

EA Trade Hub Launches Regional Sensitization and Training Campaign on Newly-Legislated Customs Manuals

The East Africa Trade Hub supported the East African Community (EAC) Council of Ministers to draft and formally legislate three technical customs manuals: customs procedures, customs valuation and post-audit clearance. The manuals represent a milestone in EAC customs policy and an important step in moving towards a fully-fledged customs union. To ensure widespread uptake and usage of the manuals, the EA Trade Hub will support the EAC in dissemination of all three manuals to customs officials at all regional borders, clearing and forwarding agents, and importers and exporters. The EA Trade Hub also plans to facilitate trainings on the manuals and implementation of their policies and procedures in the coming months.

Customs policy and procedures are key to trade facilitation. Burdensome fees and procedures associated with importing and exporting goods can greatly discourage cross-border trade while efficient customs practices can improve the trade environment for a range of public and private sector stakeholders including clearing agents, freight forwarders, brokers, insurers, revenue authorities, police, and plant and health inspectors.

The East African Community Customs Union (EACCU) was launched in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda in 2005 with Burundi and Rwanda acceding two years later. Partner States passed the EAC Customs Management Act which prescribes the terms and conditions under which customs policy should be implemented to achieve a developed customs union with zero percent trade tariffs and fully harmonized customs procedures across Partner States. Although EAC Partner States have taken action steps to move towards these goals, disparate national customs practices like duties, documentation, and processing and verification procedures as well as varying levels of national capacities continue to challenge progress towards harmonized policies.

The EA Trade Hub operates through a formal working relationship with the EAC Secretariat as opposed to bilaterally with Partner States. Although validating policy through the various echelons of the EAC takes time, operating within the framework of the EAC secretariat allows the EA Trade Hub to formalize its initiatives through legislation, ensuring sustainability.

The EA Trade Hub has supported the EAC in customs policy initiatives since 2009 in three policy areas: customs procedures, customs valuation and post-audit clearance. The EA Trade Hub also supports trainings for customs officials within these thematic areas and increased customs interconnectivity between Partner States.