

# RUSH Project

Re-engineering Uganda's Sanitary and  
Phytosanitary Inspection of Horticulture Exports

Transforming Uganda's Horticulture Export Sector: Enhancing SPS  
Processes, Driving Digitization, and Fostering Private Sector Collaboration

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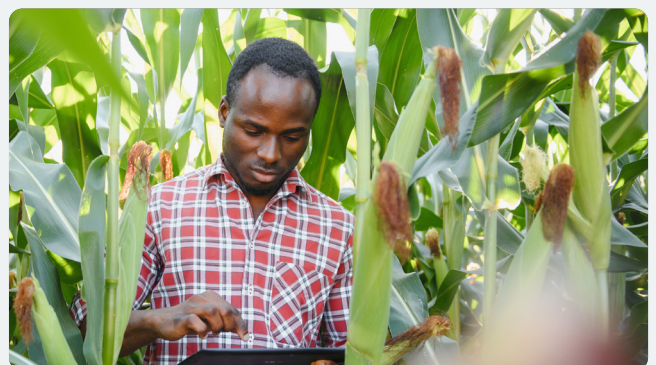
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# Introduction to the RUSH Project & Manual SPS Improvements.

A comprehensive catalogue of improvements in the manual sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) inspection process for the export of fruits and vegetables from Uganda.

## Introduction

This knowledge product presents a detailed account of the significant progress achieved through the RUSH project—an innovative initiative dedicated to improving sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) inspection procedures in Uganda’s agricultural export sector.

By exploring the project’s comprehensive approach to process review, enhancement, and digitization, this catalogue highlights the transformative efforts made to streamline operations, ensure compliance with international standards, and boost efficiency in the export of fruits and vegetables from Uganda.

We invite you to discover the innovations, challenges, and actionable recommendations that have shaped the evolution of SPS inspection processes, ultimately benefiting the entire agricultural value chain in Uganda.

## Background

Uganda’s agricultural sector is a cornerstone of its economy, with a strong emphasis on exporting fruits and vegetables to international markets. However, meeting international sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards has long posed a significant challenge for the sector.

To address this, the *Re-engineering Uganda’s Sanitary and Phytosanitary Inspection of Horticulture Exports (RUSH)* project was launched. This forward-looking initiative set out to revamp and modernize the previously manual SPS inspection processes conducted at packhouses and Entebbe Airport—key hubs for processing and dispatching Uganda’s agricultural exports.

The project adopted a comprehensive approach, encompassing capacity building, small-scale infrastructure improvements, and the progressive digitization of SPS inspections. These efforts have already yielded tangible results, including enhanced compliance with international standards, streamlined operational processes, and a more coordinated approach to SPS measures.

This background provides the context for the *Catalogue of Improvements Made in the Manual SPS Inspection Process for the Export of Fruits and Vegetables in Uganda*. It offers an in-depth

exploration of the RUSH project’s transformative initiatives and their far-reaching impact on Uganda’s agricultural export landscape.

## Project RUSH Overview

The *Re-engineering Uganda’s Sanitary and Phytosanitary Inspection of Horticulture Exports (RUSH)* project represents a pivotal initiative designed to digitize Uganda’s agricultural export processes, with a particular focus on fruits and vegetables.

The project was driven by the pressing need to improve the efficiency, compliance, and overall effectiveness of the manual sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) inspection procedures conducted at packhouses and Entebbe Airport—key points in the country’s agricultural export value chain.

At its core, the RUSH project sought to implement a comprehensive transformation of Uganda’s SPS inspection practices, laying the foundation for a more streamlined and internationally compliant agricultural export system.



*“The RUSH project sought to drive a holistic transformation of Uganda’s sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) inspection practices.”*



## Improvements made in the Manual SPS Inspection process.

### **Capacity Building and Training Training Collaborations**

The RUSH project established key partnerships with Turkish Airlines and Hortifresh to deliver specialized training programs. These sessions covered essential topics such as pest management, fresh cargo handling, and quality control. Through these collaborations, stakeholders gained valuable knowledge and exposure to international best practices.

### **Enhanced Quality Control**

A significant outcome of the training was an improved understanding of quality control processes. Stakeholders learned to identify critical control points during the handling and processing of produce, particularly at the entry stage of packhouses. This increased awareness has led to stronger quality control measures, reducing risks of contamination and ensuring higher product standards.

### **Improved Cleaning Procedures**

The training highlighted the importance of rigorous

cleaning protocols in packhouses. Emphasis was placed on mitigating hazards such as soil contamination and unwanted organisms, which could result in product interception. As a result, stakeholders now adhere to enhanced cleaning procedures, ensuring product safety and compliance with international standards.

### **Better Inspection Organization**

Stakeholders were trained to optimize the organization and scheduling of inspections. This included ensuring the timely arrival of inspectors and the on-schedule delivery of produce for inspection. Improved coordination has minimized delays and streamlined the inspection process, fostering efficiency.

### **Development of HACCP Plans**

One notable achievement was the ability of stakeholders to design tailored Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) plans. These plans, customized to their specific operations, reflect a comprehensive understanding of risk management principles and their practical application.

### **Practical Application of Training**

Beyond theoretical knowledge, the training sessions emphasized hands-on application. Stakeholders were equipped to implement quality control principles effectively in their work environments. This practical approach has ensured the widespread adoption of these improvements across the industry.

### **Efficient Cargo Handling**

International training in Turkey provided participants with advanced insights into modern practices for handling fresh cargo. Stakeholders observed and learned innovative techniques for efficient cargo management, ensuring the seamless transportation of fresh produce. This international perspective has significantly enhanced Uganda's ability to maintain quality throughout the supply chain.

Through these comprehensive capacity-building efforts, the RUSH project has laid the foundation for a more robust and efficient SPS inspection process, ensuring Uganda's horticultural exports meet global standards.



*Through these efforts, the digitization of SPS inspections has transformed Uganda's horticulture export sector, setting a benchmark for modernized and efficient processes.*

# Challenges and Mitigation Measures

## Regulating Unregistered Suppliers

The challenge of regulating produce collected by unregistered middlemen can affect compliance and product quality. To address this, future initiatives should prioritize inclusive training and engagement, ensuring that all stakeholders—including grassroots farmers and field service providers—are well-informed about SPS standards and procedures.

## Personnel Changes

Personnel turnover, especially when agronomists or inspectors rotate, can disrupt the continuity of the inspection process and impact compliance. To mitigate this, it is crucial to establish comprehensive training and handover procedures for new personnel. This ensures that knowledge and standards are consistently maintained during staff transitions.

## Inspector Availability

Inconsistent availability of inspectors can cause delays in the inspection process. To address this, efforts should be made to improve system accessibility and information dissemination. Ensuring that all users have easy access to the digital SPS system, with up-to-date information on system features, will promote transparency and ensure timely inspections.

## Lack of Uniformity in Practices

Prior to the introduction of the digital SPS system, there was a lack of uniformity in SPS practices across packhouses, leading to inefficiencies and confusion. The digital system has successfully standardized these practices, streamlining SPS processes and ensuring that all packhouses follow consistent standards and procedures.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Collecting and analyzing data for process improvement presented initial challenges. Early improvements to the manual process enabled the collection of data on time taken at each stage of inspection. This data laid the foundation for the comprehensive re-engineering and digitization of the inspection process, improving efficiency and compliance.

## Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

Effective engagement and collaboration with both private and public sector stakeholders were essential for the success of the project. Key partnerships, such as those with Turkish Airlines and Hortifresh for training, helped ensure that stakeholder needs and feedback were incorporated into the process. This approach fostered better planning, coordination, and informed decision-making.

These mitigation measures have collectively contributed to transforming Uganda's SPS inspection processes for fruits and vegetables. The improvements foster greater efficiency, enhanced compliance with international standards, and a more streamlined approach to agricultural exports. The collaborative efforts, training initiatives, and digitization of processes have positioned Uganda's agricultural export sector for greater competitiveness and sustainability.



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*“The RUSH project sought to drive a comprehensive transformation in Uganda’s sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) inspection practices.”*



# Digitization Efforts and Lessons Learned in SPS Inspection

Unlocking Efficiency in Complex Environments: Insights into Uganda's Successful SPS Inspection Digitization



In today's global trade landscape, efficient and reliable Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) inspection processes are essential. Recognizing this, Uganda embarked on a transformative journey in 2021 to transition its SPS inspection procedures for horticulture exports from manual to digital.

This knowledge product, *“Unlocking Efficiency in Complex Environments: Key Mechanisms Behind Uganda’s Successful Digitization of SPS Inspection,”* explores the strategies, challenges, and lessons learned from this ambitious initiative. It underscores how the integration of technology into regulatory processes has streamlined operations, improved compliance, and enhanced Uganda’s competitiveness in the global market.

This document emphasizes not only the outcomes but also the invaluable lessons gained during the system’s development. It highlights the importance of leveraging sector platforms, alliances, and stakeholder inputs—showcasing the collaborative effort that underpinned the successful digitization journey.

## Background

Before its significant shift to digital solutions, Uganda’s SPS inspection processes were heavily reliant on manual, paper-based methods. These systems used qualitative checklists for data collection, often leading to inefficiencies such as delays, higher operational costs, and challenges in meeting the stringent international standards required for global trade.

This dependency on outdated processes highlighted an urgent need for a more transparent, cost-effective, and efficient approach. The digitization initiative aimed not just to replace manual methods but also to improve the quality, reliability, and accessibility of data. By enhancing compliance with global SPS standards, Uganda sought to bolster its competitive edge in international markets, paving the way for a stronger agricultural export sector.

## Overview

In response to the explicit needs identified by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries - Directorate of Crop Inspection and Certification (MAAIF-DCIC), the RUSH Project, facilitated by Swisscontact Uganda, was launched to modernize Uganda’s agricultural export sector. This demand-driven initiative focused on digitizing the SPS inspection process for horticulture exports, addressing key challenges such as inefficiency and high operational costs. The project’s primary objectives included streamlining inspection processes, implementing risk-based inspections, and strengthening stakeholder engagement. The ultimate goal was to transition from manual systems to a digital platform that would reduce costs, enhance efficiency, and ensure Uganda’s adherence to international trade standards. This collaborative approach has set a new benchmark for Uganda’s horticulture export industry, marking a significant milestone in agricultural trade.

## Digitization of SPS Inspection Processes

The digitization of Uganda's SPS inspection processes, a cornerstone of the RUSH Project, represents a transformative leap forward. Currently in its testing phase, the digital system is designed to replace paper-based methods with advanced digital solutions, expediting SPS clearance while improving transparency, efficiency, and accuracy in inspections.

A key feature of the system is an e-document tracking and process management platform equipped with analytical tools. This platform enables seamless inspection workflows and real-time data analysis, providing critical insights for policy and decision-making.

The journey toward digitization was meticulously planned, involving:

- **Robust Stakeholder Engagement:** Ensuring that diverse interests were aligned and that stakeholders were actively involved throughout the development process.
- **Comprehensive Training Programs:** Equipping users with the skills needed to adapt to the new technology.
- **Iterative Development Approach:** Incorporating regular feedback to refine and optimize the system.

While challenges such as adapting to new technology and harmonizing stakeholder expectations arose, the project's proactive and collaborative strategies have laid the groundwork for a more efficient and competitive horticulture export sector in Uganda.

This digitization effort underscores Uganda's commitment to leveraging technology to meet global standards and unlock new opportunities in agricultural trade.

## Potential Benefits of the Digitization Process

The digitization of Uganda's SPS Inspection Process, a core element of the RUSH Project, is poised to deliver transformative benefits to the horticulture export sector. These anticipated advantages, recognized by both the project team and sector stakeholders, include the following:

**Increased Operational Efficiency:** Digitization is expected to significantly reduce the time required for critical processes, such as document verification, inspection scheduling, and reporting. This efficiency will enable more timely exports, minimizing delays for perishable goods and enhancing Uganda's competitive edge in global markets.

**Cost Savings for Stakeholders:** By reducing reliance on manual labor and paperwork, the system is likely to lower operational expenses. This shift is particularly beneficial for small-scale exporters, bolstering their competitiveness and enabling broader participation in international trade.

**Enhanced Accuracy and Compliance with International Standards:** The digital system is designed to enhance the precision and consistency of inspection processes, ensuring greater adherence to international SPS standards. This improvement is expected to reduce the risk of export rejections due to non-compliance, safeguarding Uganda's reputation in global markets.

**Data-Driven Insights for Policy and Decision-Making:** With its advanced data collection and analysis capabilities, the digital system will generate valuable insights. Policymakers can use these insights to identify trends, address potential risk areas, and capitalize on opportunities for sector growth and improvement.

**Improved Stakeholder Engagement and Communication:** The system will facilitate more effective communication and collaboration among inspectors, exporters, and regulatory bodies. By fostering a more transparent and cohesive environment, stakeholders can work together to address challenges and maximize the benefits of digitization.

**Advisory Note to Key Stakeholders:** To ensure the successful realization of these benefits, stakeholders are encouraged to actively monitor the rollout and performance of the digital system. This proactive approach will help identify areas for

further refinement and continuous improvement, maximizing the system's impact on Uganda's horticulture export sector.

### Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

The digitization process faced several challenges, each addressed through targeted mitigation measures to ensure successful implementation and sustainability:

- **Regulating Unregistered Suppliers:** Unregistered middlemen posed challenges to compliance and product quality. To address this, the digital system integrated stringent registration and tracking mechanisms, enhancing traceability and accountability throughout the supply chain.
- **Personnel Changes:** Frequent staff turnover, particularly among agronomists, disrupted the continuity of operations. This issue was mitigated by embedding flexible and ongoing training programs into the developer's contract. This approach ensured that new personnel received timely training to maintain consistency in system usage and compliance.
- **Inspector Availability:** Inconsistent availability of inspectors delayed the inspection process. To resolve this, a steering committee with robust oversight responsibilities was established. The committee ensured adequate scheduling and availability of inspectors, minimizing delays and optimizing operations.
- **Internet Connectivity:** Limited internet connectivity posed a significant obstacle during the initial stages of implementation. To overcome this, the system was equipped with offline functionality, enabling data collection even in low-connectivity areas. Data could then be synchronized once connectivity was restored, ensuring seamless operations.
- **Feedback and Adaptation:** Continuous improvement was supported by regular stakeholder meetings and a built-in feedback mechanism within the system. The steering committee's proactive oversight ensured timely incorporation of stakeholder feedback into system enhancements, fostering adaptability and stakeholder trust.

These strategies collectively addressed the challenges encountered, paving the way for a smoother and more effective digitization process.

### Enhancing Beneficiary Engagement and System Resilience

**Strong Beneficiary Role through Working Committees:** The active participation of beneficiaries in dedicated working committees ensured that the system's development was closely aligned with the practical needs and expectations of end-users. This collaborative approach fostered a sense of ownership and relevance among stakeholders, driving higher engagement and commitment to the system's success.

**Strategic Use of Cloud Hosting:** To address challenges such as limited local server capacity and reliability, the project initially adopted cloud hosting. This strategic choice provided a stable and scalable platform, ensuring uninterrupted service and robust data security. As the system matured and local infrastructure improved, a transition to local hosting was implemented to further strengthen system sustainability.

**Adaptability to Beneficiary Needs:** Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness, the system expanded its capabilities to include farmer data in response to beneficiary feedback. This enhancement underscored the project's commitment to adapting to evolving needs, ensuring that the system remained relevant and beneficial to all stakeholders involved.



## Future Outlook and Recommendations

The digitization of Uganda's SPS inspection process holds immense potential for transforming the agricultural export sector, enhancing both efficiency and compliance. As the system is fully implemented, it is critical to align with global digitization trends, including advancements in artificial intelligence (AI). Ugandan stakeholders must act swiftly, as lagging in digital adoption poses risks in an increasingly competitive global market. For instance, airlines have announced that by 2025, they will no longer accommodate non-digital cargo handling processes, underscoring the urgency of adopting digital systems.

Looking ahead, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries (MAAIF) should leverage the data generated by the digital system to develop a risk-based inspection strategy. This framework would optimize resource allocation and inspection processes, aligning with international standards and further streamlining operations.

## Recommendations

**Continuous System Upgrades:** Regular updates to the digital system are essential to incorporate emerging technologies and align with global best practices.

**Ongoing Training and Support:** Sustained training initiatives and technical support are crucial

to ensure user proficiency and widespread system adoption.

**Regular Stakeholder Engagement:** Engaging stakeholders through regular consultations will foster collaboration, address emerging challenges, and enhance system effectiveness.

**Partnerships for Technical and Financial Support:** Building partnerships with local and international entities can provide the technical expertise and financial resources needed to sustain and expand the initiative.

**Integration of AI and Emerging Technologies:** Actively exploring and integrating AI and other cutting-edge technologies will position Uganda's SPS inspection process at the forefront of global innovation.

## Conclusion

The digitization of Uganda's SPS inspection process represents a significant milestone in modernizing its horticulture export sector. While the full range of benefits is yet to be realized, the initiative promises improved efficiency, cost reduction, and enhanced compliance with international standards. To sustain this momentum, a strong commitment to ongoing training, stakeholder engagement, and technological adaptation is paramount. This digitization journey not only strengthens Uganda's agricultural exports but also sets a benchmark for innovation and collaboration in navigating complex global trade environments.







# Enhancing Uganda's Horticulture Sector

The Role of Private Sector Engagement in Strengthening SPS Competitiveness

In Uganda's evolving agricultural landscape, the RUSH Project has emerged as a pivotal innovation, demonstrating the transformative power of private sector engagement. Led by Swisscontact Uganda in collaboration with key stakeholders, this initiative has been instrumental in advancing Uganda's horticultural sector—a vital contributor to employment and foreign exchange earnings.

The project focuses on strengthening compliance with international sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards, optimizing supply chain management, and minimizing post-harvest losses to enhance global competitiveness.

A defining element of this transformation has been the active involvement of the private sector, which transitioned from being mere beneficiaries to active collaborators and co-creators of solutions.

This document examines the RUSH Project's strategic engagement with the private sector, the approaches employed to navigate challenges, and the impact on enhancing export quality and safety. It also highlights the role of the **Private Sector Contribution Tracker** in measuring impact, providing actionable insights for stakeholders, policymakers, and industry leaders on leveraging private sector collaboration for agricultural innovation.



## The Process of Engaging the Private Sector

The engagement of the private sector in the RUSH Project followed a structured, strategic approach designed to maximize their expertise and foster innovation. The following steps and tools were instrumental in this process:

### Identifying Key Stakeholders

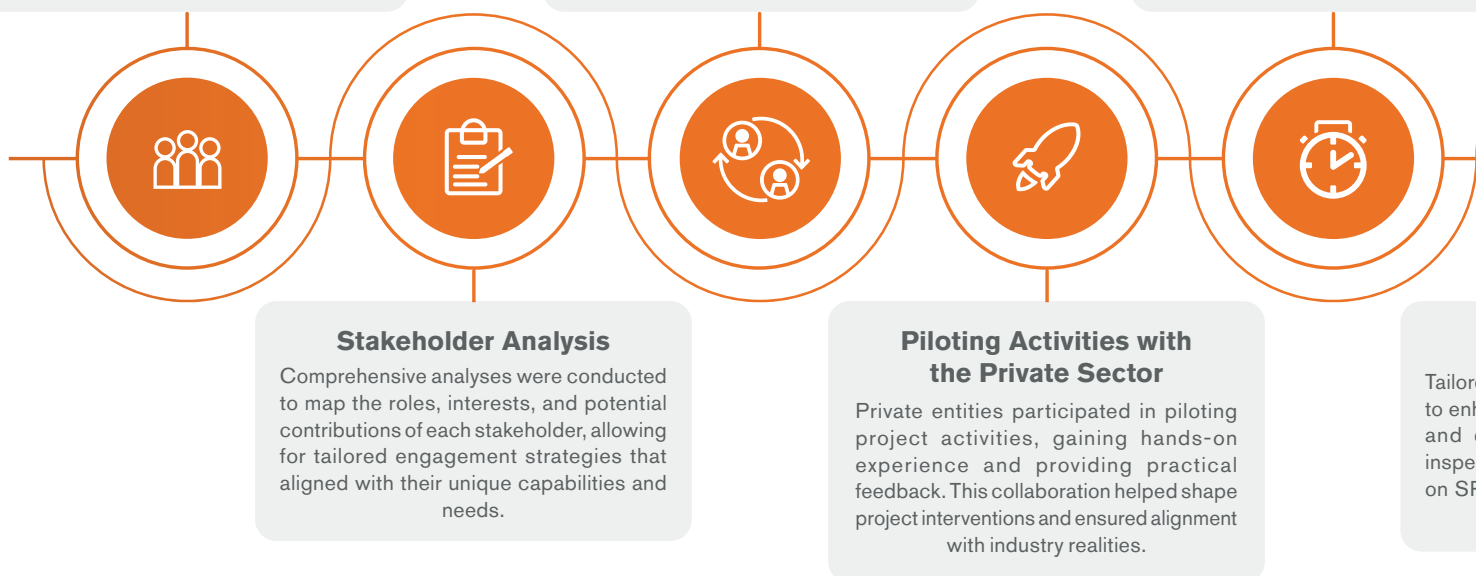
The project adopted a targeted approach to identify key private sector players. Collaborations included prominent horticulture exporters such as KK Foods, Agricado, Tropical Dynasty, and Mairye Estates, who formed the Hortifresh formation steering committee. International stakeholders like Turkish Cargo, KLM, and IATA were engaged through partnerships with Champ Cargo Systems, leveraging their expertise in cargo handling.

### Establishing Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

While formal agreements like Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were limited locally, international partnerships under the Alliance set benchmarks for successful collaborations, defining clear roles, responsibilities, and mutual benefits.

### Feedback Mechanisms

Regular stakeholder forums and surveys, such as those held with Hortifresh and other industry leaders, facilitated open communication, ensuring timely incorporation of feedback into project adaptations.



## The Private Sector Contribution Tracker

A standout innovation of the RUSH Project, the **Private Sector Contribution Tracker**, played a crucial role in evaluating the impact of private sector involvement. This tool allowed for the systematic quantification and assessment of contributions, providing valuable insights into the role of private entities in project success. Key functions included:

### Measuring Private Sector Contributions

The tracker equated donor investments with private sector in-kind contributions, ensuring accountability and transparency for reporting purposes.

### Enhancing Data Classification and Valuation

Updates to the tracker improved data consistency, enabling precise classification and valuation of contributions across governance, advocacy, expertise, and company data tools.

### Operational Guidance

The tracker provided operational best practices, such as avoiding double counting, ensuring coordination among teams, and maintaining accurate, regular reporting.



### Strategic Insights

Data from the tracker informed decision-making, strengthened project delivery, and showcased the impact of public-private collaborations in advancing Uganda’s horticulture sector.

### Conclusion

The RUSH Project’s structured approach to engaging the private sector has set a precedent for fostering innovation and shared responsibility in Uganda’s horticultural sector. By leveraging tools like the **Private Sector Contribution Tracker**,

the project has demonstrated how effective public-private partnerships can drive meaningful change, enhance compliance with international standards, and contribute to economic growth.

Through collaboration, capacity building, and continuous adaptation, the RUSH Project exemplifies how private sector engagement can be harnessed to transform agricultural sectors, paving the way for sustained competitiveness in global markets.



# Uganda's Vegetable Sector

Unlocking Opportunities through an Enhanced Trade  
Facilitation Portal

## Background and Introduction

The Ugandan vegetable export sector, a cornerstone of the country's economy, has long grappled with systemic challenges. Historically, these included opaque and cumbersome trade procedures, coupled with a lack of transparency that hindered the sector's growth and global competitiveness. The heavy reliance on intermediaries further compounded these issues, often leading to exploitation and financial losses for exporters, particularly those new to the market. These intermediaries, operating with minimal oversight, controlled critical information and processes, resulting in inefficiencies and heightened risks for exporters.

## The RUSH Project

In response to these challenges, Uganda initiated a transformative 21-month project titled *"Reengineering Uganda's SPS Inspection for Horticulture (F&V) Exports – RUSH."* This initiative, spearheaded by the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation and implemented by Swisscontact Uganda, was executed in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) and the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Cooperatives (MTIC). The project's

primary objective was to revitalize the horticulture export sector by introducing critical efficiencies into the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) inspection processes at export packhouses and airports.

A cornerstone of this effort was the enhancement of Uganda's Trade Facilitation Portal (<https://ugandatrades.go.ug>), maintained by the MTIC. The portal underwent significant updates, incorporating new information modules tailored to the horticulture sector. These updates also refined existing features to ensure relevance and user-friendliness, delivering a more streamlined trade facilitation experience.

The project aimed to address longstanding issues, such as limited access to reliable trade information and the risks posed by intermediary exploitation. By granting exporters direct access to vital trade-related information through the portal, the initiative sought to create a more transparent, efficient, and self-reliant vegetable export sector. This modernized approach was anticipated to reduce the time and costs associated with exporting, enhance Uganda's competitiveness in international markets, and ensure compliance with global regulatory standards.



# Enhancing Uganda's Trade Facilitation Portal: The Improvement Process



## Initial Planning and Collaboration

- Conducted an introductory meeting between Swisscontact Uganda and the MTIC team to establish consensus on the assignment's objectives.
- Reviewed the work plan and assignment details with the MTIC portal team to align expectations and define responsibilities.



## Information Gathering and Preparation

- Evaluated existing information on the portal for accuracy and completeness.
- Identified critical missing data and flagged it for inclusion in the update process.
- Secured login credentials to access and make updates to the portal.



## Data Collection and Documentation

- Gathered export-related data for products such as kidney beans, plantains, pawpaws, and assorted vegetables from institutions and stakeholders including MTIC, MAAIF, URA, Hortifresh, and exporters.
- Documented and uploaded relevant information to the Uganda Trade Facilitation Portal.
- Addressed specific documentation requirements, such as obtaining REX numbers, Certificates of Origin, Simplified Certificates of Origin (SCO), and SPS certificates.



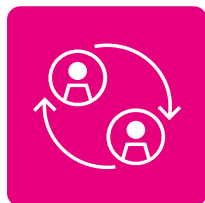
## Updating Procedures and Validation

- Updated portal procedures, including those for obtaining certifications and managing clearance processes at Entebbe International Airport.
- Verified that the updated procedures were aligned with current practices and regulatory standards.



## Continuous Refinement and Uploading

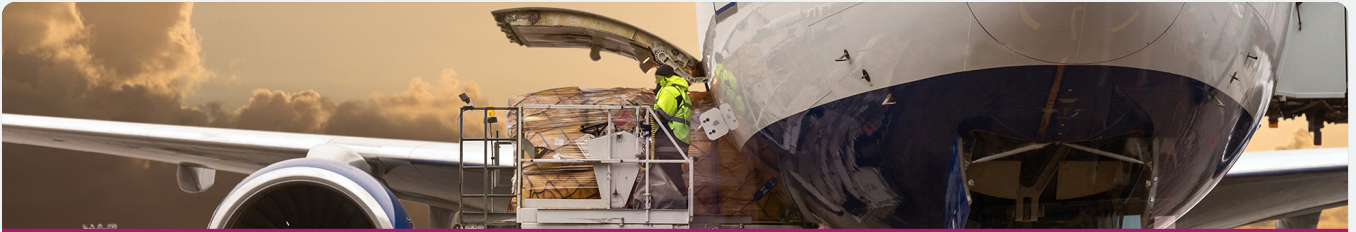
- Regularly reviewed and refined updated procedures to ensure accuracy, clarity, and user-friendliness.
- Uploaded new and revised information continuously, maintaining the portal's relevance and comprehensiveness.



## Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback

- Engaged stakeholders throughout the process to gather insights and validate updates.
- Incorporated feedback to improve the portal's functionality and relevance for diverse users within the export community.

This structured and collaborative process exemplifies the meticulous planning, robust data collection, iterative refinement, and active stakeholder engagement involved in enhancing Uganda's Trade Facilitation Portal. These efforts have ensured the portal is both user-friendly and equipped to meet the needs of Uganda's export sector effectively.



## Benefits of Enhancing the Trade Facilitation Portal

The improvements made to Uganda's Trade Facilitation Portal have brought significant advantages to the vegetable export sector, streamlining processes, reducing costs, and driving competitiveness.

### Streamlined Export Procedures

The updated portal simplifies complex export processes, substantially reducing the time and effort required for documentation. As the Team Lead from Hortifresh remarked:

*“Our members are using it, and it is very well linked with other digital platforms in the sector. We are progressively moving away from paper-based systems to fully digital ones. The fact that it consolidates key information and processes is a significant step forward for the sector.”*

### Cost Reduction

By providing clear and accessible information, the portal minimizes reliance on intermediaries, leading to significant cost savings for exporters. Samuel Kawalya of the Uganda Export Promotion Board highlighted:

*“The portal has essentially eliminated the middleman. With it, people now understand the exact steps and offices required. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have saved substantial amounts previously spent on intermediaries who charged exorbitant fees.”*

### Regulatory Compliance and Risk Mitigation

The portal provides up-to-date information on trade regulations and standards, enabling businesses to ensure compliance and mitigate risks such as penalties or shipment rejections. This is particularly critical for meeting international phytosanitary standards.

### Market Diversification and Growth Opportunities

By offering insights into new markets and trade opportunities, the portal empowers exporters to expand and diversify their market base, fostering growth in a competitive global environment. As Hanington from Hortifresh stated:

*“Whenever we discuss trade facilitation, we use the portal as evidence that critical information is readily available.”*

### Enhanced Data Collection and Analytics

The portal serves as a central repository for trade-related data, offering valuable analytics to stakeholders. This information can be utilized to identify market trends, optimize supply chains, and guide policy decisions.

### Improved Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback Mechanisms

Ongoing user feedback ensures the portal's relevance and effectiveness. Prisca from Hortifresh highlighted its transformative impact:

*“Previously, onboarding new members was a lengthy process. Now, they arrive with about 40% of the information already understood, and we simply guide them through the final steps of obtaining export clearance.”*

The comprehensive benefits of the Trade Facilitation Portal, supported by testimonials from key stakeholders, underline its critical role in transforming Uganda's vegetable export sector. By fostering efficiency, reducing costs, ensuring compliance, and driving growth, the portal positions the sector for enhanced global competitiveness.

## Recommendations for Enhancing the Trade Facilitation Portal

The Trade Facilitation Portal has proven to be a transformative tool for Uganda's vegetable export sector, streamlining processes, improving market access, and supporting sectoral growth. To build on its success, the following recommendations are proposed:

### 1. Streamlining and Simplifying Procedures

The portal has effectively eliminated redundant steps that previously hindered exporters. For instance, it now provides clear guidance on obtaining certificates of origin and other key documents, reducing delays significantly. Further efforts should focus on:

Simplifying the processes for acquiring export documentation and movement permits.

Continuously reviewing procedures to identify and eliminate unnecessary complexities.

### 2. Enhancing Data Collection and Market Information

One of the portal's critical functions is its ability to collect data on market trends and notifications. Improving this feature will enable exporters to:

Access timely and relevant market intelligence.

Make informed decisions to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

### 3. Maintaining a User-Centered Approach

The portal's success stems from its focus on documenting procedures from the exporter's perspective. To sustain this, efforts should include:

Regular updates to ensure processes remain relevant and user-friendly.

Continuous identification of areas for simplification, followed by action from the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Cooperatives.

### 4. Strengthening Collaborative Workgroups

The establishment of simplification workgroups has been instrumental in addressing key export challenges. These workgroups focus on areas such as:

Registration with institutions like Hortifresh Uganda, the Uganda Export Promotion Board, and the Ministry of Agriculture.

Obtaining critical documents such as REX numbers, Certificates of Origin, and Phytosanitary Certificates.

Sustained collaboration and real-time feedback from these workgroups will ensure the portal continues to meet user needs effectively.

### 5. Promoting Transparency and Accessibility

Transparency in export procedures is vital for fostering trust and encouraging participation. The portal should:

Continue to detail existing processes while simplifying them further.

Focus on making export procedures accessible and straightforward, especially for new exporters entering the sector.

## Conclusion

The Trade Facilitation Portal has significantly enhanced Uganda's vegetable export sector, making it more competitive and efficient in the global marketplace. By implementing these recommendations, the portal can continue to adapt to the dynamic needs of the industry, fostering sustainable growth.

- Ongoing improvement should focus on:
- Simplifying procedures further.
- Incorporating continuous user feedback.
- Providing up-to-date market insights.

These efforts will ensure the portal remains a vital resource in an evolving global trade environment, empowering Uganda's vegetable exporters to thrive.





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