



SUCCESS STORY

Center resolves traders' woes

The Border Information Center improves traders' access to information – reducing delays and frustration in cross border trade.



By Ryan Yingling

Moving goods across West African borders is not easy. The Border Information Center is tackling the problems where they happen - and getting results for traders.

Offering direct assistance, training stakeholders and facilitating problem solving efforts, the Border Information Center is transforming trade.

On a recent afternoon at the Ghana-Togo border, a truck filled with sandals (made in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire and hypothetically duty free) destined for Nigeria was stuck – not in the mud or a deep ditch, but in the complex procedures involved with moving goods across borders in West Africa.

Thanks to the work of the Borderless Alliance's Border Information Center, launched in August 2011 with the support of the USAID West Africa Trade Hub, the truck was soon rolling along toward Lagos: A form was corrected and then properly stamped.

The center, opened last year, is a collaboration of the Ghana Shippers' Authority, the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor Organization and the USAID Trade Hub. A retired Ghanaian customs official – Evans Klutse – brings more than two decades of experience to the benefit of traders confronting the sometimes onerous and opaque processes and procedures involved in cross-border trade.

"This is the busiest corridor in West Africa, connecting the region's most important cities, everything and anything happens here and I think I've seen it all," Klutse said. "It's satisfying to use that experience to reduce the delays and frustrations for everyone involved in trade at the border."

The stakes are high. According to ALCO's 2011 report, the Ghana-Togo border imposes the longest delays on average on traders—surprisingly more than the Benin-Nigeria border.

Beyond immediate assistance, Klutse and his counterparts from ALCO and the Shippers' Authority are connecting to stakeholders at the border – at customs, immigration and the destination inspection company – to identify problem areas and devise solutions to speed trade up. They have also conducted stakeholder training workshops to educate traders and officials. A hotline allows traders to call the center, too.

The center has directly assisted 61 people including companies like Unilever since it opened, resolving a wide variety of issues – and reducing costs and delays. "Our only wish is that a center like this was also operating at the Benin-Nigeria border," said a trader after a successful intervention saw her load of food products move along. She will not need to wait long: the next center should be at the Benin-Nigeria border later this year.