

Beginning the CBM process: the Botswana experience



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IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE POLICY and practices with respect to the management of cross-border flows is one of the priority work areas identified by the Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS) and other border regulatory and enforcement agencies, whilst they seek to create a better environment for traders and travellers alike. This is because it has been established that smooth movement of goods and services, including passengers, between Botswana – a landlocked Southern African country – and her neighbours is, in a lot of cases, hampered by delays at border posts.

Joint cooperation between all agencies involved in the cross-border movement of goods through the implementation of coordinated border management (CBM) will, therefore, go a long way in eliminating current trade barriers, paving the way for Botswana to become more economically productive and enhancing regional integration efforts.

In order to gather ideas and support on CBM implementation from all the actors involved, a policy dialogue attended by key stakeholders was undertaken in May

2014. The event provided an opportunity for senior government officials and executives from leading companies and business organizations, representing manufacturers, importers and brokers, to learn about CBM best practices and to give their input into developing a CBM strategy.

Following the dialogue, the Botswana Government nominated five participants, each from different agencies, to visit ports and borders in Finland, as part of the CBM component of the Finnish-funded WCO East and Southern Africa (ESA) Project: 'Building Trade Capacity through Customs Modernization in the ESA Region'. The study visit took place from 17 to 19 September 2014 and the delegation was led by the Commissioner of Customs who was accompanied by senior government officials from Customs, Immigration, Veterinary Services and the Police.

They visited the Finnish Customs Headquarters and Customs' Risk Management Centre in Helsinki, as well as the seaport of Vuosaari and the model border station of Nuijamma on the

Finnish-Russian border. The delegation also met representatives from various border agencies. Participants hailed the study visit as an eye opener to the possibilities and levels of how border agencies can jointly cooperate with each other efficiently and effectively while also individually achieving their statutory obligations. The way Finland's land borders are manned by only two authorities – Customs and the Border Guard – is one of the major highlights that the delegation picked up on, and what they would like to recommend for adoption in Botswana.

For example, preliminary discussions between Customs and Immigration officials showed that it would make sense to allow Customs to handle passport control for truck drivers so that the latter do not have to deal with different offices when crossing the border, first to clear their goods and then to have their passport checked as is currently the case. Implementing this form of interagency cooperation would require the training of officers to do tasks on behalf of other agencies, which could take time. One possibility is to launch a pilot project at one of the borders as a starting point with a view to progressively rolling out the project to the whole country.

Subsequent to a benchmarking exercise, the BURS, with the technical support of the WCO, undertook a diagnostic of Botswana's current border management environment from 13 to 23 January 2015 with a view to recommending actions that should be taken to implement a CBM system. The mission involved interviews with all border agencies and the private sector, as well as visit to a number of Botswana's border posts. A follow-up policy dialogue to consider the diagnostic report and to make firm decisions on the next steps aimed at implementing a CBM system in Botswana is scheduled for March 2015.

More information
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