

Liberia: Computerization of Customs Department Project

The challenge:

Facilities for customs clearance within the Free Port of Monrovia were very rudimentary in 2008. Agencies maintained manual ledgers and records to account for containers and goods passing through the port, but with no or little coordination. Most records were made by hand, requiring much time for indexing and transfer of notes into ledgers. In the absence of computers, typewriters were used to produce official documents. As a result, compiling and reporting of information was slow, and prone to error. Lack of computers meant reports were generated using publishing agents outside the Customs premises or otherwise on private or borrowed computers. In the absence of a network, information exchange was done by means of USB memory sticks



Archiving systems were poor and were often piles of dusty documents stacked against a wall. Retrieval, matching of documents and comparison of information between them was a tedious process and often limited what could be analyzed or verified. This lack of proper documentation systems was a major obstacle to improving control of goods in the port, hampered proper monitoring of goods clearance and checking of the revenue generated. It presented a critical bottleneck to trade

The solution:

ICF worked with the Government of Liberia to simplify and automate administrative processes in the Customs House and Free Port of Monrovia to ensure a faster and more predictable goods clearing process in the port. The project cost came to a total of US\$ 442,322. Of this, ICF provided US\$ 300,000, IFC provided US\$ 81,822 and the Government of Liberia provided US\$ 60,500.

Impact:

The project achieved the following:

- The time taken from application to release of goods went down from 30 days to 3.62 days, thanks to the computerisation of all manual systems and the reduction of clearance procedures from 14 to 9.
- Over 60 computers and an office network were installed, and over 110 Customs staff and brokers were given computer skills training
- A risk based approach to the processing of applications was put in place, where traders are classified as red (physical examination), yellow (documentation check) or green (immediate release).

Project duration: March 2008 – August 2010

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