

On Wednesday, September 11, 2024, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, in collaboration with the US Government through USAID, officially launched the Feed the Future Rwanda Trade Facilitation Activity (RTFA – Boneza Ubucuruzi) project. The 4-year initiative, with a budget of \$5 million (approximately Rwf 6.5 billion), aims to enhance the efficiency of cross-border trade by increasing the use of technology at Rwanda's borders, allowing products to be promoted and processed faster.

Cross-border traders have welcomed the project as a solution to long-standing challenges in customs. Théophile Siboniyo, a cross-border trader, highlighted how technical issues, such as slow internet or malfunctioning computers used by the Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA), often cause delays in clearing goods.

"When the system is down, work stalls. Even though the government has provided us with internet access, slow speeds continue to be a problem. With this new project, we believe these issues will be resolved, and vehicle traffic at the borders will move faster," Siboniyo explained.

He also mentioned that outdated technology sometimes triggers false alarms about the goods being cleared, causing RRA officials to spend unnecessary time verifying shipments, which can be misclassified as smuggled goods.

Jackie Zizane, Executive Director of the Feed the Future Trade Activity (RTFA), emphasized that the goal of the project is to support and boost cross-border trade. She expressed confidence that within four years, the barriers hindering traders will be eliminated.

"The issues related to tax evasion and goods smuggling are practices we aim to eradicate. It will take the collaboration of all those involved in import and export businesses, along with cooperation from relevant government agencies and neighboring countries, to overcome these obstacles," Zizane said.

 Jackie Zizane, Executive Director of the Feed the Future Trade Activity (RTFA)

Improving Cross-Border Trade through Technology and Cooperation

The success of the Feed the Future Rwanda Trade Facilitation Activity (RTFA) project relies on the collaboration of all stakeholders, especially those involved in export and import trade. Working closely with relevant authorities, government agencies,

and neighboring countries will help eliminate the obstacles hindering smooth cross-border trade.

The primary goal of the project is to assist government agencies in implementing technology that will allow businesspeople to quickly process their documents at the borders. This technology will enable traders to submit applications digitally, with customs officers instantly receiving and processing them, making the system faster and more efficient for both parties.

Zizane emphasized, “We aim to include even those who have been processing documents manually, without using modern technologies such as the ‘Electronic Single Window’ (ESW). This system will organize everything systematically, ensuring cross-border traders are no longer inconvenienced.”



Alex Mugire, Acting Deputy Commissioner for the Customs Services Department and Coordinator for the Implementation of the Single Customs Territory at the Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA), expressed confidence that the project will address many of the issues previously faced in customs.

“This project will improve our efficiency, as it allows both traders and customs officers to work seamlessly with integrated technology. Customs clearance will be streamlined—traders will submit their declarations remotely, and once all necessary approvals are in place, the goods will be released. This will save both time and money,” Mugire said.

In addition to customs, this streamlined process will benefit other agencies such as the Rwanda FDA and RICA, where information sharing between all parties will ensure quicker operations at the border.

Keisha L. Effiom, USAID Country Representative for Rwanda and Burundi, highlighted the project’s benefits for the private sector and Rwanda’s overall development. “This project is crucial for removing barriers faced by traders. Its implementation will benefit the private sector, the Rwandan Government, and citizens. USAID is committed to fostering development, and we believe this project will expedite the removal of obstacles to cross-border trade.”

The RTFA – Boneza Ubucuruzi project aligns with the Rwandan Government’s National Strategy for Transformation (NST2), which seeks to accelerate

development by promoting exports and private investment. During the five-year program, Rwanda's exports are expected to rise from \$3.5 billion to \$7.3 billion, and private investments projected to double, reaching \$4.6 billion by 2029.