



International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO
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'BRIDGES ACROSS BORDERS' HISTORY

This 'Bridges Across Borders' networking event is organised with the specific purpose of bringing together service sector industry associations in order to promote partnership and exchange market information. The principal focus of the meeting is on "networking" and participants are given the opportunity:

- To meet foreign associations/chambers whose members offer a complementary type of expertise;
- To meet foreign industry associations and/or trade support institutions in –the same sector;
- To determine what capacity and demand for services in their sector exist in the country of their counterpart;
- To determine if their counterpart can accept their association or members as "associate members," and if it is possible to receive their newsletter and directory of members;
- To determine how their respective members can be put in touch with each other;
- To determine how projects their respective members can jointly work on can be identified ;
- To determine if it is possible to place guest articles in the newsletter of their counterpart from time to time;
- To share strategies on mutual challenges such as member retention; and
- To determine if the counterpart association is involved in export training or other programmes suggested by ITC, such as awards programmes, export articles in newsletters, etc.

In the SADC region, 'Bridges Across Borders' has been organized in Botswana (2003), Zambia (2005), and in South Africa (2006). The Lusaka event took place on 20-21 January 2005. 74 professional institutes and associations from 6 Southern African countries (i.e., Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland and Zambia) attended the networking event. 426 bilateral consultations between institutes and associations representing over 70,000 member

companies and professionals were established. Nevertheless, the interdependent nature of the services industry could allow for 1,304 matches between participants with complementary business interests. Some results from this event is available below.

- The Institute of Architects, Surveyors and Engineers of Zambia exchanged market failures in Zambia with their counterpart from Malawi. Malawi had faced the same problems six years ago and the exchange provided Zambia with a potential source of information to resolve the issues.
- A member of the Surveyors Institute of Zambia is currently building a hospital in Lusaka, after winning a government bid. During the talks held with the Medical Association of Malawi, a strategic alliance is being formed to have their experience transferred to a Zambian counterpart on managing the hospital facilities.
- During one-on-one sessions, the Musicians Association of Malawi and the Women Entrepreneurs of Zambia discovered that similar problems affect their members' access to the market. The exchange of information on the matter helped them to build an alliance and draft possible solutions, including lobbying respective governments for policy changes.
- Since it lacks financial market for service firms, Intercon Trust has developed a mutual fund in Lesotho to provide project funds and in return, receive a percentage on investment. In exchanging experiences with other associations presented during the meeting, it was agreed to form a SADC-wide fund. The idea received great welcome from Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland and Zambia.
- The Professional Centre of Zambia liaised with other professional institutions to form a group of professionals looking at standardizing vocational programmes in the region.
- A friendship agreement was reached between Botswana Export Development and Investment Authority, Ministry of Trade of Lesotho, Malawi Export Promotion Council, and Export Board of Zambia. The agreement is to consult with one another in areas relating to service export, mutual accepted credentials, and project opportunities.
- The Economics Association of Zambia and the Economics Association of Malawi reached a friendship agreement on exchanging information about processes and procedures in their individual countries.

Some quotes were extracted from participants to illustrate the value of organizing such a networking event.

- "I was able to know what other members in other countries needed in terms of the service we offer. Also what policy they have in relation to our service." Vention Ltd. - Zambia.

- "I made contact with an insurance broker I met to market credit insurance for us in Zambia, because the service is not available here." Export Credit Insurance Company - Botswana.
- "I identified a few associations with complementary types of expertise." World Vision International - Lesotho.
- "During the one-to-one meetings, I've accomplished a lot of important things. It has given me a great chance to open up a business partnership with a Swazi. This will bring development to my country and to Swaziland." Elbrux Marketing & Business Consultancy - Zambia.
- "I have created/improved the image of integrity of Namibia." Law Society of Namibia.
- "I was able to acquire some strategies on how the government can assist SME's to export services and even link us with other service providers in other countries." Ministry of Trade & Industry, Cooperatives & Marketing - Lesotho.
- "Other associations have already shown interest in our members' products." Exporters Association - Botswana.

Participants were asked to follow up on contacts established at the meeting, and they responded positively. Some actions intended by the associations once back in their respective home countries are listed below.

- "Prepared to trade with some countries I met at this event. Export our services". *Vention Ltd. - Zambia.*
- "Upkeep an e-mail contact with persons/institutions of similar interests/objectives." *Engineering Council of Namibia.*
- "Advise the Ministry to employ those strategies with the view to develop service exports. I will also try to assess the current policies to ensure that they support service exporting and service trade liberalization." *Ministry of Trade & Industry, Cooperatives & Marketing - Lesotho.*
- "Contact the organizations with whom those have been specific to arrange to work together and to sign MOUs." *Comesa Bankers Association, Malawi.*

The quote below summarizes the outlook of the event. 'Bridges Across Borders' provided to service associations in a few African countries, the opportunity to network and exchange

views and information. The objective is to allow them to find by themselves, a solution for each one of their problems.

"It's been a wonderful network event that has removed our association from an egg shell to a mountain peak where opportunities are visible." Africa Centre for Advancement - Malawi

The largest event organised so far was in South Africa in November of 2006. Over 300 participants from 15 SADC countries travelled to Johannesburg to attend the event. The event focused on 3 major sectors, which were considered key for regional integration (e.g., construction, transportation and financial services). The event had a morning session discussing on one topic per day, while in the afternoon participants had one-on-one meetings scheduled. Over 2,000 of those meetings took place during the 3-day event.

Angola was under attack for forbidding right hand-side driven trucks to enter its territory and reminded that such unilateral decisions only hurt Angolans with higher cost of transport and less competitive products. Mauritius indicated that most cargo ships coming to the island from Asia would return home empty and this impacted the cost to ship their products. The Maputo Corridor Group demonstrated great interest in analyzing the potential to funnel some of its shipments through Mauritius, as they experience a similar problem. This business cooperation between Freeport Mauritius and Maputo Corridor was further explored in a bilateral consultation.

"Great networking event! We got all our Trans-Kalahari Corridor (TKC) stakeholders together from RSA, Botswana and Namibia and for the first time succeeded in collaborating on a strategic plan for a pilot project to kick-start two-way container traffic between JNB and Walvis Bay on the TKC, which was very important". (Philip Fischer, Trans-Kalahari Corridor)

One concrete outcome was a partnership agreement between an architect from Mauritius and a property developer from Rwanda to build golf courses in East Africa. The event was useful to service associations, small service providers and other institutional participants.

Various participants representing small businesses invited the Head for Africa at the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) to better understand policies and application procedures. IDC is South Africa's development bank and so far, it has invested in high capital projects. Policies at IDC have changed and shifted towards smaller projects. Bridges Across Borders was considered an excellent platform for IDC to promote its new policies and reach out to the size of businesses it is now targeting.