

# AID-FOR-TRADE CASE STORY

UNITED STATES

## USAID'S AID-FOR-TRADE PROGRAMMING: REGIONAL TRADE FACILITATION IMPLEMENTED BY THE AFRICAN TRADE HUBS

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) African Trade Hubs are one of the agency's primary vehicles for promoting trade facilitation in Africa and hence, a valuable Aid-for-Trade tool. The Hubs have had particular programming success in providing assistance to modernize and increase the efficiency of custom procedures and implement and monitor the Regional Economic Community (REC) trade protocols, which are the focus of this case study. Customs provides the gateway for trade; hence, it is critical that custom's authorities operate under best practices. At the policy level, increased harmonization of trade policies and procedures in the context of lowering tariff and non-tariff barriers to intra-regional trade increases the economic viability of African states and sub-regions.

There are a number of key programming issues involved in successfully introducing and ensuring the sustainability of new custom procedures and technology. The key issues include clear targeting of a response to a specific need; gaining the commitment, cooperation, and collaboration of regional stakeholders; and achieving the proper alignment of public and private sector involvement to ensure trust and sustainability.

The key macro objectives of USAID's technical assistance for improving customs procedures and processes are to reduce the time and cost of customs clearance and thus increase trade. A few examples of USAID's work illustrate how these macro objectives are achieved at the micro level. These include speeding up customs clearances in Mozambique using time release studies; improving customs procedures in Southern Africa with better tools (SAD500); improving connectivity between Tanzania and Malawi with improved technology (RADDEX); and supporting the RECs in implementing various aspects of the fundamental REC trade protocols. Secondary high-level objectives are to facilitate regional integration and help improve technical capacity of local institutions. Guided by its technical assistance experience, USAID recognizes that addressing the programming issues is necessary to achieve its macro objectives.

For the design and implementation of its programming to improve custom procedures and processes, USAID's technical assistance is delivered by the Hubs serving as regional platforms. The Hubs' operating priorities include providing demand driven-technical assistance, ensuring compatibility with local partner priorities, pursuing activities that achieve tangible results in a relatively short time frame, and aiming for long-term sustainability. These match closely with the key programming issues and thus provide coherence and consistency across programs and Hubs.

In implementing the illustrative projects highlighted herein, USAID encountered three types of problems: organizational, human resources, and issues related to the institutional constraints facing the RECs. In part,

these are the natural outgrowth to introducing fundamental change to existing organizations and procedures across different countries. Importantly, the effectiveness of USAID's programming and the performance of the Hubs are judged by how well these problems are addressed.

The key factors for the USAID's programming success can be traced to the Hubs' regional focus, the successful implementation of the operating priorities that guide them, and the skills makeup of their long- and short-term staff. These are all essential for overcoming problems encountered, effectively driving change, and ensuring that the results are sustainable. USAID's programming to build a progression of best customs practice procedures, processes, and technology has been successful and in line with its objectives. The results achieved were measurable and meaningful in terms of saving time and resources, removing bottlenecks, improving transparency, lessening the administrative burden, mitigating fraud, and facilitating trade.

The key lessons learned from USAID's programming to build a progression of best customs practice procedures, processes, and technology link back to the importance of the Hubs' operating priorities and the related project-specific programming issues. Sustainable programming success that results in real positive impacts requires a consistency in Hub organizational priorities and program execution. The four key lessons include: 1) program through a demand-driven process that is flexible and responsive; 2) gain the commitment, cooperation, and collaboration of regional stakeholders (public and private sector); 3) understand the incentives and constraints of partner institutions; 4) pilot test interventions as needed and integrate performance monitoring into the reform plan

## ISSUES ADDRESSED

This case study examines USAID's regional programming in trade facilitation in Africa through its African Trade Hubs. Operating for almost ten years in each region, the Trade Hubs are designed to help advance economic growth objectives that are necessarily regional in nature. An important facet of the Hubs' early work was offering technical assistance to African counterparts in eligible countries to take advantage of the generous trade preferences offered under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which today offers duty free, quota free access to the U.S. market for more than 6,400 African products. The Hubs also partner with Africa's RECs in supporting various programs that enhance regional economic integration. USAID maintains three Hubs in Southern, East, and West Africa which are based in Gaborone, Botswana; Nairobi, Kenya; and Accra, Ghana (with a satellite office in Dakar, Senegal), respectively.

Since 2005, the Hubs operated as part of the African Global Competitiveness Initiative (AGCI), which has provided an organizational framework for USAID's African competitiveness portfolio of projects in Africa. AGCI's primary objective is to improve the export competitiveness of African enterprises in order to expand trade with the United States, inter-regionally, and internationally, including through the implementation of better trade-led economic policies and increasing the capacity for African firms, institutions, and governments to compete in the global marketplace. AGCI approaches trade competitiveness by focusing on four program areas:

- 1) Improving the business and regulatory environment for private sector-led trade and investment
- 2) Strengthening the knowledge and skills of Sub-Saharan Africa private sector enterprises to take advantage of market opportunities
- 3) Increasing access to financial services for trade and investment
- 4) Overcoming infrastructure constraints.

Treating the Hubs collectively as a single programming initiative, this case story focuses on improving the business and regulatory environment by highlighting examples of how the Hubs have applied targeted assistance to improve customs procedures, including through the harmonization of customs documents,

creating electronic customs interchanges, and helping to monitor customs performance, and supporting Africa's RECs in implementing their own activities to further regional trade integration. These are all critical for trade facilitation.

The three key programming issues involved in ensuring the sustainable success of customs modernization include:

- 1) Clear targeting of response to specific needs—Correctly identifying the problem and choosing the type and level of assistance (e.g., best practice) that will bring about real and lasting change
- 2) Gaining the commitment, cooperation, and collaboration of regional stakeholders—Making sure there is commitment from the top and that relevant stakeholders take ownership and work together in sharing resources, best practices, and lessons learned
- 3) Achieving the proper alignment of public and private sector involvement to ensure trust and sustainability of success and workability of program change—Implementing fundamental and lasting procedural and technical change requires alignment of public and private efforts and dialogue to make necessary adjustments.

## OBJECTIVES PURSUED

At the macro level, the objectives of USAID's trade facilitation technical assistance for improving customs procedures is to reduce the time and cost of clearing customs, and thus trade in Africa. More specifically, as the following examples illustrate, USAID has been successful through a progression of best customs practice procedures and technology.

- *Speeding up customs clearances in Mozambique*—Address delays caused by cumbersome customs procedures, obsolete computer system, and poor administrative practices through reorganization (decentralization) of functions, using time release studies to identify problem areas and remove bottlenecks, improve communications, and alignment of procedures with the World Customs Organization.<sup>1</sup>
- *Improving customs procedures in Southern Africa with better tools (SAD 500)*—Address the high number of transactions of moving goods across international borders caused in part by differing customs transit procedures and documentation across countries by introducing the single administrative document (SAD 500), a multi-purpose goods declaration form covering imports, exports, and cross-border and transit movements.<sup>2</sup>
- *Improving connectivity between Tanzania and Malawi with best practice technology*—Building off the adoption of SAD 500 and focused on addressing the lack of direct exchange of electronic information between border posts, which negatively affect transit times between Malawi and Tanzania, implement the Revenue Authority Digital Data Exchange System (RADDEX), software designed to transmit custom declaration data in real time.<sup>3</sup>
- *Improving the implementation and monitoring of REC trade protocols*—Each of the three Hubs, on a demand-driven basis and in compliance with the Paris Declaration on donor engagement with recipients of donor aid, has helped to advance the implementation of the major REC protocols. Examples include: in *East Africa*, designing a simplified trade regime for small traders with the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) and leading a public-private effort to harmonize product standards with both COMESA and the East African Community; in *Southern Africa*, providing technical assistance to develop rules of origin, tariff reduction phase-down

<sup>1</sup> African Global Competitiveness Initiative: *Compendium of Trade-Related Success Stories*, USAID, July 2009.

<sup>2</sup> *2007 Compendium of Trade-Related Success Stories*, African Global Competitiveness Initiative, USAID, July 2008.

<sup>3</sup> *Compendium of African Trade-Related Success Stories and Case Studies*, USAID, May 2010.

schedules, monitor compliance with trade protocol provisions, and establish a dispute resolution mechanism in coordination with the Southern African Development Community (SADC); and in *West Africa* monitoring compliance with the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) Trade Liberalization scheme and identifying extra-legal and cumbersome border checkpoints in coordination with both ECOWAS and the West African Monetary Union.

Addressing customs procedures is a critical step in facilitating trade, which is an essential pre-condition for boosting economic growth and employment, as well as reducing poverty. Secondary macro objectives include helping African institutions, such as the RECs, to enhance regional integration to make African markets more attractive for investment and to help improve technical capacity of local institutions, such as customs agencies, to better serve the public. USAID development assistance has supported this priority by identifying and seeking to overcome the barriers to trade on the continent. There are several justifications for this focus, namely: less cumbersome trade across borders lowers transaction costs; larger integrated markets are more likely to attract foreign direct investment and support exports; further opening Africa's borders to neighbors rationalizes trade in food staples between deficit and surplus areas.

Although each Hub tailors its own programming to suit local conditions and development needs, since 2005 they have all worked in the same four program areas—enabling environment policy reform, enterprise development, overcoming infrastructure constraints, and improving access to finance. In pursuing its objective of trade facilitation through improving customs procedures, USAID is guided by its technical assistance experience that to be successful it must address the key programming issues. These then become a set of micro level objectives that determine and drive overall program success.

## DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Most USAID technical assistance is delivered on the basis of a bilateral relationship between a country-specific USAID mission and national government, private sector, and civil society counterparts. USAID was one of the earlier aid organizations to focus its programs at the regional level given that this is the focal point of many of the important issues affecting the pace of development, especially in Africa. The continent's small and fragmented markets are a significant constraint to economic growth. The Hubs were designed as regional platforms for the delivery of technical assistance with a focus on issues that require the participation of more than a single state to achieve results. The Hubs were also envisioned as a vehicle through which U.S. Government assistance could have an impact on stakeholders in countries where USAID lacks a bilateral mission.

The Hubs were also envisioned to be able to work with important regional stakeholders that were also focused on removing barriers to intra- and extra-regional trade. Primary among these are the major RECs—ECOWAS, COMESA, and SADC—and various affiliated regional institutions, such as transport corridor management organizations and the regional power pools. As noted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), African leaders have not only endorsed the need to better integrate their economies but in recent years have called for acceleration of the process: “African leaders have firmly committed themselves to accelerating regional cooperation and integration. Underlying this commitment is a belief that most African countries cannot achieve rapid economic growth and development in a reasonable time without first overcoming the constraints of small populations and economies. Of the 53 African countries, 38 (about three quarters) have populations of 15 million or less, while one third have populations of 3 million or less.”<sup>4</sup>

In designing the Hubs, USAID expressed the following four priorities for how they should operate:

- 1) *Provide demand driven-technical assistance.* Over the past ten years, USAID's Trade Hubs have established themselves as valuable and neutral sources of technical assistance and expertise on a demand-driven basis. African partner institutions, including national governments, the RECs, and other regional organizations have come to the Hubs for assistance in helping to overcome a range of

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<sup>4</sup> UNECA, 2008. *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa* (ARIA) III, pg. 23.

technical and policy challenges.

- 2) *Ensure compatibility with local partner priorities.* When working with a local partner, such as an industry association or REC, the Hubs have used various mechanisms to ensure that their programming supports an agreed-to objective
- 3) *Identify activities that maximize the likelihood of success within a reasonably short time frame.* Unlike some other development partners, USAID expects to see tangible results within a relative short time horizon. Typically, larger USAID projects have between three to five years to establish themselves and produce a series of annual accomplishments. USAID has found that interventions with a narrower but deeper focus are more likely to produce tangible results than are more diffuse initiatives.
- 4) *Aim for long-term sustainability.* Like other donors, USAID aspires to provide technical assistance that proves to be sustainable over the long term.

At the level of implementation, the Hubs themselves further refine the choice of activities targeted for technical assistance by balancing a set of criteria, including:

- *Likelihood of successful implementation.* USAID projects report annually on results achieved and are typically funded for a three- to five-year period of operation, with possible renewal periods. As such, the Hubs must balance their annual resources and the time frame within which to achieve results against a request for technical assistance. However laudable the request may be, if it is unclear how tangible results may be achieved within a specific time frame the Hubs are unlikely to devote significant resources to it.
- *Relative significance of the intervention's results.* Not every successful development intervention has great significance or deep economic impact. As such, when choosing which activities to undertake the Hubs attempt to balance the likelihood of success with the significance of the results achieved.
- *Extent of alignment with Hub objectives.* USAID projects go through a formal and intense annual work planning process. During this process, the implementing partner of a USAID project will be required to program activities that advance the project's overall objectives. This work planning process is also designed to help the implementing partner anticipate technical assistance requests and determine which ones are in line with activities that can advance its project objectives. In recent years, major stakeholders, including the RECs and other donors working in the same areas, have been invited to formally participate in the Hub work planning process.
- *Compatibility with the Hubs' perceived comparative advantage and expertise.* In the spirit of the Paris Declaration, USAID is increasingly attempting to coordinate with other donors as well as recipients of U.S. Government technical assistance to ensure that overlap and duplication of efforts is minimal. In parallel, the Hubs also make a determination as to whether it is the best suited partner to undertake a specific activity.

As indicated, these priorities are consistent with the key programming issues identified earlier for programming success on improving customs procedures and processes. This consistency is essential for ensuring there is consistency and coherence across the Hubs and their programs.

## PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

USAID's three projects to improve custom procedures and processes encountered a number of problems, many of which are the natural outgrowth to introducing fundamental change to existing organizations and procedures, and doing so across different countries. Ultimately, the value of the operation priorities of the Hubs and the programming issues identified are tested on how well they can address the organizational, human resource, and capacity problems and challenges that normally arise.

It is instructive to break down the problems encountered into three groups: organizational, human resources, and related to the RECs' specific institutional constraints.

The key organizational problems and challenges common to the three USAID customs improvement projects included:

- Gaining buy-in by all regional participating governments and ensuring agreement on the direction and pace of adoption of new customs processes, procedures, and technology
- Fears by participating governments about ceding too much control over the direct national collection of customs duties
- Bureaucratic inertia and hurdles related to implementing changes in procedures and documents required to improve efficiency and customer service, especially among agencies that consider it a primary duty to detect fraud and collect revenue.

The key human resource problems and challenges common to the three USAID customs improvement projects included :

- Capacity building to ensure personnel are properly trained and motivated to take on progressively more sophisticated and complex responsibilities (e.g., from participating in time release studies, becoming expert in World Customs Organization procedures, to operating RADDEX software for transmitting custom declaration data)
- Turnover of staff in customs and related organizations that harm cohesiveness and institutional learning necessary for organizational effectiveness. Continuity in staff and programming also applies to aid providers where long-term expert advisors—both regional and international—are critical.

The REC-related problems and challenges common to the three USAID customs improvement projects included the following:

- Each of Africa's RECs has its own strengths and weaknesses, but common to them all is the challenge of ensuring that member states comply with their regional commitments. National self-interest, a lack of institutional capacity, and skepticism about the ultimate gains of integration among powerful interests all pose challenges to ensuring compliance
- For the RECs themselves, identifying which member states are not in compliance with any particular aspect of a trade protocol and pinpointing the root cause of this lack of compliance is challenging given poor communications, limited resources, and fundamental differences in how much authority these non-supranational institutions should have over member states.

## FACTORS FOR SUCCESS/FAILURE

Many of the key factors for the success in USAID's three projects to improve customs processes and procedures can be traced to the performance and organization of its Hubs. As USAID's most visible and creative programming entities in Africa, they have a reputation for being sources of expertise in trade and development, a reliable and responsive partner for African institutions, and a source of high-quality firm-level technical assistance.

The Hubs' success can be traced to five sources:

- 1) *Recognizing the need for a regional focus.* The Hubs were designed with recognition that many issues holding back African development required a regional solution. Particularly given the continent's many small markets, it was clear that sustained economic growth relied in part on creating larger, more viable markets through the rule-based sharing of resources and production assets.
- 2) *Proven capacity to respond to a wide range of technical assistance needs.* The Hubs have been staffed with long-term African and expatriate experts in a range of disciplines, including trade policy, customs, transport, and enterprise development. Supplementing these field-based specialists is a

pool of short-term technical expertise that can be engaged to address specific technical issues.

- 3) *Consistent ability to secure local buy-in.* Especially when working with the RECs and African governments, the Hubs have undergone a deliberate process to ensure that the activities programmed have buy-in from critical stakeholders. In accordance with the Paris Declaration, USAID attempts to link interventions to the expressed aims of its counterparts.
- 4) *Mix of policy and firm-level assistance.* Recognizing that improving trade competitiveness is multi-faceted, the Hubs have blended a mix of competencies into one technical assistance platform. They also provide assistance to overcome infrastructure constraints and increase the access to finance.
- 5) *Proven ability to cultivate private sector engagement.* One of the strengths of the Hubs is its focus on engaging the private sector to help advocate for appropriate space in policymaking. For example, in harmonizing industry and trade standards, the Hubs have ensured that credible private sector interest groups are central partners in the process and outcomes.

These sources of the Hubs' success overlap with its operating priorities and the key programming issues outlined earlier. To directly address and overcome the problems of implementing change at customs organizations and in their procedures requires that the Hubs' operating priorities and programming focus be consistent and time-tested. These are the key elements to effectively drive change and ensure that the results are sustainable.

## RESULTS ACHIEVED

In general, the results of USAID's programming to build a progression of best customs practice procedures, processes, and technology has been successful and in line with its objectives. Improving customs procedures has thus been a key step in facilitating trade and obtaining its associated benefits. The project specific results are highlighted below.

*Speeding up customs clearances in Mozambique.* Time release studies were successful in identifying problem areas, removing bottlenecks, and improving the procedures. In addition, communications were improved and procedures aligned with the World Customs Organization. As a result of the immediate improvements made by Mozambican Customs, the time for processing goods has been reduced from 30 days in extreme cases to approximately two to five days.

*Improving customs procedures in Southern Africa with better tools (SAD 500).* Adoption of the single customs declaration was successful in reducing administrative burdens and transit times. In particular, the new process reduced paperwork, allowed for quicker turnaround times with fewer errors, removed confusion, lowered costs, improved trade efficiencies, and minimized customs fraud associated with false declarations.

*Improving connectivity between Tanzania and Malawi with best practice technology.* Tanzania and Malawi revenue authorities successfully established a bilateral operational agreement, installed and customized the RADDEx software, and underwent extensive testing and training of ICT technical staff. The automatic electronic transmission of custom declaration data resulted in decreased transit delays through the provision of advance notification, facilitation of pre-lodging, elimination of duplicate data entry, and improved risk analysis. In addition, the revenue authorities now have more efficient and paper-free processes, as well as a more transparent trading environment.

*Establishing a model for the RECs to harmonize standards, monitor compliance with trade protocols, and analyze technical trade issues.* The Hubs have been particularly useful sources of expertise and technical assistance for the major RECs. Although the mode of operating with each REC varies to some degree, the Hubs have offered valuable outside expertise in technical trade facilitation issues. Furthermore, in many cases the Hubs have designed new systems and procedures that the RECs continue to operationalize today without direct donor assistance, including procedures for how to harmonize standards with established private sector partners, monitor compliance with trade protocols, and analyze and negotiate trade policies.



In part as a result of USAID assistance, there has been a general trend in trade expansion in Africa. Between 2008 and 2009, the East Africa Hub reported an \$11 million increase in trade under AGOA, the Southern Africa Hub tallied a total of \$40 million additional AGOA exports, and the West Africa Trade Hub cites an additional \$20 million in AGOA exports.<sup>[1]</sup>

## LESSONS LEARNED

The key lessons learned from the USAID's programming to build a progression of best custom practice procedures, processes, and technology link back to the importance of the Hubs' operating priorities and the related project-specific programming issues. Sustainable programming success that results in real positive impacts requires a consistency in Hub organizational priorities and program execution.

Specifically, six lessons stand out.

*Program through a demand-driven process that is flexible and responsive.* This is consistent with the programming issue on the need for clear targeting of response to a specific need. Correctly identifying the problem and choosing the type and level of assistance (e.g., best practice) that will bring about real and lasting change. Moreover, USAID has found that interventions with a narrower but deeper focus are more likely to produce tangible results than are more diffuse initiatives.

*Gain the commitment, cooperation, and collaboration of regional stakeholders (public and private sector).* It is necessary to make sure there is commitment in the form of political will from the top and that relevant stakeholders take ownership and work together in sharing resources, best practices, and lessons learned. Especially when dealing with multiple national or regional entities, ensuring that sufficient political will exists across all stakeholders is an important prerequisite for success. An important corollary is to involve credible private sector organizations in the process. The Hubs' work on improving customs procedures and harmonizing standards has successfully demonstrated the value of ensuring that the private sector is involved in the design of new standards and procedures. In some cases, the Hubs have played a facilitative role, ensuring that existing stakeholders are brought into an established government dialogue process, but in other cases the Hubs have undertaken a more intensive capacity building role with private sector organizations to help them become reliable partners for government in policy dialogue.

*Understand incentives and constraints of partner institutions.* USAID's experience in regional programming through the Hubs has illuminated that a careful understanding of the individual stakeholders involved—including at the national government and regional entity level—and their interaction among one another is necessary to program successful trade facilitation activities. Especially in a multi-stakeholder and regional context, assessing the individual and collective barriers to action is an essential early step in planning. Finally, understanding the incentives for institutions is essential to achieve the proper alignment of public and private sector involvement to ensure trust, sustainability of success, and workability of program change. Implementing fundamental and lasting administrative and technical change requires alignment of public and private efforts and open dialogue to ensure that necessary adjustments occur over time.

*Pilot test interventions as needed and integrate performance monitoring into the reform plan.* Particularly when attempting to introduce a new procedure in coordination with the RECs, USAID has found that some reforms are more effective when tested among a small group of countries prior to attempting to implement change across all member states at the same pace. In attempting to advance the harmonization of customs in West Africa, USAID chose to focus first on the countries that have the hardware and software as well as the

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<sup>[1]</sup> African Global Competitiveness Initiative: African Global Competitiveness Hub Overview, Knowledge Sharing and Analysis (KSA) Project, 11-12-09.



trained personnel ready to move ahead (in this case Burkina Faso, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Senegal). By contrast, ECOWAS's previous attempts to roll out customs harmonization activities across all members have taken five years and are still not in effect. To a significant degree, all the Hubs have integrated a performance monitoring capability into their trade facilitation work. In some cases a third-party indicator is used to gauge performance, such as the World Bank's Doing Business indicator series, and in other cases the Hubs collect and report on standard or custom indicators. This not only conforms to international good practice in policy reform, but also helps continue the momentum for reform as managers are better able to track and report on achieving milestones.

*Expand the focus of trade capacity building beyond specific bilateral preference programs.* An early focus of the Hubs was to assist African governments in creating the enabling environment for increasing trade under AGOA and help African entrepreneurs develop the capacity to export to the United States. USAID soon realized that developing and measuring trade competitiveness only through the lens of AGOA was inadequate from a development perspective. While there were considerable positive spill-over effects in helping Africans become able to trade with the United States, in many cases there were other more logical markets for the firms assisted by the Hubs. As such, measuring success based solely on bilateral trade statistics under AGOA omits much of the positive impact of USAID trade facilitation technical assistance.

*Better integrate performance monitoring in the design phase.* To a significant degree, all the Hubs have integrated a performance monitoring capability into their trade facilitation work. In some cases a third-party indicator is used to gauge performance, such as the World Bank's *Doing Business* indicator series, and in other cases the Hubs collect and report on standard or custom indicators. However, experience suggests that more could be done by USAID to select more appropriate indicators to measure results, especially in the economic growth and policy reform areas. Furthermore, despite their similar activities, reporting across the three Hubs varies more widely than is desirable.

## CONCLUSION

Increasingly, Africans and donors agree that aid-for-trade programming is an important component of development assistance. Helping African companies take better advantage of the potential gains from trade contributes not only to employment and government tax revenue, but also sparks innovation among entrepreneurs and skill development among workers. USAID's African Trade Hubs have been an important driver for trade facilitation and thus act as catalysts for economic growth and employment and helping to reduce poverty. As this case story demonstrates, the Hubs have become efficient delivery mechanisms for regional targeted technical assistance, which in this case has been effective in helping to put in place international custom best practices, processes, and technology.