



Q: Public Health? A: Trade Facilitation.



Making the link

Access to medicines is fundamental to good health. Yet over two billion people—nearly one-third of humanity—continue to lack access to essential healthcare supplies.

Governments working to keep their people healthy face many challenges, but avoidable delays in getting critical medical supplies across borders shouldn't be among them. Slow inspections, lack of facilities, and paper-based procedures can often deprive those in desperate need.

This doesn't have to happen. Trade facilitation can't overcome every healthcare challenge, but it can contribute by identifying and unblocking border logjams, ensuring that medical goods reach

their intended destinations faster and more cost-effectively.

Streamlining processes can speed up delivery while helping regulatory authorities to protect people from falsified products.

How?


Trade facilitation cuts red tape and improves clearance procedures, ensuring that all legitimate goods, including healthcare supplies, clear borders as efficiently as possible. Border reforms can strengthen medical supply chains, improve administrative efficiency, and contribute to building more robust healthcare systems.




Lifesaving medicines should never be held up at borders

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development cites trade as an engine for inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, and health and well-being for everyone.

Alliance projects support public health and well-being in developing countries in many ways:

 **Access:** Digitalising paper-based procedures contributes to quicker distribution of medical supplies to vulnerable populations

 **Cost:** Fewer delays at borders reduces storage fees and other overheads for importers, including aid organisations

 **Consumer Safety:** Modern risk management allows authorities to concentrate physical inspections on higher-risk shipments and to better combat fraud.

The Alliance can Help

Alliance projects demonstrate consistently that introducing digitalisation and other best practices speed up border import clearance. In Colombia, for instance, the Alliance supported the National Food and Drug Surveillance Institute (Invima) in rolling out a modern risk management system, enabling the agency to concentrate physical inspections on higher-risk shipments. And in Guatemala, automating documentation procedures for vessels arriving and departing the country's four main ports is helping to streamline imports of pharmaceutical and related goods.

In 2022, the Alliance and UNICEF collaborated in expediting clearance of humanitarian supplies in Mozambique. This has inspired both partners to extend and intensify their joint efforts into at least 10 more countries.

Related reforms, such as modernising import and export licensing, automating documentation procedures and introducing e-certification processes are among the other trade facilitation measures available to streamline imports of healthcare supplies, saving time, storage costs, and, ultimately, lives.

Case study



Alliance, UNICEF upscale partnership

In Mozambique, the Alliance and UNICEF improved pre-shipment approvals by ANARME, the medicines regulatory body, reducing wait times for clearing time-sensitive, life-saving vaccines and other humanitarian supplies by 25%–10 working days.

Prior to this, importers had to navigate a web of inconsistent classifications through complex, multi-layered, paper-based approvals procedures.

Alliance data analysis at the outset of the project showed that inconsistent, overlapping, or duplicative product codes at the pre-shipment authorisation stage were responsible for most of the delays, bringing individual discretion into play when classifying goods.

Digitalising and integrating these processes into the country's existing single window and establishing ways for relevant government ministries, health agencies, and Customs to coordinate more effectively on vaccine imports reduced processing times, improved shipment traceability, and cut costs.



The new system will ensure timely delivery of critical supplies to protect children from preventable, life-threatening infections and diseases in every district, leaving no child behind. We trust the success of this initiative will also inspire other countries where we have programmes in the region, and beyond.

Edson Madeira,
Chief of Supply & Logistics
Section, UNICEF Mozambique

About Us

The Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation supports governments in developing countries in implementing the WTO TFA. Alliance projects bring together governments and businesses of all sizes as equal partners to deliver targeted trade reforms. By emphasising digitalisation and delivering other best practices, Alliance projects ultimately boost trade competitiveness and business conditions, which are key drivers of inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction.

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