GLOBAL ALLIANCE
FOR TRADE FACILITATION

STREAMLINING INSPECTIONS
TO BOOST AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS

UGANDA

Timeframe: **2021–2024**

Donor Funding: **CHF 1,050,579**

Private Sector Contribution:
(USD 800,494)

THE CHALLENGE

Agriculture is the backbone of Uganda's economy, employing nearly 70% of the population and generating close to 50% of export earnings. It is a major source of livelihoods for women and small-scale traders, who make up 70% of the workforce and own nearly a third of businesses in the sector. Yet despite its importance, agriculture has struggled to grow and compete regionally due to fragmented operations, information gaps across the supply chain, weak traceability, and low trust between public and private actors—driving inefficiencies and high transaction costs.

These challenges were especially acute in the country's Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) inspection system. The paper-based, manual process was slow and error-prone, requiring over 15 hours per consignment—equivalent to more than a month of working time each year—much of it spent on inspections and manual sorting. Limited visibility of incoming trucks at the airport prevented exporters from planning shipments, resulting in ad hoc evening operations, higher costs, and increased risks of spoilage, waste, and border rejections.

At the same time, regulatory agencies lacked end-to-end oversight: cargo was sometimes approved without physical inspection, while weak documentation, poor enforcement, and duplicate checks at packhouses and airports further undermined efficiency. These systemic failures led to international bans on some Ugandan products, threatening livelihoods, employment, and Uganda's credibility as an exporter. While SPS guidelines existed, they were inconsistently applied and rarely enforced—the system was failing both public authorities and the private sector.

"Historically, we inspected manually and we often erred, leading to inefficiencies. CICS/RUSH digitalises the entire process reducing errors, providing reliable data for regulators and exporters and enhancing compliance. With the new tool, each batch of produce will be traceable back to its origin, enabling authorities to identify the source of any issues, such as harmful organisms or pesticide residues. This is expected to significantly benefit farmers, who will be 'coded and traced', ensuring accurate tracking and documentation for exports."

Carol Nankinga, Assistant Commissioner Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries

WHAT WE DID

To tackle these systemic issues, the Alliance through Swisscontact partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives (MTIC) to support the creation of a key private sector association named HortiFresh and implement a multi-pronged strategy to improve the quality and efficiency of SPS procedures.

1. Laying the groundwork for data-driven inspections

The project began by reviewing the full process from loading trucks at the farms to dispatching them at the airport for air-shipment out of Uganda. The team adapted data checklists and introduced a pre-inspection planning tool to strengthen coordination between exporters and inspectors. These tools helped capture critical information, identify inefficiencies, provide an improved level of traceability and set the stage for process improvements.

2. Engaging stakeholders to co-create solutions

Throughout implementation, the team conducted interviews, focus groups, and workshops with both public and private stakeholders across the export supply chain. These consultations were key to gathering insights, validating findings, and ensuring the solution addressed real sector needs.

3. Introducing smart, digital tools

To resolve long-standing challenges in existing SPS procedures, the Alliance developed and rolled out the RUSH/CICS (Crop Inspection & Certification System) platform. This digital tool streamlines inspection workflows, improves transparency, provides traceability and enhances coordination across the supply chain.

4. Building capacity across the supply chain

Training was central to the solution. The project equipped quality controllers and agronomists at packhouses with skills to improve inspection readiness and fresh produce handling. It also onboarded 183 exporters and 2,595 farmers, and trained 41 inspectors and 156 exporting companies to effectively use the RUSH/CICS platform.

5. Enabling risk-based inspections

The RUSH/CICS platform enables MAAIF to implement risk-based inspections by generating risk profiles for traders, packhouses, and suppliers. This allows inspectors to focus efforts on higher-risk consignments, making inspections more targeted and efficient.

"The shift from a manual inspection and certification system to a digital solution has transformed our operations, eliminating errors and inefficiencies that hindered our standards. The new system enhances compliance by providing reliable data for regulators and exporters and improves traceability for each batch of produce, allowing us to identify issues like harmful organisms or pesticide residues effectively. Overall, the system helps us meet high SPS standards and strengthens Uganda's reputation in the global produce industry."

Samula Alexander, Senior Agricultural Inspector, Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries.

THE IMPACTS

RUSH/CICS is transforming Uganda's agricultural export landscape through a digital inspection platform that strengthens compliance, reduces errors, and builds trust in Ugandan produce—delivering measurable value across the sector.

1. Saving time and money for exporters

By allowing packhouse operators to enter shipment data directly into the system, RUSH/CICS automates packing lists and audit reports, significantly reducing paperwork and streamlining operations. As a result, the cost of processing a consignment has fallen from USD 88 to USD 50, saving exporters nearly USD 39 per shipment.

2. Improving the effectiveness of SPS controls

Digital scheduling, geolocation to verify inspector presence, and early access to export data enable better planning, faster inspections, and greater transparency for MAAIF. Trained packhouse staff now manage produce more efficiently from the outset, reducing delays, spoilage, and overall supply chain friction.

3. Enhancing compliance and lowering rejection risks

End-to-end traceability and real-time data sharing allow inspectors and exporters to identify and intercept non-compliant consignments—such as those affected by pests or pesticide residues—before export. Exporters can trace issues back to individual suppliers, improving farming practices and reducing waste.

4. Strengthening Uganda's position in global markets

Over time, RUSH/CICS supports sustained compliance with international SPS standards, helping small-scale farmers and exporters access new markets. Improved traceability and faster clearance reinforce Uganda's competitiveness, particularly for time-sensitive, perishable exports.

"Globally, digital solutions reduce the time and costs associated with regulatory compliance and the RUSH platform enables inspectors to maintain the high standards crucial for Uganda's access to high-value export markets."

Fred Zake, Executive Director HortiFresh Association Uganda Limited

"The RUSH/CICS system has transformed our exporting business by replacing time-consuming manual processes with a streamlined digital solution. This shift not only saves us valuable time but also improves data management, ensuring our records are safe, accessible and accurately tracked. Additionally, the system allows us to trace our goods back to their origin, enabling quick identification of any issues and enhancing accountability and quality control. Overall, RUSH/CICS significantly boosts our efficiency and reliability, facilitating more successful exports"

Yawe Juliet Mercy, Manager Roki fruits & vegetables ltd.

Scaling the Impact

A strong SPS system is essential for effective trade facilitation—not only to ensure safe and efficient cross-border movement of goods, but also to unlock broader economic opportunities. Platforms like RUSH/CICS are driving this transformation by increasing transparency, reducing risk, and enabling compliance. This is critical for small-scale exporters in least developed countries (LDCs) seeking to access global markets.

RUSH/CICS shows that trade facilitation is about more than digitising documents or streamlining border procedures. It highlights the importance of a holistic approach—building private sector capacity, improving regulatory processes, and strengthening coordination along the supply chain.

Uganda's experience offers a scalable model for other LDCs, where SPS systems remain fragmented, manual, and under-resourced. With RUSH/CICS feeding into the ePhyto system, the potential for interoperability is strong—laying the foundation for more efficient, harmonised, and transparent SPS systems globally.

For countries aiming to increase their competitiveness in global trade, investing in digital SPS solutions is not just a technical upgrade—it's a strategic move toward inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

Scan QR code to watch more on our project in Uganda on YouTube

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ICC

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