



Q: Disaster Preparedness? A: Trade Facilitation



Making the Link

Disasters can strike at any time, in any place. People are injured and communities left vulnerable. Lives are upended – but to what extent and for how long depends on how soon disrupted supply chains and critical services can be restored. The ‘X’ factor is preparation. Whether responding to earthquakes, hurricanes, health crises, or IT system failures, swift access to essential goods—such as food, medical supplies, and emergency equipment—is critical for saving lives and restoring stability.

Yet, border inefficiencies can slow the movement of these vital supplies when they are needed most. Complex customs procedures, lack of emergency protocols, and reliance on paper-based processes can lead to unnecessary delays, worsening the impact of disasters.

Being well-prepared is half the battle won. Trade facilitation alone cannot cover all aspects of disaster response. But by cutting red tape at borders, it can ensure the smooth movement of critical supplies in the face of crisis and disruption.

How?




Trade facilitation streamlines border processes, ensuring that emergency supplies move quickly and reliably. Simplified procedures, clear protocols, digitalised systems, and better coordination between customs and emergency response agencies ensure the timely arrival of vital goods, strengthening resilience in times of crisis.



When Disaster Strikes, Borders Shouldn't Be the Barrier!

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights trade as a key driver of resilience and economic stability. When disasters disrupt supply chains, efficient trade systems help ensure that critical goods reach affected areas quickly.

A well-prepared trade network reduces bottlenecks and keeps aid moving when it's needed most. Alliance trade facilitation projects strengthen disaster preparedness by improving border processes.

-  **Access:** Simplified processes and emergency protocols keep goods flowing even during system disruptions.
-  **Time:** Digitalising procedures cuts red tape, allowing emergency supplies to clear borders faster.
-  **Coordination:** Stronger collaboration between customs, emergency response agencies, aid organisations and the private sector improves response times and efficiency.

The Alliance can Help

The Alliance has demonstrated success in making border processes more efficient and resilient during emergencies. Its multi-stakeholder approach involving government agencies, private sector partners and international organisations has proven reliable in improving trade processes to enhance disaster preparedness.

For example, Alliance projects help countries develop fallback procedures to ensure smooth cross-border movement of goods during disruptions. These efforts streamline customs processes and strengthen local capacity to manage emergencies.

In one project with the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University and the World Customs Organisation (WCO), Alliance efforts helped to ensure that the customs administration in Madagascar could maintain operations despite system failures, infrastructure damage, or staff shortages.

Case study



Flying in the Face of Disaster

In May 2021, Madagascar Customs and the National Risk and Disaster Management Office, supported by WCO, launched an initiative to improve the resilience of Madagascar's clearance processes for importing relief supplies following natural disasters and disease outbreaks.

In February 2022, the Alliance, in collaboration with the Malagasy government, NCDP and WCO, organised a scenario-based testing exercise to stress-test the new customs procedures—aiming to optimise and fast-track humanitarian aid, ensuring a swifter economic recovery. Later that month, as Cyclone Batsirai struck the country, the exercise proved its worth, turning theory into action and underscoring the critical need for such preparedness.



We recognise that trade facilitation is an important facet of disaster resilience, serving as a lifeline for communities affected by disasters, with cascading impacts beyond the directly impacted areas. In a world of growing consequences from trade disruptions, and increasing disasters disrupting trade, the integration of resilience more centrally to trade strategies will benefit greatly from the work of the Alliance. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Alliance on these important issues.

Jeff Schlegelmilch
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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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