



As SEW/TTBizLink enters fourth phase...

More government services go online

The Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) has been spearheading implementation of the Single Electronic Window (SEW) for Trade and Business (TTBizLink), a project which began in 2009 with the first e-service launched in January 2012.

It is a secure, neutral and user-friendly IT platform—accessed online at <http://www.ttbizlink.gov.tt>—that allows various trade and business transactions to be conducted electronically.

Currently it facilitates 46 trade and business related e-services offered from across 24 unique agencies in seven ministries, together with the T&T Chamber of Industry and Commerce (TTCIC). It is a collaborative effort between government agencies and the private sector.

The project has an estimated cost of US\$25,000,000 and is expected to be completed by 2021. For fiscal year 2018-2019, the estimated budget is \$54,509,973.

The aim is to improve the trade performance and business facilitation environment in T&T through the enhancing of SEW.

Allison Bidaisee, manager, stakeholder adoption, SEW, explained that the project is now in

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its fourth phase.

“That phase is strengthening and expansion of SEW, funded by a five-year IDB loan,” she said.

The SEW/TTBizLink is underpinned by passage of the Electronics Transaction Act No 6 of 2011 and the Data Protection Act No 13 of 2011.

There has been progress in reduction of the processing time for licences and permits which can now be completed within one to three days. It used to take between three to four weeks.

There have also been noteworthy improvements in service delivery times for collaborating agencies:

- e-certificate of origin: time reduced from one day to 30 minutes
- e-company registration: time reduced from seven to three days
- e-fiscal incentives: time reduced from six weeks to 11 days
- e-import duty concessions: time reduced from six weeks to 12 days
- e-import/export permits and licences: time reduced from 4 weeks to 1 day

This directly affects the ease of doing business in T&T, which is

of particular interest to investors and is proving to be an important mechanism for growing the economy, which is in tandem with the mandate of the MTI.

Issues and challenges

There are challenges the biggest having to do with change management, Bidaisee said.

She admitted that transitioning to an electronic system after years of a manual system requires a mindset change, along with acquiring new skills.

“This applies to both the applicant and the approving agencies. The MTI/TTBizLink has sought to address this on different levels but we are getting more and more adoption as there have been more agencies coming on board to use the system. There is more interest in it,” she said.

Stakeholder engagement activities and consultations have helped build awareness and trust in the system. Some kinks regarding resources still need to be ironed out.

“Many ministries face human resource, equipment and even technological constraints. While

the MTI cannot directly address the first issue, every effort is made to ensure that staff are properly trained. The MTI has also provided key pieces of equipment to various agencies, including laptops, scanners, printers, tablets and bar code readers,” Bidaisee said.

She reiterated that since introduction of e-services in 2012 training has been consistent as SEW specialists provide expertise to approving agencies and arrangements are made with various private sector organisations for training. These have included the American Chamber of Commerce, exporTT Ltd, the Shipping Association and the Manufacturers’ Association.

Some agencies have been hesitant about making a full transition from manual to electronic, while other still operate parallel systems, which causes the problem of people gravitating to the manual system.

In cases where important documentation needs to be retrieved in the event of an e-system malfunction, Bidaisee assures TTBizLink has a back-up function.

“Since TTBizLink has been up it’s been 99.9 per cent operational. There are various monthly reports done both by the unit and the vendor. That’s mandatory and that is

to track,” she said.

Legislation needed

Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) Consultancy is an initiative of the Treasury Division of the Ministry of Finance. However, because of the goal and objectives of the SEW IDB loan programme, there is an effort to partner with the Treasury Division to develop the framework.

Stakeholders to the initiative include the Central Bank, Finance Ministry and all receivers of revenue in the government service.

Gaynelle Abraham-Brathwaite of the project implementation unit—Strengthening of the Single Electronic Window for Trade and Business Facilitation, explained that the impact of all relevant legislation is being considered.

She said the EFT will be implemented in two phases: Linx facilities at the offices of all receivers of revenue so debit and credit cards can be used, followed by introduction of other payment options, including automated clearing house (ACH) and real-time gross settlement (RTGS).

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CONNECTING all state agencies

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"We're looking at what exists in the environment and making recommendations in the legislation where processes need to be changed and actually developing a framework. From there we will look at implementation," Abraham-Brathwaite said.

"The legislation is across the public sector but affecting trade-related policies and business to some extent. We need to ensure we have more efficient and cost effective trade and related business activities and an environment which is more attractive to investors."

Review of the legislative and institutional framework for trade and business in T&T, which is scheduled to begin in July 2018 with a duration of 14 months, will result in a modern legislative framework and appropriate institutional framework for trade and business.

"In essence, the consultants will conduct a comparative scan of the domestic legislative framework with the legislative framework of at least three relevant developed countries and at least three comparative developing countries, as agreed by the client, identify the gaps in the domestic trade and business related legislation and present findings on the proposed list of legislation to be amended or drafted," Abraham-Brathwaite explained.

Consultation is taking place with the Planning Ministry, specifically the Town and Country Planning Division, on construction permits.

"We're looking at the current paper-based trail that has to be followed when someone applies for a construction permit. The storing of those files is outdated and we're looking at digitisation of those files, as well as sharing that information with different stakeholders and ultimately reducing the application period for a construction permit.

"That's important because it's one of the business indicators for T&T. If we are able to reduce time and cost we will see an improvement overall in our ranking," Abraham-Brathwaite said.

Launch of e-permits for construction will take place in the coming months.

Highest volume from import, export

The import/export sectors constitute the highest volume of users of the system, followed by those registering a business or incorporating a company.

Use of SEW/TTBizLink is increasing. As at March 31, there were 2,867 businesses and 8,795 individuals registered to use the platform.

Agencies that have transitioned to SEW/TTBizLink include:

- The trade licence unit: import/export applications
- exportTT: applications for e-certificates of origin
- Plant quarantine services, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries: plant import permits
- The Pesticides and Toxic Chemical, Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division, Ministry of Health: applications related to pesticides and toxic chemicals
- Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division, Food and Drug Inspectorate, Ministry of Health: export health certificates
- The work permit secretariat, Ministry of National Security: applications for work permits and extension

The e-Work Permit Module was launched on March 1, 2012, and there have been 2,783 applications with the top five nationalities of applicants from United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Philippines and India.

Phased adoption of platform

The Health Ministry has adopted the e-services of SEW/TTBizLink that are relevant to it.

In 2013, the food and drug inspectorate of the Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division (CFDD) came on board for the e-permits and licences module. Then in October 2016 the Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Inspectorate of the CFDD, and the Pharmacy Drug Inspectorate came on board.

Similarly, Plant Quarantine Services, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, came on board with the e-permits and licences module in 2012, e-goods declaration in 2014 and e-mobile inspection in 2016.

As a result, TTBizLink has provided interconnectivity among various state agencies, enhanced the ease of doing business and facilitated real time data capture critical to policy and decision making, with enhanced oversight and security.

MORE INFO

Ministries using SEW/TTBizLink

- Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries
- Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of National Security
- Ministry of Public Utilities
- Ministry of Works and Transport
- Ministry of Trade and Industry



Gaynelle Abraham-Brathwaite, project implementation unit, left, with Allison Bidaisee, manager, stakeholder adoption, Single Electronic Window. PICTURE ABRAHAM DIAZ



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