

National experiences on progress made in integrating the VPoA into the National Development Plans: challenges and possible solutions in implementing the VPoA and in building coherence with the 2030 Agenda.

As a landlocked developing country Lesotho is facing a number of obstacles relating to geographical location, transport, infrastructure, border-crossings, commodity-dependency and low productivity. As a result, trade facilitation is critical to Lesotho economic growth and development and features in national plans and programs

Following the adoption of the Vienna Program of Action, VPoA priorities have been integrated into the country`s development Plans - the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2012/13-2016/17, (Review: 2017/18-2022/23) which is the current working document to implement the country`s short to medium developmental goals prioritised Trade Facilitation alongside development of key infrastructure; enhancement of the skills base and technology adoption among other things.

Implementation of the Trade Chapter of the NSDP is guided by the National Trade Policy Framework 2020-2025 which is geared towards maximizing exports through improving the business enabling environment, implementing trade facilitation to reduce trade costs, maintaining and expanding market access regionally and internationally.

Trade Facilitation activities are guided by the Trade Facilitation Roadmap 2019-2024 and are coordinated by the National Trade Facilitation Committee, made up of relevant government ministries and the private sector. This roadmap outlines the direction which the Kingdom of Lesotho will take to implement TF reforms with a view to enhance cooperation between the public and private sectors, while improving domestic and cross-border trade with a possible impact on economic growth. The Lesotho National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) through consultations with relevant stakeholders has come up with this five-year Roadmap (2019-2024) .

Although the TF Roadmap was developed under the auspices of the WTO TF Agreement, it is also essential in achieving the objectives set out in the VPoA.

The Roadmap is also used as a tool for resource mobilisation for implementation of the Trade Facilitation activities.

The Roadmap activities are also incorporated in regional development plans; Lesotho is implementing the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development (RISDP); the Strategy guides SADC Member States, International Development Cooperation partners as well as key regional

stakeholders in planning the implementation of significant parts of the cooperation and integration agenda in order to achieve sustainable development through regional integration. The RISDP priority areas are: Trade and Economic liberalisation, Regional Infrastructure and Services Development for regional Integration among others.

Lesotho is also implementing the Southern African Customs Union Trade Facilitation Programme whose aim is to promote intra-SACU trade amongst Member States. The program includes a range of activities and initiatives to facilitate trade at the national, bilateral and regional levels, these have been consolidated into a single plan and some of them are currently being pursued. They include: IT Interconnectivity; Improving Border Efficiencies; Partnerships with Traders; Legislation; and establishing One Stop Border Posts. Key achievements in this regard have been in the area of harmonisation and simplification of Customs rules and procedures including development of a model customs law; Single Administrative Document; transit management and training manuals for building capacity of customs administration in the region.

For TF efforts and reforms to be effectively implemented, coordination is required across the entire spectrum, this requires careful planning and collaboration across a number of government agencies and the private sector hence the establishment of the National Trade Facilitation Committee.

Challenges

Major challenge is financial resources