



BORDERLESS ALLIANCE
EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

Annual Conference « Borderless 2017 »

Theme:

“Optimizing Trade Opportunities: The Role of Trade Facilitation”

CONCEPT NOTE

January 2017

INTRODUCTION

Borderless Alliance is a private association established in 2011 with the objective to catalyze the efforts of the West African private sector and its partners to offer and promote concrete improvements to free movement of persons and goods. It advocates for changes in policies and practices by the public authorities, both at the national and regional levels to improve business environment.

To achieve this mission aimed at facilitating trade and transport with a view to making regional economic integration a reality in West Africa, Borderless Alliance has initiated the planning and organization of Annual Conferences since 2012. These are platforms for dialogue on issues where private and public actors discuss the constraints related to intra-regional trade with suggestions of possible solutions for the development of trade and transport in a more integrated West Africa.

Organized under the auspices of the Burkina Faso Ministry of Trade, the 6th Borderless Conference will take place from May 10 to 12, 2017 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, under the theme: *“Optimizing Trade Opportunities: The role of Trade Facilitation”*

As in past editions, *Borderless Alliance* will bring together key business and professional organizations from the private sector operating in various sectors such as transport and logistics, industry, trade, finance, representatives of regional economic communities (ECOWAS and UEMOA), governments and development partners in the region.

CHOICE OF THE THEME

World trade is increasingly growing mainly due to the emergence of new trade opportunities and the reduction of quotas related to trade liberalization. With its potentials, West Africa represents less than only 1% of the world trade and a little more than 2% of African trade (per UNECA/BSR-AO, 2016 Report on Trade and Transport Infrastructure in West Africa).

Goods crossing the borders must, however, comply with customs and other administrative procedures at these borders. If trade policies, procedures and practices are cumbersome or inefficiently applied, they may create significant barriers to the free movement of goods, from shipment by the exporter to delivery to the importer. Therefore, the main objective of trade facilitation is to minimize transaction costs and simplify international trade for businesses, while ensuring effective control by governments and regional organizations.

Despite the efforts that organizations are constantly making in facilitating trade and improving the business environment, companies express major concerns about the time and costs of commercial transactions. They therefore call for more transparency, efficiency and uniformity in the procedures applicable to cross-border trade in goods. The World Trade Organization Trade

Facilitation Agreement is, thus, an important tool for international trade competitiveness and reveals to private and public actors the challenges for them to seize the opportunities that are attached to them.

To illustrate the above, a report by the United Nations (2002) estimated that high administrative costs resulting from complex customary procedures and requirements account for 7%-10% of the value of global trade. On the contrary, efficient ports, customs and e-business can have a positive effect on trade flows.¹

FORMAT OF THE CONFERENCE AND OPPORTUNITIES

For three days, the conference will provide a platform for experience and knowledge sharing, advocacy, and networking, as well as business relationship development.

Most importantly, it will be an opportunity to draw attention of political and administrative decision-makers on the need to comply with international agreements and regional regulations already adopted and to undertake reforms aiming at promoting trade through an effective free movement of persons and goods.

The opening ceremony of Borderless 2017 will be held in the afternoon of May 10, 2017. It will be attended by the authorities of Burkina Faso, officials of Regional Economic Communities, government representatives, regional development partners and private sector stakeholders. A key note address on the conference theme will be presented by a development partner representative.

On 11th and 12th May 2017, there will be three (03) thematic panels. These will focus on the challenges and opportunities related to Trade Facilitation Agreement, promoting efficiency of borders through the acceleration of customs procedures; and the promotion of private sector in the context of regional and international agreements.

High level experts from both private and public sectors in the sub-region, as well as international organizations will be invited to share their experiences and best practices to remove obstacles and barriers to trade, promote cross-border trade, and develop appropriate mechanisms for trade and transport stakeholders to enable them to optimize the opportunities aimed at facilitating trade and transport in West Africa.

Discussions will be held in the following three proposed panels:

¹ United Nations (2002). Trade Facilitation Handbook: For the Greater Mekong Subregion. New York: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and The Pacific.

Panel 1: Trade Facilitation Agreement: Opportunities and Challenges for West Africa

Experts in this panel will highlight the advantages of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement aimed at simplifying, harmonizing and standardizing customs clearance procedures of goods. It will be an opportunity for experts to highlight the opportunities the TFA implementation presents for expediting the movement and customs clearance procedures for transit goods. Finally the panel of experts will discuss the challenges the agreement presents for the Private Sector, as well as the needs, particularly for capacity building in developing countries.

Panel 2: Promoting Corridor and Border Efficiency in West Africa.

Experts in this panel will examine the various modern approaches to making borders efficient in West Africa, notably by improving on the passage of goods and persons at these borders. Case studies of successful measures taken to simplify and harmonize procedures (especially customs) through the interconnection of Customs Information Systems, establishment of Joint Border Posts, etc. will be presented by the experts.

The landlocked countries – Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger – are confronted with peculiar challenges regarding the costs of business and delays experienced at the border and on road corridors leading to high transportation costs and delays which translate into the high cost of goods and services in these countries. Their peculiar challenges will be shared and deliberated with the aim of mapping out concrete actions to be taken to address their peculiar issues.

Panel 3: Regional Trade Regulations: Tools for improving trade of agricultural products

In West Africa, the ECOWAS and UEMOA Commissions have adopted several community regulations with a view to achieving economic integration through the realization of a common market. This panel will take stock of the regulations approved by the two (02) Regional Economic Community institutions (ECOWAS and UEMOA). Emphasis will be placed on regulations aimed at promoting regional production and facilitating intra-regional trade and trade with the rest of the world. These Community regulations include the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS), the Common External Tariff (CET) and its accompanying measures.

The conference will be an opportunity for ECOWAS and UEMOA to take stock of the implementation of these various procedures with emphasis on the benefits for the private sector and the reforms expected from the Member States.

It will also be an opportunity for participants to discuss the challenges faced by actors in the private sector in West Africa. This will then enable them to enjoy the benefits of the ECOWAS CET and the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) as an operational tool for promoting the West African region as a zone of free trade.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Borderless Annual General Meeting

On the sidelines of the conference, Borderless Alliance will hold its Annual General meeting and review past activities and the financial statements of 2016 and advise the Executive Committee and the General Assembly on the management of the Alliance.

Field Trip

Participants will have the opportunity to visit the International Dry Port of Ouagadougou, known as “Ouagarinter.”

Organizing Committee

The main organizers of the conference are Borderless Alliance, Burkina Shippers’ Council (CBC) and the Burkina Faso Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI-BF).

LOGISTICS

The organizers will be available to offer assistance to all participants before, during and after the conference. Participants may take note of the following:

- Simultaneous translation will be provided in English and French during the conference
- All conference materials will be available in French and English
- Information on the conference will be regularly updated on the website of Borderless Alliance (www.borderlesswa.com) and with partner organizations
- Reception at the airport as well as transport to various official hotels will be provided by the organizers

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION AND SPONSORSHIP

The conference provides sponsorship opportunities with attractive benefits for businesses (members and non-members) wishing to associate themselves with this regional event that will be attended by all stakeholders in West Africa.

For more information, please contact:

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