USAID Boosts East Africa's performance under WTO Transparency Principles

SUCCESS STORY

In Brief

Imagine you were exporting some perishable goods abroad. Once your goods reach the destination port you discover that they cannot be allowed into the country because of a newly introduced requirement or standard that your product does not meet. The goods have to be destroyed or returned. You stand to suffer massive losses and possibly lose a buyer. This hypothetical situation can happen in real life.

Scenarios such as these led the WTO to introduce measures requiring members to explicitly notify other members before adopting new measures, if the new measures are likely to affect international trade. Notifications provide an opportunity for members to comment on the measures and address potential trade problems at an early stage. The requirements are captured in the WTO Sanitary and Phtosanitary (SPS) Agreement and the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement.

For the first time, five East African Community (EAC) partner states are ranked as top users of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Notification Submission System (NSS). The EAC performance is directly attributable to USAID technical support to increase notifications through the system. NSS is an online tool used by the WTO to help its members submit regulatory updates on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) measures. Notification is a key pillar of the WTO's transparency principle, which requires members to clearly communication their policies and regulations affecting foreign trade.

Last month, the WTO released a report during its 23rd annual review of TBT implementation and operation. According to the report, a total of 2,585 notifications were submitted in 2017 by 82 WTO members. Uganda was the top notifying member (329 notifications), the first African nation to hold the ranking. Tanzania (81) and Kenya (75) were among the top ten notifying members and Rwanda (29) and Burundi (2) placed among the top half.

Over the last three years, USAID has been helping the East African partner states meet their trade transparency and SPS/TBT compliance obligations through national and regional training sessions, as a part of U.S. capacity building assistance under the U.S.-EAC Cooperation Agreement. The WTO Agreements on TBT and SPS contain provisions on transparency requirements and procedures. These transparency provisions aim to achieve a greater degree of clarity, predictability and information exchange about trade policies, rules and regulations of WTO members. The NSS system is complementary to the ePing Electronic Notification System (ENS) system which USAID helped implement throughout the EAC region as well.

Notification systems are important because they alert WTO members of non-tariff barriers and other trade concerns; adherence to these systems demonstrate a commitment to transparency in trade.

But how can an individual exporter, particularly an SME, keep track of all the changes that might occur?

Introducing the ePing Electronic Notification System (ENS).

www.epingalert.org

NSS: Allows national notification authorities submit WTO notifications to WTO Secretari through an online platform.

ePing: Enabling timely access to trade rules and regulations and the changes that WTO member countries institute. It facilitates dialogue among public and private sector actors to address potential trade problems at an early stage.

Watch the videos below to learn more about the WTO NSS System and the ePing system.

The WTO TBT and SPS Notification System in two minutes.

Learn about ePing in one minute.