anyone involved in international trade to easily find and understand any legal requirements and procedures pertaining to specific commodities that are necessary to comply with national obligations for clearings goods at the border as well as before or after clearance.*

*A Trade Information Portal may also provide any other pertinent information available nationally or internationally that may facilitate the trade of goods or services across borders including highlighting external market access opportunities or impediments.*

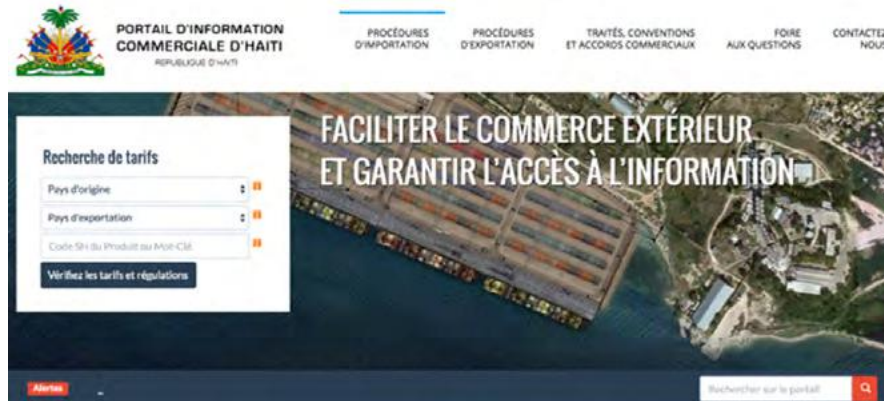
UN/CEFACT in recommendation 38 argue that a TIP building country can choose between a:

- Centralized model where the core of the information is maintained in a unique repository
- Decentralized model implying that most of the information is stored and maintained by the agencies overseeing a regulation or a procedure. With a TIP functioning as an entry point through which users may find links to external websites containing relevant information managed by other agencies and organizations
- Hybrid model of web platforms that maintain core information and provide links to supplementary information existing on external sites

This publication recommends the centralized TIP model as it is arguably more efficient to store all information in a centralized repository that can then be disseminated across government and partner websites instead of each agency describing intertwined processes in a piecemeal and disjointed fashion requiring the identification, analysis, standardization, and synchronization of complex information across government departments.

Box 6 illustrates the heterogeneity of TIPs available worldwide. Box 7 highlights UNCTAD's TIP model which is available to interested countries.

**Box 6 National Trade Information Portal may come in many shapes**



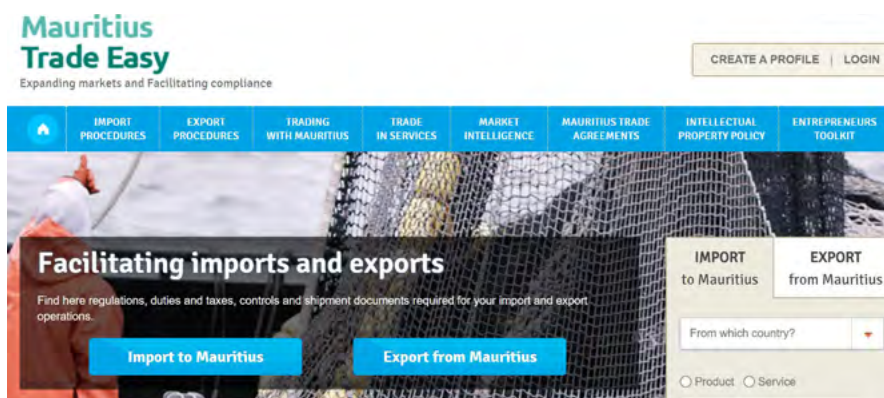
**Haiti**

<http://www.haiticommerce.gouv.ht/>



**Malawi**

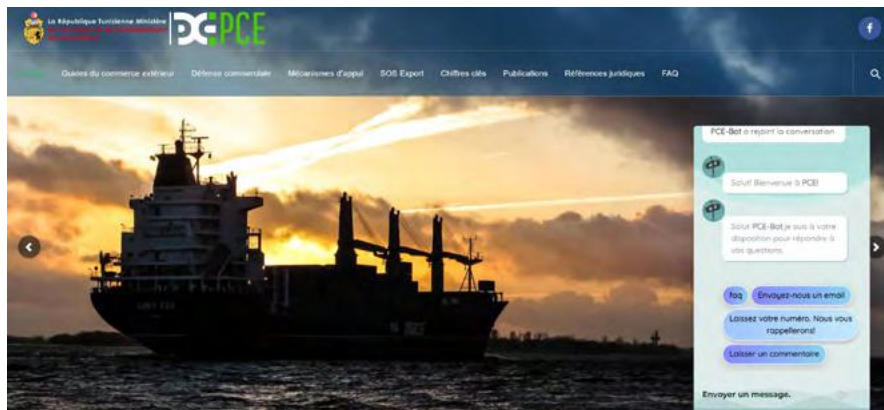
<http://www.malawitradeportal.gov.mw/>



**Mauritius**

<http://www.mauritiustrade.mu/>





## Tunisia

<http://pce.tn>



## Uganda

<https://ugandatrades.go.ug/>

### Box 7 UN Trade Information Portal

The UN TIP model is based on UNCTAD's eRegulations technology and methodology.

UN TIPs were developed in response to the growing demand for technical assistance to: support governments in enhancing the transparency and efficiency of cross-border related procedures; improve the competitiveness of their business environment; and comply with their obligations under the TFA.

The UN TIP is built around the provision of step-by-step guides for all types of import, export and transit procedures (permits, certificates, licenses and clearance). For each step (i.e., a mandatory interaction between the user and a government agency), the trade portal tells the user:

- where to go
- who to see
- what documents to bring
- what forms to fill
- what costs to pay
- what law justifies the step
- where to complain to in case of a problem

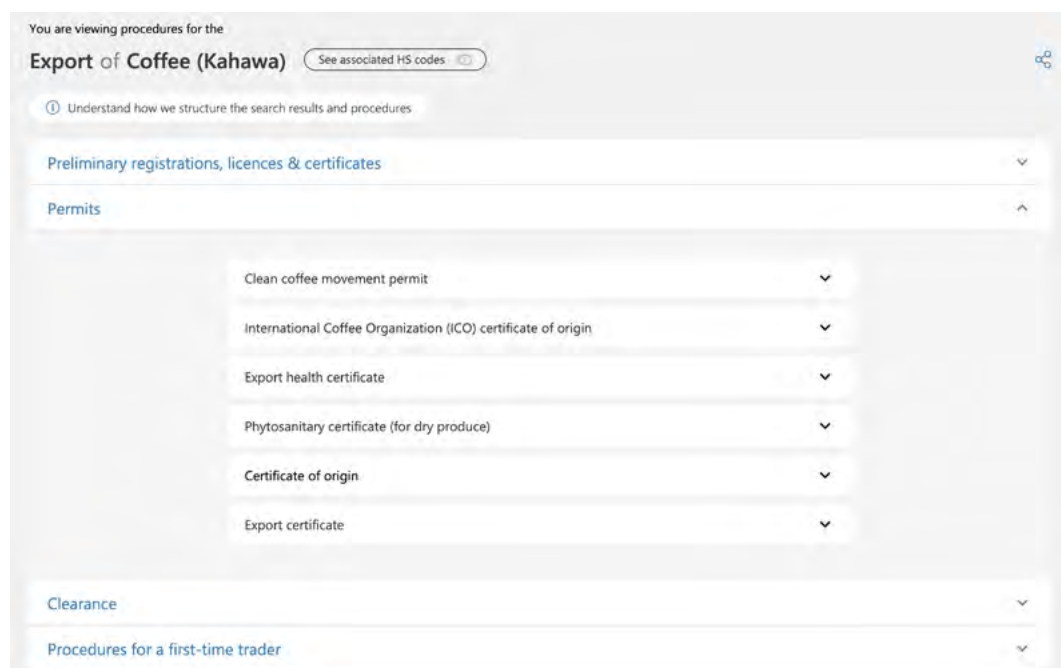
The screenshot displays the UN TIP interface for the step '11 Obtain licence (last modified: 10/08/2021)'. The left sidebar shows a list of steps, with '11 Obtain licence' highlighted. The main content area is divided into three sections: 'Where to go?', 'What do I get?', and 'What are the requirements?'. The 'Where to go?' section lists three entities: 'Entity in charge' (PORT HEALTH SERVICES KENYA (JKIA)), 'Unit in charge' (RECEPTION COUNTER (PORT HEALTH SERVICES) (JKIA)), and 'Contact person' (EDITH L. KAVULAVU, Senior Public Health Technician). The 'What do I get?' section shows a sample of a 'Food hygiene licence'. The 'What are the requirements?' section lists two items: '1. Health clearance certificate (original)' and '2. Bank deposit slip (original)'. The 'Legal justification' section lists '1. Food, Drugs and Chemical Substances (Food Hygiene) Regulations, 1978'.

A step page from the step-by-step guides



**Kenya was the first country to use UNCTAD's TIP platform. It was launched in Nov 2017 by the Kenya Trade Network Agency (KenTrade) with support from TradeMark East Africa, UNCTAD and ITC.**

A centrally located search bar allows the user to select the trade operation (export, import or transit) and the commodity they wish to trade or seek more information on. It takes the user to a list of applicable procedures for the commodity arranged in a sequential manner.



Through a TIP, citizens and businesses have access to clear and accurate information on trade-related administrative procedures. They are able to send complaints, report misconduct and propose simplifications online.

The way the procedures are mapped makes it easy for National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFC) to review procedures from the trader's point of view and to identify simplification measures that reduce time and costs for users. Additional modules such as the administrative burden cost module and the simplification dashboard (see Chapter 4) allows for the effective monitoring and piloting of implementations of trade facilitation measures.

*UN TIPs are available to any interested government and can usually be installed within the existing laws of the country.*

## B. Key principles to make procedures easy to understand

In practice, improvements to a country's trade and business environment require its government to understand the complexity of its rules, to be able to explain their implementation to economic operators, and to continuously work to simplify them.

To help government effectively facilitate trade, a TIP should follow three key principles that are described in the following sections.

### B.1 Present information from the user's point of view

Since traders complete the various formalities needed to buy and sell goods or services internationally, a TIP should improve their practical experience of doing so. Therefore, procedures and other content must be presented from the **user's point of view** as opposed to the public institutions' point of view.

While this may sound obvious, the information provided to the public on procedures is often:

**Scattered and piecemeal:** procedures usually involve multiple agencies or several departments within an agency and the user must go from one office or website to the next to assemble the information and find out what must come first, what comes next, etc

**Hard to obtain:** the user has to insist, revisit offices multiple times, sometimes pay intermediaries, and deploy considerable effort to understand the procedures and requirements for their specific needs. When available, websites with complicated and non-user-friendly designs make reaching the required information difficult

**Hard to understand:** the terminology used by public institutions to describe their processes tends to be overly complex (e.g., acronyms, legal terms, complex sentences) and imprecise (not adapted to the specific situation of the user) leaving users unclear on the requirements, time frame, and process

**Outdated and contradictory:** once information is published on websites or other media, the content remains stagnant until a formal decision is made to update it. Since information is scattered across organizations, and the frequency of updates is not coordinated, information from one site often contradicts information on the same procedure that appears on another (e.g., a new decree defines a new fee structure, a new registration system has been implemented, requirements have changed, etc.)

Adopting the user's point of view means describing procedures in the simplest terms, step-by-step, providing sufficient information for the user to complete them (where to go, what you will get, what to give, how much it costs, how long it takes, what is the legal basis, who to complain to in case of a problem).

## B.2 Describe the reality of administrative practice

The main purpose of a Trade Information Portal is to help traders comply with international trade rules, thus facilitating their trade operations. This means that a TIP should describe the **reality** of what a trader faces to import, export and transit goods or services.

It is, therefore, the **implementation of the procedures in practice that should be at the core of a TIP**, allowing traders to become familiar with and prepare for the actual requirements and conditions administered in practice by institutions and their officials. This enables the economic operator to efficiently understand the procedures since, as it was described above, there is often a significant difference between the written laws and the way they are implemented in practice.

**For national authorities**, an understanding of the reality of procedures is a precondition to any simplification activities. To simplify a procedure an official must know it and be able to describe it. When confronted with a detailed analysis of their procedures, government officials are usually surprised by the extent of the complexity. This realization alongside tools and methods to confront the problem are needed for decision makers to implement reforms that actually address the reality faced by traders.

## B.3 Provide sufficient information

An economic operator must have immediate access to all the information needed to understand the procedure and be able to complete it to meet the legal requirements.

This involves **providing sufficient information** on:

**What the economic operator should do to complete a trade operation:** explaining what the applicable procedures are and the steps that must be completed to fulfil each of them

**How to do it:** explaining where to go, how to fulfil the requirements by providing online access to the forms or links to online systems and the complete list of documentary evidence that applies for any type of trader

**Why it is required:** providing access to the legal justification for the procedure and the requirements therein

It is important that the descriptions are precise and sufficient to remove any room for variation in interpretation and blind spots to alleviate common doubts such as, for example, "Does this procedure apply to me?", "What comes after this procedure?", "Have I done enough to fulfil the requirements"?

## C. Structuring a TIP to effectively describe procedures

This section describes how to organize the information within a TIP to best provide practical information about regulatory procedures for those trading products or services.

### C.1 Starting from what the operator is looking for (home/filters)

A TIP must be built around an understanding of how the economic operator will best be directed to the information they need in the fastest and easiest manner possible.

This implies that the site should immediately propose clear (i.e., concise, simple, and precise) and logically arranged answers to the question: "*what do you want to export, import or transit*"?

Therefore, the **information should be presented in a commodity or service-specific way**. A user should be able to rapidly and easily find the information needed based on what product or



service they wish to trade, with the TIP providing answers to a user's enquiries, for example, "I'm a trader wanting to export processed fruit juice. What are the procedures that apply to my specific case?".

Therefore, on the homepage, the user should choose between the following search filters which serve to narrow down options and progressively guide the user to what they are looking for:

**"Operations" filter:**

- Import
- Export
- Transit

**"Products" filter:**

1. Animals and Animal Products (Chapters 1 – 20)
2. Plants / Vegetables and Plant Products (Chapters 6 – 24)
3. Minerals (Chapters 25 – 27)
4. Chemicals / Pharmaceuticals (Chapters 28 – 38)
5. Plastics / Leather / Wood / Paper (Chapters 39 – 49)
6. Textiles (Chapters 50 – 63)
7. Shoes (Chapter 64)
8. Metals and Articles thereof (Chapters 70 – 83)
9. Machines / Machinery and Vehicles Chapters 84 – 89)
10. Miscellaneous Articles (Chapters 90 – 97)

**Entry / Exit points "filter".** Clearance procedures vary greatly depending on the mode of transport and the entry and exit point. At very least, a TIP should be able to provide border procedure descriptions for:

- One airport
- One road entry / exit point
- One sea port (when applicable)

## C.2 Listing and sequencing all procedures that apply to a trade operation

The result of that commodity or service-specific query in the trade portal must lead to a **search results page** that explains where to start, where to go next, and what will be the final output. Thus, an effective trade portal:

**Lists all the procedures that must be completed** so that goods can be cleared through customs

**Orders the procedures according to the sequence through which they must be completed.** For example, a certificate of conformity or a veterinary certificate may be required *before* clearing the goods through customs

To address the full reality faced by traders wishing to complete a specific trade operation (import/export/transit), it is important that the TIP captures information on four categories of procedures covering both pre-clearance and clearance processes:

**Preliminary/initial registrations:** an individual or business often needs to be registered to apply for licenses and permits. This may involve verification, such as warehouse or farm inspections. Usually, registrations only need to be done once by each entity

**Licenses:** several industries are regulated and firms (individual enterprises or corporations) wishing to trade in these industries need to be issued with licenses before they are authorized to do so and obtain the needed permits. In some instances, licenses must be renewed annually

**Permits:** permits are the authorizations that must accompany a consignment before clearance procedures can begin. Examples include phytosanitary or veterinary certificates, certificates of origin, import permits, certificates of compliance, etc. These procedures must be completed for each trade operation or for each consignment

**Customs clearance and border procedures:** these include all procedures that a consignment must be cleared through at customs exit or entry points. This includes submitting a customs declaration, applicable border inspections, cargo sealing, etc. As with permits, these may be required for every new trade operation

Understanding in which categories the procedures fall into is crucial to explain the order with which they must be completed, especially to someone trading a commodity (or service) for the first time.<sup>3</sup>

### C.3 Describing the procedures step-by-step

For each procedure that appears on the above-mentioned search result page, a clear menu text should indicate who must complete the procedure, concisely explaining its purpose.

The TIP must list every step needed to complete each procedure. A step could be defined as “any necessary interaction between the user and the administration (or a private actor providing a necessary service, such as a notary) to achieve an operation.” (UNCTAD, 2009)

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<sup>3</sup> Trade Portals have often only been concerned with customs clearance procedures but the most pressing barriers to trade are “the behind-the-border procedures” often found before this process can occur such as at initial registration, license, or permit level.

### Box 8 Describing procedures step-by-step

Illustrations of how organizations typically choose to arrange procedures from the point of view of the user, using a simple process to an increasingly complex one.

Figure 1

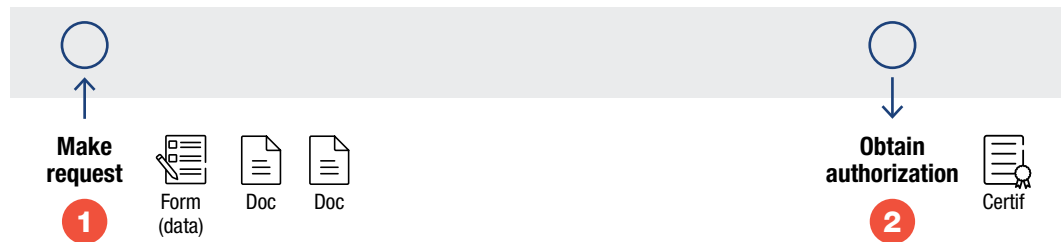


Figure 2

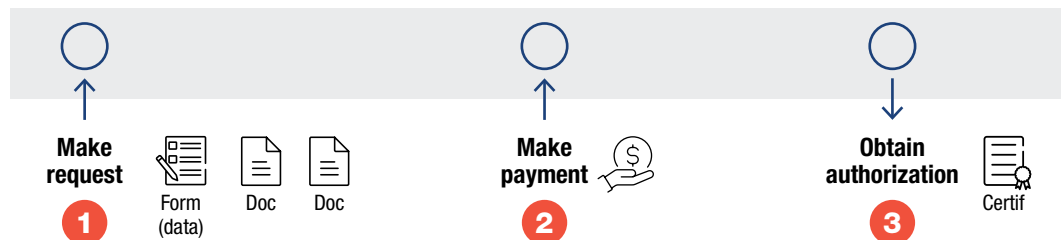


Figure 3

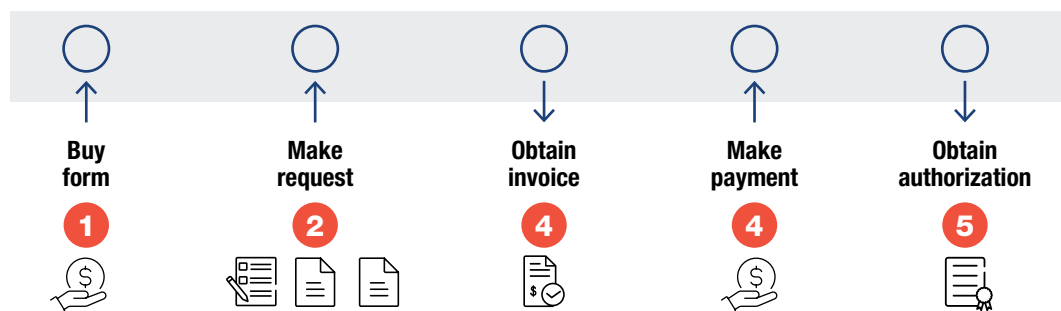
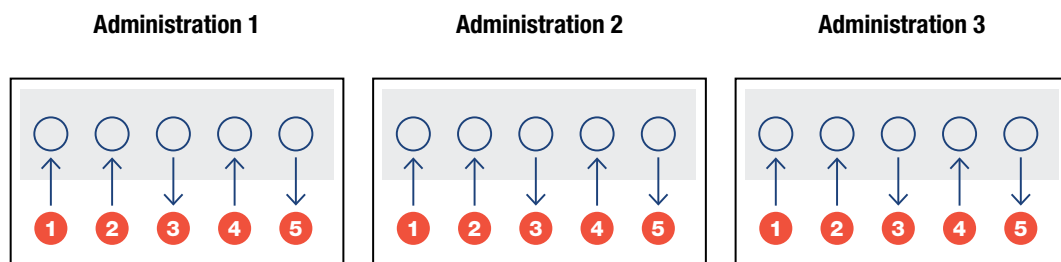


Figure 4

Procedures often involve multiple departments or different organizations and the number of steps is multiplied, as illustrated in the example below involving three institutions and 15 steps in total.



## C.4 Detailing each step (contacts, requirements, result, etc)

For every step of each procedure, the TIP must indicate:

**Where to go:** the necessary **contact information** including name of institution, precise addresses, phone numbers, websites, emails, etc

**What to bring:** The **documents required** including the downloadable forms and documentary evidence

**Costs and how to pay them:** precise details of fees and payments required including methods of payment

**What will I get:** The **results** to be expected

**The legal basis:** Reference to the legal basis justifying all elements of the steps such as the requirements and the fees

**How long does it take:** The **time frame** to complete the step

**Dealing with issues:** The **ways of submitting complaints** and recourse, detailing who to complain to in case of a problem

Additionally, information should be provided for each procedure outlining the obligations applicable at each stage (registration, license, permit), providing clear instructions for compliance, and a description of penalties for non-compliance, if any.

## C.5 Presenting the information in a standardized way

**A TIP must present information in a standardized manner**, ensuring a recurring, similar and simple presentation, allowing users to recognise the same comparable structure and elements, increasing usability.

Ensuring harmonization requires making important methodological decisions regarding how information is presented throughout the system. For instance, as indicated in Section C3, UNCTAD-sponsored TIPs are built on a clear and logical definition of what a step is, i.e. a mandatory interaction between a private operator (or their representative) with an administration (represented by a public officer or an information system).

This methodological choice means procedures can be described in a standardized way throughout the system, allowing for the comparison of one procedure with another, within a given country or between different countries. Above all, the methodology facilitates an understanding of worldwide processes, circumventing local particularities, by basing descriptions on a universally understandable representation of what a procedure is.

## D. Enrich with add-on features

Besides fulfilling the core function of providing information on the regulatory environment (i.e. the procedures, including laws, fees, contact details, recourse information, etc.), a TIP can also include, embed or link to other pertinent information that is available nationally or internationally that may facilitate trade of goods or services across borders. Below are examples of key features that are usually deemed beneficial for the trading community and decision makers and can be added to the TIP as add-on features or modules.

Having these features in the TIP can help cement its standing within the ecosystem of online services as the go-to place and single point of contact for information on trade. Continuously adding new features and extending its scope will give the TIP the feel of a “*living system*”, one that evolves and stays relevant unlike some other government websites that have a tendency to become obsolete after their initial launch.

## D.1 Customs tariffs module

While a core function of the TIP should be to provide information on all fees and tariffs applicable per procedure and product, it is useful to also include a dedicated customs tariff and duty calculator / module which allows traders to calculate the applicable tariff based on origin and destination countries of the product being traded.

Sometimes such calculators might already exist within the services provided by customs or via a single window system. A link to this or embedding the tool within the trade portal would provide additional ease of service.

### Box 9 Estimate your customs duties online

Customs and compliance for **importing the product 0201.10.00 from Denmark into Mauritius**

Customs duties and local taxes applied in Mauritius

Customs duties when importing from Denmark	Customs duties when importing from countries involved in trade agreements with Mauritius
0% of CIF value	Countries under COMESA (group I): 0% of CIF value
	Countries under COMESA (group II): 0% of CIF value
	SADC: 0% of CIF value
	IOC: 0% of CIF value
	INDIA: 0% of CIF value
	PAKISTAN: 0% of CIF value
	EU: 0% of CIF value
	TURKEY: 0% of CIF value
	UK: 0% of CIF value
	CHINA: 0% of CIF value
	AICFTA: 0% of CIF value
VAT: 0% of CIF value + duties (customs duty, excise, etc.)	
Excise Duty: 0%	

Source: Mauritius Revenue Authority

**Keep updated**  
Receive email updates when customs and compliances changes.  
[Create an alert](#)

### Mauritius Trade Easy

<http://www.mauritiustrade.mu/>

CIF Value: 130,000,000

[Estimate](#)

Estimated duties, taxes and fees to pay

Applicable duties, taxes & fees	Tax base	Rate	Amount due
CUSTOMS DUTY PETROLEUM PRODUCTS	110,000,000	0	0
VALUE ADDED TAX PETROLEUM PRODUCTS	136,916,000	0.18	24,644,880
WITHHOLDING TAX	110,000,000	0.05	5,500,000
QUALITY INSPECTION FEES	108,910,888	0.002001	217,822
INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT LEVY	110,000,000	0.01	1,650,000
AFRICAN UNION FEE	110,000,000	0.002	220,000
COMPUTER PROCESSING FEE	1	3,000	3,000
<b>Total (in RWF):</b>			<b>32,235,702</b>

### Rwanda Trade Portal

[Rwandatrade.rw](http://Rwandatrade.rw)

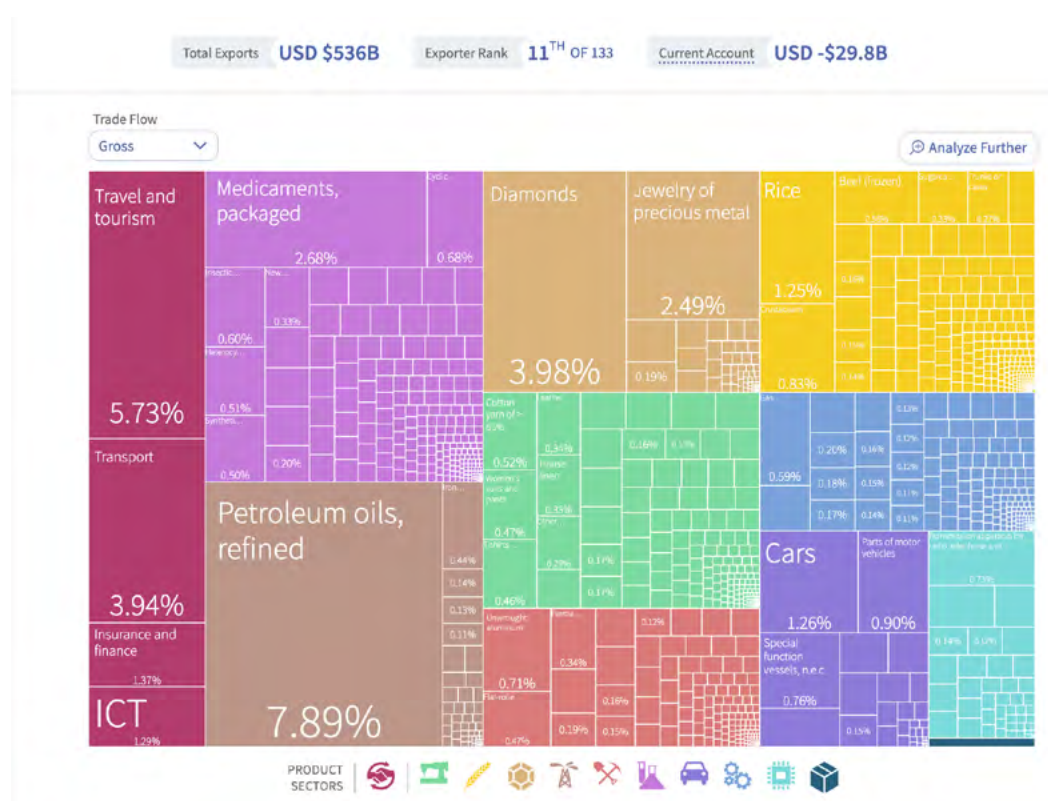


## D.2 Foreign trade statistics

Usually, a country produces regular statistical reports on foreign trade flows which can be useful to incorporate in the TIP. Interactive data visualization tools, which are readily available, can also be embedded to inform traders of the goods and services being traded and with which countries.

International statistical tools are mostly based on the UN Comtrade database which compiles all statistics shared by UN Member States. These are often freely available such as the Observatory of Economic Complexity and can be embedded onto a TIP. Member States can also use their Application Programming Interface (web service) for customized integrations.

### Box 10 Using data visualization to show-case trade statistics



### The Atlas of Economic Complexity (Harvard University)

Exportations for India (2018)

<https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/countries/104/export-basket>

### D.3 Market information and export opportunities

The TIPs can integrate other data sources such as the [UN Comtrade data](#). For example, the EAC TIPs include the Observatory of Economic Complexity and the ITC's [market analysis tools](#), including the [export potential map](#), that can be useful for traders and policymakers to identify market opportunities.

#### Box 11 Tools to explore market opportunities for exportation



#### The Export Potential Map (ITC)

Export Potential for Guatemala  
<http://exportpotential.intracen.org/>

### D.4 Regional Trade Information Portal (RTIP)

Transparent procedures can play a key role in supporting regional integration efforts. RTIP systems can help connect the information on national procedures emanating from national systems, from one border to the next, bringing clarity to transit or specific transport corridors. UNCTAD has helped build RTIPs in the EAC and the Pacific region.

RTIP systems can facilitate the comparison of administrative practices among Member States and the detection of good trade facilitation practices. In the EAC and Pacific regions, for instance, a Regional Trade Facilitation Index enables institutions engaged in trade facilitation to measure and compare the ease of importing and exporting and the related administrative burden between trading block members applying the following indicators: number of steps; number of agencies involved; number of requirements; cost; and duration. Such tools help simplify and harmonize trade related procedures at the regional level by facilitating the achievement of regional objectives while helping support the simplification of procedures at the national level.

### Box 12 Promoting trade transparency at regional level



#### EAC Regional Trade Facilitation Index

An East African Community initiative  
Supported by TMEA, UNCTAD and ITC  
<http://eac.tradeportal.org/>

### D.5 Useful links and resources (WCO, WTO, ASYCUDA, etc.)

The TIP should contain a section where various links to national and international sources can easily be added. In doing so, the role of the TIP as a central repository for trade information in the country is strengthened. Adding links to partner's websites will also encourage them to do the same, thereby strengthening the institutional fabric supporting the TIP and its continuous updating and relevance.

It should be noted that several TIPs proved especially useful during the ongoing COVID-19 emergency crisis. Emergency guidelines from the World Health Organization, Regional Economic Communities, Ministries of Health, and relevant agencies were systemically centralised on and disseminated through the TIPs in Kenya and Rwanda, for instance, in a concerted effort to inform the trading community about the changes and updated health and administrative protocols while crossing borders or trading goods during the crisis.<sup>4</sup>

Other types of resources that can be linked to the portal include:

- WCO resources regarding trade facilitation tools
- WTO resources, for instance on the TFA
- Free trade area agreements
- Single window systems
- Export promotion agencies
- Transporters, freight forwarders and other business associations
- Online marketplaces, etc

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/how-rwanda-trade-portal-offset-some-covid-19-impact-business>

### 3. How to implement a Trade Information Portal

#### A. Success factor one: Technology, choosing simplicity

##### A.1 Design and user experience

Complex procedures (laws, forms and bureaucratic terminology) may discourage potential firm owners from engaging in foreign trade. A TIP can address this by making the administrative aspects of trade feel less difficult, more inclusive and doable. Getting the design right is primordial to achieving this goal.

A TIP must be freely accessible and designed in a way that ensures that the user can easily find what they are looking for. As covered, the design should embody and enhance the user-centricity of the TIP's approach and be structured to deliver the most seamless user experience possible.

Using a simple design and layout so that users can focus on the essentials and be guided to the information they need. Simplicity entails using fewer words, and instead of text, whenever possible using images. Images of offices and the people in charge of the different steps can reassure the user and create a sense of trust.

Simplicity also entails standardizing pages, to create cohesion and familiarity across the system. The choice of colour scheme, layout of menus and step pages, search function, for example, should all be conceived to facilitate navigation and guide the user to the required information.

A TIP should use a responsive design – meaning that it should work well on any computer, tablet or mobile phone.

Further, its look and feel must evolve regularly to stay relevant and align with technological requirements. Resources should be set aside to enable these design evolutions.

##### A.2 Content Management System (CMS)

A TIP may be created using any standard technology platform that allows a website to be built and that also provides interaction with users via a web front end. It is essential that the TIP be easy to manage so that all content can be easily integrated and updated through a CMS. The CMS should be designed so that the training time to use the system for new information officers and system managers is kept to a minimum. No IT programming or database management skills should be needed to update or extend the system.

A CMS' administration interface should allow:

##### **Registering and updating the procedures databases and the corresponding data:**

- Contact details of the entity in charge of each step including address, phone numbers, emails, web systems, designated staff contact data
- Contact details for recourse and ways of submitting complaints
- Links to online systems
- Result (output) of each step
- Legal basis: laws and regulations also to specify applicable sections and article for each step or procedure
- Forms and other required documents, allowing the user to download them in high-resolution format
- Estimation of time frame at each step allowing computation of total length of time required
- Cost and fees, where applicable

##### **Modifying the public interfaces (colours, texts, pictures, logos)**

##### **Ordering the menus**

##### **Managing the search query functions and search filters**

##### **Creating users and granting administration rights**

##### **Defining the recipient of users feedback**

The CMS should be designed to work in areas with low internet bandwidth and for intuitive and ease of use.

The **CMS must have multilingual capacity** and should therefore include a translation module to easily translate the content. Additionally, the system could be setup to accommodate translation tools such as Google translate or similar software.

### A.3 Hosting and maintenance

Since a TIP will be servicing traders around the globe, it is imperative that the system is always accessible, and that the server's performance is sufficient to accommodate an increasing number of TIP users.

The application may be hosted on the lead agency or another government agency's server(s) or outsourced to a service provider - an external specialized service provider may offer better reliability and security at a competitive price.

While the information in a TIP is public by nature (procedures, laws, forms, contact details) and contains no sensitive or person specific data, it is still important that appropriate measures for the maintenance and integrity of system be put in place to safeguard the information, which is increasingly valuable the richer the content of the databases becomes.

## B. Success factor two: Ensuring strong and sustainable institutional anchoring

### B.1 Strong lead agency

A government agency should be appointed to lead the establishment of a TIP and its subsequent operation. The lead agency:

- Will require a clear government mandate, which may need to be conferred through legislation, to empower it to collect, manage and share trade related regulatory information between all relevant agencies and other stakeholders
- Must have the necessary strength, vision and commitment to implement trade facilitation policies and should be accountable to a collaborative body such as a National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC), composed of both public agencies and the business community, or an equivalent governing body
- Will have responsibility for coordinating efforts and managing the development and implementation project. It would also be responsible for operating the TIP on an ongoing basis and ensuring that its content is kept accurate and up to date, reporting to and acting upon policy decisions made collectively by the governing body
- Would be expected to appoint an **implementation team** tasked with developing and implementing the TIP with the required technical resources and skills

Collection and integration of data into the TIP should be done as much as possible with **internal resources** assigned to the implementation team to: build institutional knowledge of the regulatory framework and of the system; and contribute effectively to **the overarching goal of simplifying the trade environment**.

Once operational, the implementation team would likely become the core of a permanent TIP management team tasked with operating and maintaining the TIP and ensuring that relevant content continues to be provided on an ongoing basis by all the relevant government agencies in a timely manner.

### B.2 Role of the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC)

The designated lead agency may report to the NTFC or an equivalent **high-level multi-agency governing body** whose mandate includes the objectives of trade facilitation, coordinating the



trade facilitation ecosystem, streamlining trade procedures and improving the trade and business environment. The WTO TFA (Article 23.2) states that “Each Member shall establish and/or maintain a national committee on trade facilitation or designate an existing mechanism to facilitate both domestic coordination and implementation of the provisions of this Agreement”. Depending on the Member State, this body may also be tasked with oversight of the TIP.

Indeed, with a TIP, the NTFC will have a powerful tool at its disposal that actively supports the implementation of its trade facilitation mandate, namely, to publish online up-to-date trade-related information, to simplify procedures and to communicate with the trading communities. Conversely, the TIP, to ensure national ownership and sustainability, needs the strong institutional anchoring and recognition as the official national platform that NTFC backing can offer.

The NTFC or equivalent governing body must meet regularly to undertake the following activities, among others:

- Review progress in the availability and accuracy of trade information,
- Set the targets and priorities for further simplification of trade procedures
- Direct the development of new modules and functionalities, for the evolution of the system
- Strategic communication to all stakeholders.

It is key that high level representatives of the trading community (importers/exporters association, transport association, Chamber of Commerce and other private sector associations, etc.) take an active part in the TIP’s steering committee to influence its direction so that it provides for the needs of the private sector.

One of the key tasks in the early phases of the TIP implementation for the NTFC will be to **secure institutional buy-in and support**, and to formalize collaboration between agencies around the TIP. Through instruments such as memoranda of understanding / cooperation, the NTFC can assign responsibilities and define accountability mechanisms with the aim of ensuring complete disclosure of public information by all agencies, and to keeping information up to date. The NTFC must appoint focal points within institutions involved in regulating trade who will be formally designated with responsibilities for providing information to the TIP team and for continuously informing them of any changes to procedures (forms, required documents, laws, contact details, etc.).

#### **Box 13 Kenya’s NTFC: a leading role in TIP management**



#### **Meeting of the National Trade Facilitation Committee**

Nairobi, Kenya. 25th November 2019

## C. Success factor three: The need for a strong team

### C.1 National coordinator

The NTFC, governing body or lead agency must designate a skilled national coordinator for the TIP. This should be an official with experience working on regulatory reform for trade, single window implementation, trade facilitation or other reforms that require high levels of inter-agency collaboration. An excellent communicator, the coordinator should be able to secure the needed buy-in and continuous support across the institutions, with the support and leadership of the NTFC or governing body.

Ideally, this appointment will be a full-time position, especially during the early stages of the implementation phase when the workload would be higher as procedures are documented. However, if there are resource constraints, the coordinator should be able to dedicate at least 50% of their time to the implementation and management of the TIP, especially when considering that the TIP should lead to reforms that simplify procedures.

The coordinator will be tasked with managing the day-to-day functions of the TIP team and overseeing the implementation of all national project activities. They also report on progress to the lead agency and the NTFC, becoming the focal point for the TIP within the governments' institutional framework.

If no official enquiry point has been designated yet in the country, the TIP coordinator could take on the role of ensuring prompt response to trader enquiries as increasingly these will arrive through the TIP.

### C.2 Documentation officers

The lead agency must appoint at least two documentation officers - ideally more during the implementation phase. The TIP team's initial focus is on fulfilling the documentation needs (see Section D below) which is significant at first and requires full time staffing commitments during the first 1-2 years depending on the country's regulatory complexity and size.

Importantly, the staff should have some knowledge of the country's business and trade regulatory environment but should especially be highly organized, skilled researchers (desk analysis and face-to-face interviews), with a capacity to analyse large amounts of information. The documentation officers must be able to read and understand laws and regulations, but a legal background is not needed. Training to build business process analysis and data collection/communication skills may be useful.

The documentation work involves a great deal of daily travel to offices in the capital city and around the country, in particular at borders, so it is crucial that the officers are keen to be mobile and to frequently work remotely.

No specific IT skills are required. Basic entry level IT skills are sufficient since the officers will mainly deal with the TIP's CMS for data integration.

### C.3 IT Management

The lead agency should ensure that the organization's IT department is involved in the project to manage access rights and the technical functioning of the platform. This includes hosting arrangements, application and database security, data backup and assistance for system integration with government websites and other IT issues.

Should a Member State decide to build a TIP from scratch, instead of sourcing it from a provider, the IT department will inevitably play a larger role in devising the architecture and supervising the development of the system and ensuring its technical evolution.



## D. Success factor four: Organizing documentation

Information is the TIP's raw material and is central to the development and success of the portal. The quality of the information will determine the quality of the portal and its usefulness for trade operators. The documentation of procedures is, therefore, the most important stage in the development of a TIP. It requires resources (especially human), an effective methodology, and determination.

Procedure documentation is the process by which information on a specific procedure is collected, analysed, integrated online into the TIP, then reviewed (to track down possible inconsistencies) and validated/certified by the highest competent administrative authority. The completion of these successive phases, which are self-standing but complementary, is the best way to present quality documentation online.

### D1. Collect data

A common mistake is to assume that information on procedures is already available (on existing sites, or brochures provided by government agencies).

This is rarely the case and administrative practice is based more on experience, relying on word of mouth between officials. Thus, procedures must be tested and experienced "on the ground". Moreover, when information does exist, it is generally piecemeal, rarely reflecting the real experience of the user but biased towards the administrations' point of view. As stated before, it is this lack of information, and therefore of transparency, that justifies the development of the TIP.

The documentation of a procedure therefore begins with field visits to the institutions to retrace, step-by-step, the operator's journey. A procedure can be considered as a succession of stages: the trader goes to an administration to obtain information or a document that will be necessary for the next stage. This administrative process ends when the trader has all the documents they need to move their goods freely. It is therefore from the institutions directly that the data must be collected and from whom the maximum amount of information useful to the operator can be obtained.

Access to information is challenging. Seeking information from an administration, even when it is public by nature, can meet unexpected resistance from its staff. To counter this, it is important to obtain senior backing (e.g., minister, Secretary-General, departmental director) to facilitate access and interview personnel such as heads of departments and reception officers. An authorization letter and a brief presentation of the TIP to each agency highlighting objectives and issues, can also be helpful. The NTFC can play a central role in facilitating data collection and raising awareness of its member agencies.

Data collection is then carried out during field visits, preferably with the agencies whose officers would be in direct contact with users, in order to understand the practical experience of economic operators and how the agencies in charge of formalities function. Ideally, the agencies' field officers who welcome, guide or control users on a daily basis, will be asked to outline the step-by-step processes they follow.

Data collection is a difficult exercise, involving the processing of a large amount of information (contacts, documents, form, etc.). Also, it is not always easy for agencies to explain their daily work in simple words and the exercise can be further complicated by a challenging work environment (heat, fatigue, noise, etc.).

These obstacles align with a fundamental principle of data collection: "it will take more than one visit". It is not uncommon to meet one agency several times to understand a single step. Courtesy and friendliness are important in overcoming such hurdles. The more pleasant the relationship with the agencies, the better the communication will be with the TIP team.

**Box 14 Data collection must be as close as possible to practice (Mali)**



**Field visit to collect information on customs clearance**

Kati, Mali, November 2018

**D2. Integrate data into the TIP**

The collection of information in the field can be complicated and sometimes chaotic. It is important to set aside time, after each visit or meeting with institutions, to sort and organize the information before important details are forgotten. This analysis phase is a critical step: it helps to clarify understanding, cross-check information and identify gaps or deficiencies. It is rare to collect all the necessary data in a single visit (“we always come back” to an agency). The analysis phase is a moment to concentrate and reflect, during which we identify what we know - and what we do not yet know.

Before entering the information that has been collected and analysed on the TIP, it is recommended to standardize the data according to agreed formats. For example, standardize the format of names, phone numbers and addresses instead of using various formats which confuse the user. For copies or examples of documents that are required or provided by agencies, care must be taken to erase any personal and confidential data (surname, first name, address, company name, etc.) using image processing software (Skitch, Microsoft Paint, Photoshop or other). Finally, the size of the photos must be standardized so that they do not appear too large or too small, and above all that the file size does not impair display or downloading.

Prior analysis of the information and the standardized processing of documents facilitates the integration of the data online. Since the TIP’s CMS should allow users to insert data on a web portal without specific IT skills, all that is needed is a good understanding of the TIP architecture and the organization of information to load or copy/paste data correctly into the system. Once the data has been entered into the CMS, it is strongly recommended to regularly check how the information is displayed online to ensure that the content is clear and understandable to TIP visitors.

**Box 15 Upload the data (Benin)**



**The TIP Team in Benin integrating data online**

Cotonou, Benin on Feb. 2020

**D3. Review the documentation**

The collection and integration of data involves the processing and manipulation of large volumes of information. It is easy to get distracted and inadvertently let errors or approximations slip through. It is also difficult, after field visits, to maintain the necessary concentration to ensure that all useful information has been collected. For this reason, it is beneficial to review and scrutinize each step objectively, looking for errors, inconsistencies or omissions. It is also a good opportunity for the “coherence” of each procedure to be tested for a logical and rational sequence of steps.

Revision, which is essentially a consistency review, requires a great deal of attention. It can seem overwhelming, as there are many opportunities for errors or omissions. It must therefore be carried out with a clear mind, patience and focus. It is often preferable to space the integration and revision work a day or two apart, as it is essential to have the necessary hindsight to analyse the documentation with a fresh eye. It is also possible to entrust the revision to someone who has not been involved in the field visits (teammate, supervisor or other) and who can question the work done with an independent perspective. In the initial phase of the TIP, it is recommended that this responsibility be assigned to a trainer/coach who can share their advice and instructions with the learning team.

The review is a critical phase in the documentation process: its role is to ensure that all the information useful to the private operator has been collected and that the procedure is described in a logical and realistic way. If there are gaps in the understanding, the team in charge of the TIP has to return to the field to collect complete information. The documentation process would be reset, and the sequence described above will be repeated: data collection, online integration, and revision. It is often necessary to return to the field several times before completing the revision phase to ensure the quality and consistency of the information. Revision is not to be underestimated: it is the key to a successful TIP.

#### D4. Validate and certify information

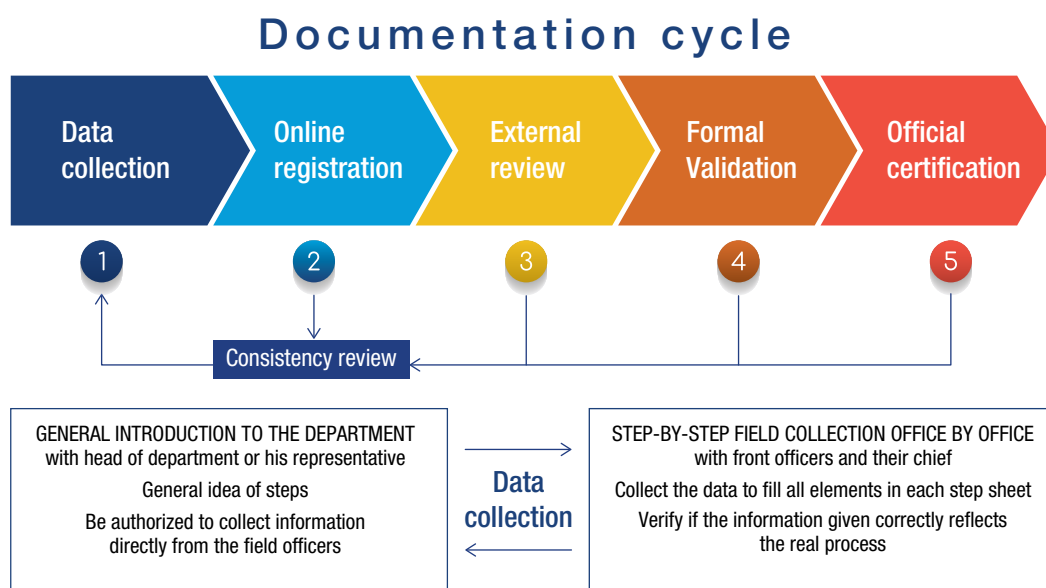
When all information has been collected for a specific procedure, the described process must be validated by the relevant stakeholders. This entails presenting each step of the procedure online to the institution in charge for confirmation. It is crucial to first recall the principles and methodology of the TIP: procedures presented step-by-step, from the user's point of view, and information collected in the field directly from the agencies' officers in charge of the procedures. The TIP reflects the procedures as they are implemented in practice and not necessarily as laid down in the law. This change in perspective sometimes leads to confusion and misunderstandings with government officials. It is therefore necessary to recall very clearly the issues and objectives of the TIP.

The validation of a procedure is done step-by-step. Each step must be reviewed and approved by the line manager of the official(s) in charge of the step. Last minute changes can be made immediately during the meeting through the CMS. The line manager will also be identified as the person to be called upon in the event of a problem or to provide additional information. The validation is first informal: the line manager reviews the step presented on the TIP and shares their remarks or corrections which may be incorporated immediately. When they approve the description, the step is considered validated. It is nevertheless desirable to formalize this validation process through certification, with the manager agreeing to officially validate the description proposed by the TIP by signing and stamping it on behalf of their institution. This certification can then be uploaded and accessible online.

Certification of the information demonstrates a government agency's desire to deliver greater administrative transparency. It also represents a commitment to accountability and principles of good governance: each private operator can refer to the certified information to report a breach or anomaly and hold that institution accountable.

Unfortunately, it is sometimes difficult to bring the process to a successful conclusion. Firstly, because the steps are numerous. Coordination with the multiple agencies in charge of different procedures requires organization. Secondly, because some may be reluctant to make a personal commitment, but with patience and persuasion most institutions and their managers will recognise the need for change and transparent practices and agree to take on this responsibility.

#### **Box 16 The documentation cycle - a continuous effort**



## E. Success factor five: Updating procedures

Initial TIP documentation entails a heavy workload and requires the mobilization of significant resources. Thankfully, updating already documented procedures is less cumbersome, involving correcting or revising documented procedures to reflect changes in administrative practice. Fewer resources will be needed at this stage, but the process requires detailed attention.

The quality of a TIP and its success depends first and foremost on the quality of the information it shares online. It must be accurate and precise to maintain the confidence of private operators and remain the undisputed, transparent reference for information on procedures. Any change in foreign trade procedures must be reflected in the TIP, ideally in real time. Therefore, putting in place mechanisms to update information is key.

### E.1 The primary responsibility of the TIP team

The TIP team's main task is to carry out the documentation while guaranteeing the quality of the information, and its primary responsibility is to ensure that the data is kept up to date. The team must put in place mechanisms to ensure that any changes in procedures or formalities are communicated to them as quickly as possible. The simplest is often the most effective: the TIP team can, at regular intervals, step-by-step and procedure by procedure, ask the vast network of contacts formed during the data collection if there have been any changes. Also, field visits provide an opportunity to meet the people who are best informed on the ground. At the time of updating (for instance every 3 or 6 months), these officials can be mobilized, formally or informally, to report any changes. A well-structured and well-organized contact directory is therefore a considerable asset.

### E.2 Raising awareness among the administrations concerned

The requirement for transparency goes beyond the sole responsibility of the TIP team and includes all government agencies involved in administering trade procedures. The TIP is a tool to describe and document cross-cutting procedures that go well beyond the competence area of the institution in charge of managing it. The agencies responsible should proactively contact the TIP team to communicate changes and ensure that current administrative practice is properly reflected in the portal. A TIP serves all institutions by helping to disseminate information on how to comply with the rules, but institutions must also collaborate to ensure its success by immediately informing the TIP team when rules change.

### E.3 The central role of the NTFC

As previously stated, the NTFC is the body in charge of coordinating trade facilitation reforms and supervising the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. It is the guarantor of Article 1 on the transparency of information related to foreign trade procedures. As such, it plays a central role in the institutionalization of the TIP and its dissemination. It can also intervene in the mechanisms for documenting and updating procedures by requesting that NTFC's members actively contribute to the documentation process, flagging agencies that refuse to share information or those which fail to communicate changes in procedures. Validating the documented trade procedures by the NTFC guarantees the quality of the information presented. Thus, in several countries, each NTFC meeting begins with a round-table discussion inviting participating administrations to inform the TIP team of changes to their procedures.

### 3. Use and operate a TIP

#### A. Facilitating the understanding of trade procedures

Administrative complexity is a cost for foreign trade economic operators. A good understanding of the trade procedures to be completed helps move goods faster, lowering transaction costs and facilitating global trade. This is the basis of the WTO TFA and the core mission of a TIP: to make procedures clear and understandable.

To achieve this goal, private sector users must know that the TIP exists and understand its purpose. Also, public agencies must actively use the TIP to share information externally. Thus, implementing an effective communication strategy that targets the business community would be beneficial. The TIP can also be used to standardize the presentation of procedures and can become the go-to place for an interactive information service, to obtain precise answers to trade-related questions.

##### A.1 Promoting the TIP to the business community

The TIP must become the go-to place for those engaging in international trade to find information on trade procedures. It is therefore essential to support the installation of the TIP with an **effective communication strategy to all stakeholders**.

Several tools or means of communication can be combined to achieve maximum impact:

- Media coverage (Press, Radio, TV). The launch of the TIP is an opportunity to organize a high-level event (in the presence of senior officials, including ministers) likely to attract the attention of the media. The TIP team should ensure that high-ranking personalities will be available for interviews. It is helpful to proactively promote the opportunity to the media in advance of the event via personalized invitations and press releases
- Brochures and merchandising (pens, stickers, USB keys, etc). The production of brochures or merchandising items can be expensive, but it can create (or even maintain) a link with the target audience. It is therefore better to keep in mind the value of the investment and to distribute the merchandise to targeted vectors of influence (President of Chamber of Commerce, professional organizations, etc).
- Public poster campaigns. This is an effective way to target a number of people using limited resources. Large-format posters (4mx3m) can be installed in cities, in strategic locations (ports of entry / exit, cargo area of the airport). Posters (A3) can be displayed inside the premises of administrations. Roll-up banners can be installed in strategic locations (reception areas, ministerial offices, etc.).
- Web presence and social networks. An effective strategy for directing visitors to the TIP is to exchange web links with government and business associations sites. The exchange of links can also influence the TIP's ranking in search engines. In addition, an active and regular presence on social media (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.) is helpful. Using keywords and search engine optimization (SEO) techniques also helps with targeting the TIP to potential users.
- Engagement with the private sector through workshops, focus groups, forums or thematic meetings raises awareness of the TIP with the target audience directly. These give attendees the opportunity to ask questions and generates the potential to make private operators active ambassadors of the TIP.



**Box 17 Launching a trade portal: making an impact**



**Uganda's TIP launch gathered more than 100 people**

Kampala, Uganda, November 2018



**Rwanda Trade Portal was celebrated at a high-level event**

Kigali, Rwanda, March 2018



## Box 18 The Nigeria TIP leaflet (key information at a glance)



# NIGERIA TRADE INFORMATION PORTAL

## AN INFORMATION WEB PORTAL ON TRADE PROCEDURES



## A GUIDE TO TRADE PROCEDURES

The Trade Portal is an online information portal that presents the foreign trade procedures from the trader's point of view.

The procedures are described step by step. Each step includes the document to be obtained, the documents to be provided, the costs, the duration, the legal basis and the institution in charge.

In case of problem, a manager can be contacted by e-mail.



## A TOOL FOR REFORMS

By describing the procedures, the Trade Portal makes it possible to simplify them.

Once procedures are documented, public institutions easily detect unnecessary steps and information (either because they are redundant, or because they are not required by law).

The Trade Portal helps Governments comply with Article 1 of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement which calls on each country to publish online practical guides to their import, export and transit procedures.

Finally, the Portal is a tool for each National Trade Facilitation Committee to coordinate reforms locally.

[nigeria.tradeportal.org](http://nigeria.tradeportal.org)



**The Nigeria TIP leaflet is a good introduction to what is online**

(It is also used as a poster to be pin on administrations' walls)

**Box 19 KenTrade on Twitter: almost 10'000 followers!**



Coffee farmers in Kericho have done it [the-star.co.ke/business/kenya...](#) and you should be the next.

KenTrade is simplifying the export procedures to help you save on time and cost.  
Direct export of your coffee to foreign markets starts here. [infotradekenya.go.ke/procedure/403?...](#)  
[#KenTradeCares](#)

KenTrade Retweeted



**KenTrade** @KenTrade\_G2B · 3 Sep 2020

Kenya tops Africa in global avocado exports and ranks 7th in the world. Key markets are The Netherlands, France, Spain, UAE and Russia - [@ITC\\_MktAnalysis](#)

Want to export avocados? See this step-by-step guide on the govt's trade portal [#InfoTradeKE bit.ly/2QVV3ZP](#)



ITC-Market Analysis and 6 others

**KenTrade promoting InfoTradeKenya on Twitter**

[https://twitter.com/KenTrade\\_G2B](https://twitter.com/KenTrade_G2B)

#### **Box 20 Connecting with the business community (Rwanda)**



#### **Face to face information to popularize the TIP**

Kigali, Rwanda, 2018

The success of a communication strategy has to be tangible and measurable. Web impact is quantifiable: it can be measured by the increase in the number of visits, which is one of the best indicators of the TIP's success. Appropriate tools, such as Google Analytics, can be installed to regularly monitor the performance of the TIP.

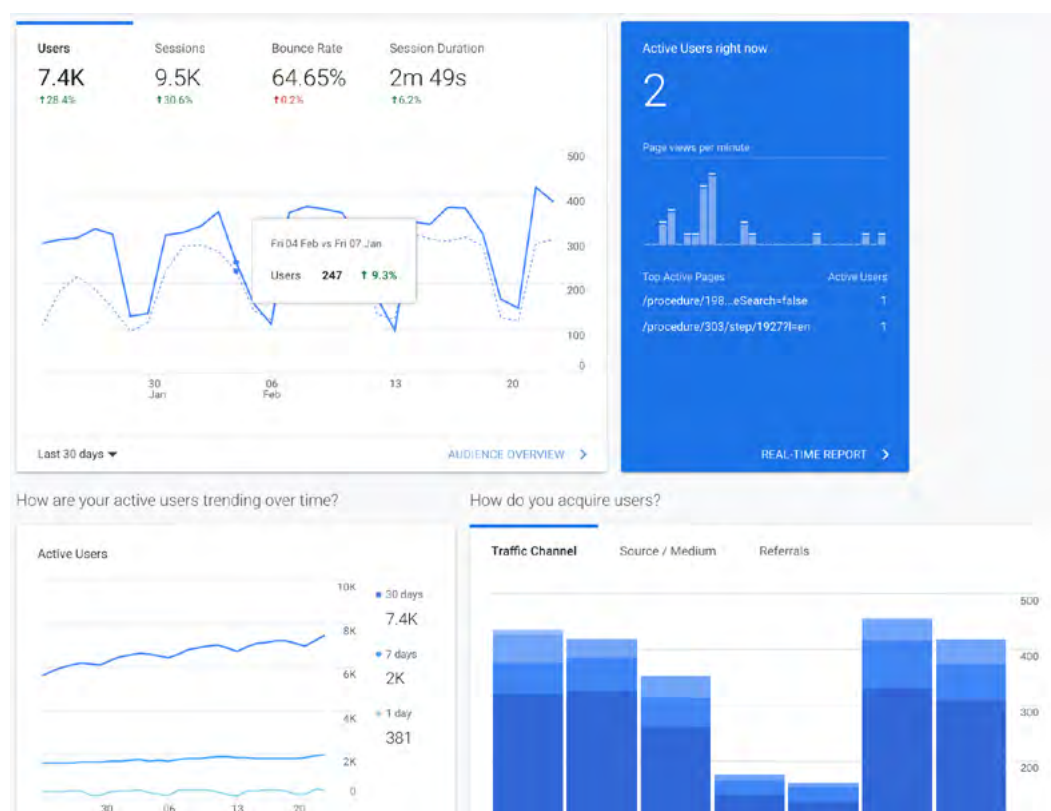
#### **A.2 Disseminating information on other sites (embedding and APIs)**

The ability to offer strategic partners a way to automatically disseminate TIP content directly from their website is a major benefit. This capability not only spreads the information more widely but also helps secure these organizations' buy-in for the timely updating of information in the TIP since they have a direct stake in its information. These partners can include government agencies, embassies, private sector associations and others.

In the EAC region, the embedding of content from the national TIPs onto multiple government and private sector association websites has drawn a high number of visitors and created a sense of shared ownership among stakeholders. The embedding capability allows for the trade procedures, which is the main module of their TIP, to be visible directly from any partner's website for free.

Embedding, for the recipient agency, is easy since it requires minimal technical skills to implement. More advanced data exchange techniques such as web services, e.g. Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), can be used to allow partner agencies to choose and customize what information to extract and how to display it on their websites.

### Box 21 Communication strategy - measuring impact



### Monitoring the impact of communication on TIP's on web traffic

Example from Kenya TIP's Google Analytics account

### A.3 Responding to requests (enquiry points)

As the TIP becomes known as the go-to place for reliable information on trade, it is natural for it to evolve to serve as the country's enquiry point<sup>5</sup>.

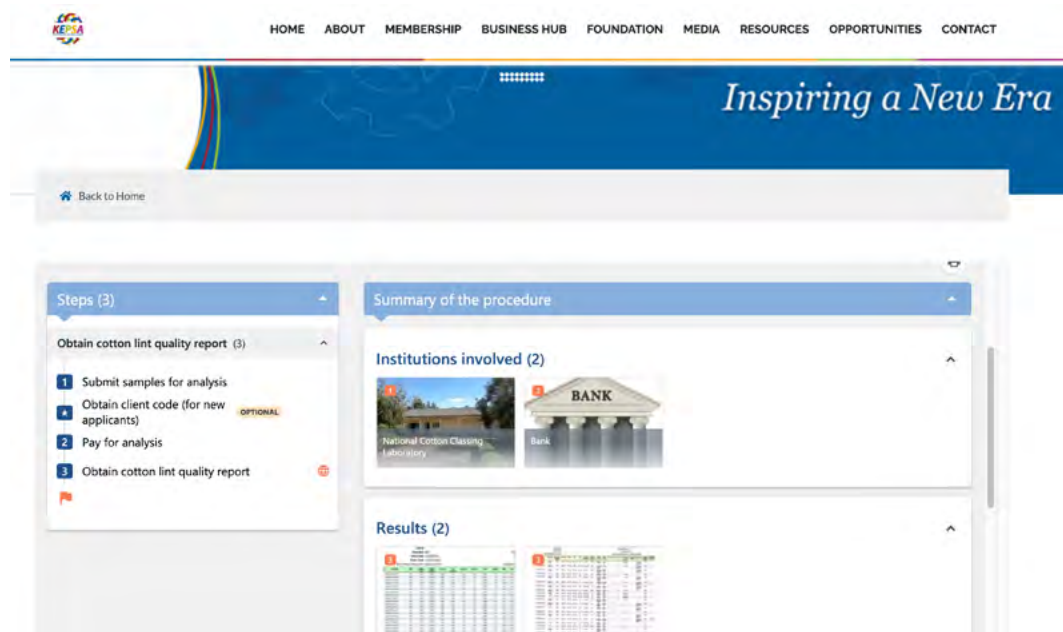
Should a trader struggle to find answers to specific questions on the TIP, they should be able to raise a query via the TIP. Communication modules within the TIP should facilitate the raising of questions via email, chat or telephone to the TIP team which should be entrusted with the task of responding in a timely and customer-oriented manner.

The process of responding to queries can be based on the same institutional framework setup to document and maintain information on procedures. It is expected that most answers to user enquiries can be found on the TIP by the team but the more complex issues can be escalated to the relevant agencies via the designated focal points under the auspices of the NTFC.

<sup>5</sup> An enquiry point is defined as "The means by which an individual trader, a government, or any other interested person can obtain specific information from a Member about import, export or transit requirements." (Article 1.3, WTO TFA, TFA Facility, <https://www.tfafacility.org/article-1>)



## Box 22 Embedding trade information on partner sites (Kenya)



### Kenya Private Sector Alliance

<https://kepsa.or.ke/>

## B. Simplifying procedures using trade information

### B.1 Using a TIP to identify simplification measures

A good understanding of existing procedures is a precondition to simplifying them, as was noted in Section 1. If a procedure has been documented precisely and fully on the TIP following the principles described in Section 2, the step-by-step guides will allow decision makers to quickly identify redundancies, unlawful requirements, inefficiencies, and formulate corrective measures.

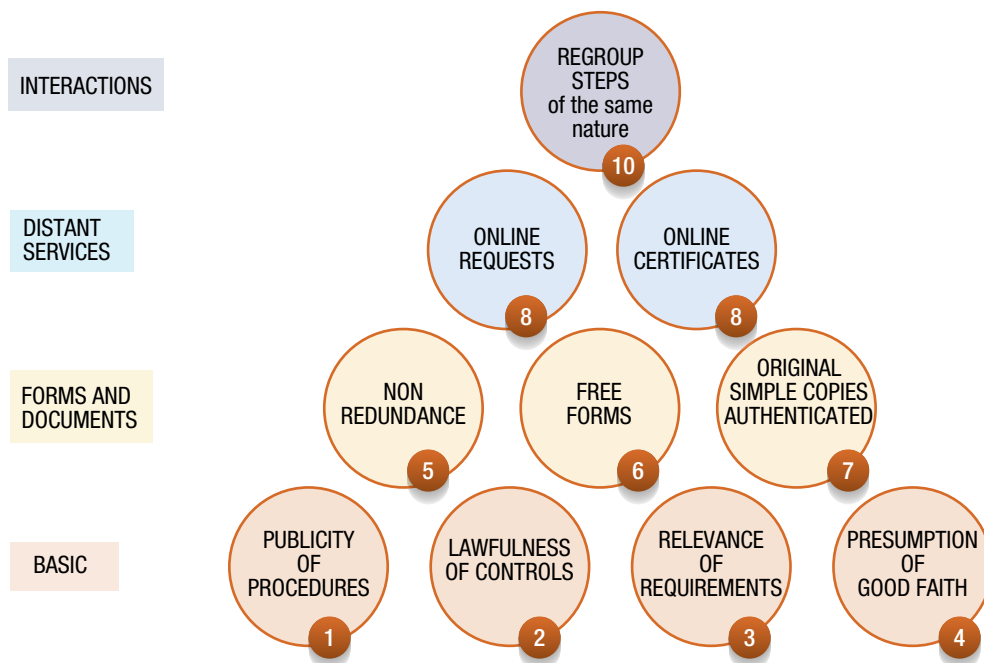
What complicates procedures for users is having to deal with multiple public agents or websites, to submit numerous forms, documents, and payments. The fewer the interactions and the less information users have to provide, the simpler the procedure and the easier compliance is. Simplifying consists, therefore, in minimizing the number of steps and requirements in a procedure.

UNCTAD has developed a set of 10 principles to simplify administrative procedures (see box 23). They are easy to apply and allow a reduction in the number of steps and requirements by using a better application of the regulations. The result is a lawful, simplified and optimized procedure.

### B.2 Using the TIP to implement and measure the impact of simplification measures

The governing body in charge of trade facilitation reforms, such as the NTFC or its equivalent, represents the best forum to oversee the implementation of simplification measures which are often cross-cutting, involving multiple agencies, just like the targeted procedures. In several countries using the UNCTAD TIP approach including Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, the NTFC uses the TIP systematically to simplify procedures. In this section we summarise the process these countries' respective NTFCs follow to reach their objectives.

**Box 23 UNCTAD's 10 principles to simplify administrative procedures**



Once a procedure has been thoroughly described (principle 1), each step must be examined one step at a time. For each step, the regulations that justify the elements of the step must be analysed to assess if all the requirements are legally justified (principle 2), or if some are redundant (principle 3). Non-lawful or redundant requirements can be removed.

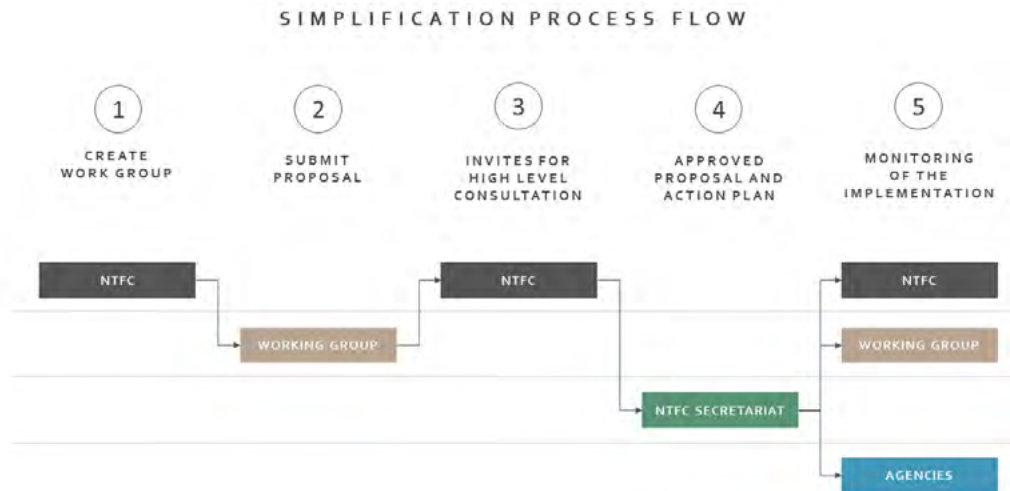
This also applies to data requested in a form. The fields that need completing must be checked to determine if they all are justified and useful. If not, they can be removed. If one out of five requirements is eliminated, the procedure will be simplified by 20%.

The next step is to eliminate steps. A way of eliminating steps is to regroup steps that are similar. There are usually three types of interactions between users and public institutions: the user (1) applies for a certificate/authorization in the first step, (2) pays in a second step and (3) collects the certificate in a third step. If a procedure involves several administrative units, the same sequence apply-pay-collect is repeated with each unit. This means that for a procedure involving three units, there are at least 9 steps.

These can be reduced to three if the user can apply simultaneously with all units in one step (with a single form), pay once, and collect all three certificates at once. The merging of steps is the principle behind the physical and electronic one-stop-shop and Single Window.

First, the NTFC decides on priority objective(s) for simplification, for example “to simplify the exportation of tea” or “to facilitate compliance with phytosanitary standards”. Then, the NTFC constitutes *ad hoc* working groups (WGs) to collaborate on developing tangible and realistic proposals for the simplification objective and sets an appropriate deadline to complete the assignment.

**Figure 4 - Model simplification process flow**



The WGs are coordinated by the NTFC coordinator or an NTFC-designated group member. They are constituted of senior managers of the institutions with intricate knowledge of the procedure. Relevant representatives of the private sector can contribute with their experience and draw attention to the most problematic areas for them. For instance, one or two local firms dealing in plant export could be invited when such procedures are targeted. Other practitioners such as trade associations or freight forwarders may be invited to take part as well.

The WG meets regularly within the allotted time frame to develop simplification proposals and may task individual members with specific tasks (e.g., creating a single application form). It is during these work sessions that the TIP should be put into full use for the analysis of the simplification objective thanks to easy identification of redundancies and bottlenecks, quick access to all forms, requirements, fees, as well as to the legal justifications for each step of the procedure. If the procedure related to the simplification objective is not yet accessible on the system, the WG may request the TIP team to document it.

The WG prepares the rationale for each simplification measure and their impact on the procedure, using the TIP to estimate step and requirement reductions, time and cost savings. Measures are usually divided into:

**Quick win measures** that can be implemented right away, with no changes in the law and at the sole prerogative of the management of the institution in charge (these can even be implemented on the fly, before reconvening the NTFC)

**Mid to long-term measures** that will require either an investment (e.g., in a software application or in infrastructure), a decision between institutions and / or changes in regulation

Once submitted by the WG, the NTFC steering committee assesses the measures, decides upon their implementation and defines an appropriate time frame. It gives the go-ahead for measures that can be implemented right away (if not already implemented by the WG), with no or little investment and orders mid-to-longer term measures according to feasibility and outlines a realistic action plan with clearly defined responsibilities for their deployment.

The NTFC Secretariat is tasked with coordinating the implementation of the simplification measures and can draw support from the WG and the NTFC members. The Secretariat regularly informs NTFC members on the progress of implementation.



**Box 24 Working session on simplifying import procedures (Mali)**



**Working group analysing the procedure as described on TIP**

Bamako, Mali on May 2017

Importantly, the team in charge of the TIP should play a key role documenting the simplifications and verifying how the new procedures will work in practice, in order to publicize the progress to the trading community and disseminate their impact.

Monitoring may be facilitated by the creation of **simplification dashboards** drawing either manually or automatically from the data publicized by the TIP - dashboards in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania currently automatically use TIP data. They provide indicators on the baseline, target procedure and current procedures and can therefore provide key metrics including on the rate of implementation (see figure 6) and on the **administrative burden cost savings** (see box 25).

**Figure 6 - A simplification dashboard**



### Box 25 Calculating the administrative burden cost

UNCTAD, as part of its TIP offering, has conceived the administrative burden cost (ABC) module to automatically calculate the ABC from a business perspective, i.e., the costs of understanding, filling, producing and presenting requirements, for the steps and procedures documented on the trade information portals. It is inspired by the OECD's Standard Cost Model<sup>6</sup>.

The ABC module evaluates the impact of simplification. It can automatically calculate the potential cost savings for businesses and governments of each simplification measure and, in so doing, allows governments to prioritize the measures that have the largest impact on reducing the cost of doing business. Such figures also allow the government to better demonstrate the positive impact of simplification for the private sector and generate additional support, institutional and financial, to its trade facilitation reform processes.

#### Administrative burden

1 user/year KES 40,465.86  
for 10,000 users/year KES 404,658,600

#### Preparation costs (1,717.08) ?

	Understand	Gather Info	Fill Form
Human	62.50	1,406.25	125
Other Costs	n/a	n/a	23.33

Print Cost ( KES 100 )

#### Submission costs (38,748.78) ?

	Reaching the office	Waiting time in line	Spent time at the counter	Return from the office
Human	4,500	112.51	2,525.02	4,500
Other Costs	13,500	n/a	n/a	13,500

Online Cost ( KES 111.25 )

### ABC module: automatic computation of the total administrative burden cost of a procedure

The ABC module has been deployed on trade information portals in EAC partner states (Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda) built by UNCTAD. Its data is used systematically by the respective government's simplification programs. ABC savings are reflected in real time in the countries' simplification dashboards (see figure 6).

### B.3 A tool for regional integration

Within a regional trading bloc, transparent trade procedures can play a catalytic role in facilitating trade among its Member States. For trade to grow within an established regional economic area, goods should be able to move smoothly and without overly cumbersome administrative hurdles. To achieve this, trade-related procedures need to be simple, harmonized and applied evenly in practice across the region. Ensuring they actually are, requires the ability to know them and monitor them.

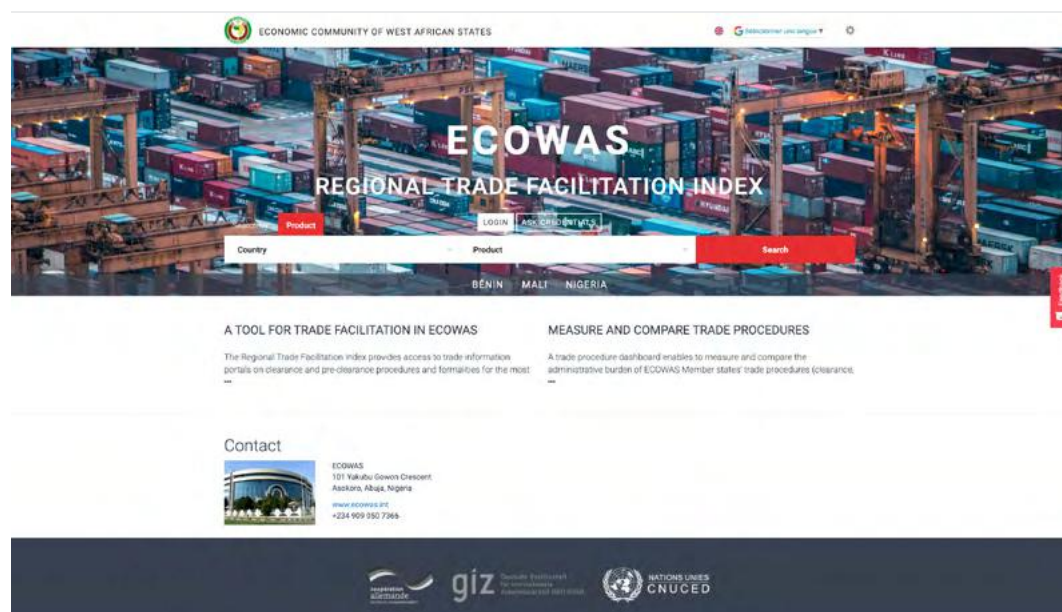
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/34227698.pdf>

Therefore, the adoption by Member States of a similar approach to trade information and to building TIPs should be encouraged as it can become a game changer for improved regional integration by:

- clarifying national and cross border procedures
- comparing Member States procedures using the same indicators (e.g., steps, requirements, time frame, costs)
- helping identify bottlenecks and prioritize removal of the most problematic ones
- shedding light on the discrepancies between Member States in applying commonly agreed rules
- identifying good practices and encouraging the adoption of these across Member States

This is the case in the East African Community (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda) and ECOWAS (pilot-initiative with Benin, Mali, Nigeria) where each Member State is implementing the same style of TIP. As mentioned in section 1, the EAC and ECOWAS Regional Trade Information Portals use information from national systems to offer decision makers a comparison tool, the Regional Trade Facilitation Index (RTFI). The ability to have instantaneous access to information on each Member State's procedures and to perform real time comparisons enables decision makers to set ambitious common goals that are tangible because they are rooted in measurable indicators that have a direct impact on the economic operators' experience.

#### **Box 26 The Regional Trade Facilitation Index in ECOWAS (pilot)**



**A regional dashboard grants access to national TIP  
and comparison functionalities**

<http://ecowas.tradeportal.org/>

**Trade Facilitation Index ECOWAS**

**Comparison**  
This dashboard allows you compare procedures in terms of number of steps, requirements, services involved, duration and costs.

**Importation de produits pharmaceutiques - Voie aérienne**

System	Steps	Entries	Requirements	Duration	Costs
Mali	45	8	48	82.25	4572180
Benin	21	9	21	31.25	152730

**Exportation de fruits frais - Voie aérienne**

System	Steps	Entries	Requirements	Duration	Costs
Mali	25	5	26	6.75	92100
Nigeria	44	12	41	76.5	398100
Benin	21	6	29	3.5	87180

**Importation de céréales - Voie terrestre**

System	Steps	Entries	Requirements	Duration	Costs
Mali	77	12	74	5.75	41098460
Nigeria	14	5	13	32	19000
Benin (Boulogne)	22	9	30	3.5	182730

**Exportation de À DÉFINIR - Voie terrestre**

System	Steps	Entries	Requirements	Duration	Costs
Mali (Mangou)	33	9	34	11.25	155240
Nigeria (Portique)	29	11	34	72.5	48300
Benin (Portique)	14	5	13	32	19000

**The RTFI compares procedures step-by-step in an automated manner**  
(Restricted access for Member States)

## 5. Conclusion: Getting started with a TIP

The Trade Facilitation Agreement's transparency provisions specify what information should be available on the Internet - namely the practical steps needed to import, export, and transit goods or services, the forms required, and contact details for more information.

This roadmap outlines that the only way to fulfil these obligations in a “non-discriminatory and easily accessible manner” (Art 1.2) is for a country to provide the trading community with a Trade Information Portal which is centred on the user and offers, as a central feature, step-by-step guidance to trade-related procedures. This enables governments to provide transparency over their border-related procedures and work to make them more efficient as the trading environment evolves.

This is particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where access to digital information to act quickly and digital services to fast-track trade procedures have proved critical to facilitating the flow of essential goods and services, providing the ability to maintain higher levels of economic activity while human interactions are constrained.

Governments wanting to build a TIP that have understood the challenges and opportunities described in this guide, particularly regarding the transversal, piecemeal and scattered nature of trade information and the need for government-wide collaboration, should consider the following five-point checklist *to get started*:

- **Determine institutional anchoring** by forming a steering committee with high-level representatives from the various trade regulating institutions. If a NTFC is already established and well-functioning, it is ideally (or one of its subcommittees) placed to become this governing body, tasked at first with overseeing the implementation phase. Its first job will be to decide which institution is best suited to oversee the implementation project and house the project team
- **Evaluate existing online information:** All countries have some information available online, albeit usually piecemeal, relating to cross-border related procedures. Conducting a desk review to take stock helps identify good practices, the institutions responsible and the biggest gaps to be addressed first by a TIP. It is also a useful exercise for staff involved to think critically about the state of trade information and ways in which institutions can improve how they explain rules to the public
- **Define the scope (of the first iteration of the TIP):** Covering the trade of all types of commodities and services from launch is not advisable as it would significantly delay the TIP's release, particularly when some products are rarely traded. Instead, the system should first offer central information useful to the TIP's primary target groups - often SMEs trading in sectors of strategic economic importance. Depending on the context, a TIP can be operational in under a year
- **Decide which system to develop and identify technical partners:** Should a country develop its own TIP from the bottom up or instead build it using a ready-made system that can be tailored to the country's needs? UNCTAD has extensive expertise in trade facilitation tools and is on hand to support interested countries. Using a tried and tested system enables a country to focus its resources on the crucial data collection process rather than on the often lengthy, costly and complex design and programming process of developing a website and content management system
- **Secure the needed resources:** As outlined, a TIP brings greater efficiency and should save government resources in the mid- to long-term. However, funds need to be directed to support the project - in particular, IT development, documentation and communication processes. Developing and Least Developed Countries may be able to benefit from various financing support mechanisms, particularly if the country has notified WTO members of the need for support to implement TFA article 1.2 (i.e., as “Category “C”) measures

Economic operators today expect full transparency on trade-procedures and fast, online services from their governments. The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement makes this mandatory. A TIP can achieve transparency, fast track a governments' trade facilitation objectives and improve the competitiveness of a country's business environment.

*For more information on UNCTAD's technical assistance in the field of Trade Information Portals and Trade Facilitation, please contact the UNCTAD Trade Facilitation Section: [unctad-tf@un.org](mailto:unctad-tf@un.org)*



