



FINAL EVALUATION OF REGIONAL TRADE FACILITATION AND BORDER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

October 2022

This publication was prepared at the request of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was prepared independently by Integra Government Services International LLC for the Learning, Evaluation, and Analysis Project (LEAP III) Activity.

REGIONAL TRADE FACILITATION AND BORDER MANAGEMENT (RTFB) ACTIVITY

FINAL EVALUATION

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DISCLAIMER

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ABSTRACT

The Regional Trade Facilitation and Border Management Activity is a five-year activity (2018 - 2023) that seeks to improve regional trade efficiency in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala by reducing time and costs of cross-border trade and providing public- and private-sector institutions with the necessary capacity to achieve greater trade competitiveness in the region. USAID/El Salvador contracted LEAP III to conduct a non-experimental, mixed-method evaluation of the RTFB Activity using 45 key informant interviews, performance monitoring data, and document reviews, to answer five evaluation questions covering the Activity's contribution to economic integration, public institutions capacities for trade facilitation, trade competitiveness of Central American businesses, growth in cross-border trade, and the sustainability of interventions and outcomes.

Overall, the Activity's direct technical assistance and capacity building support for strengthened IT systems has yielded multifaceted outcomes. It has contributed to improved regional economic integration, public capacity for improved trade facilitation, and increased trade competitiveness, by contributing to quicker registration and approval processes, increasing the availability and reliability of information in a digitized format, increasing stakeholders' ability to share information quicker, facilitating permit acquisition for imports and exports, reducing opportunities for corruption, and reducing time delays and challenges at the border points of entries for those engaged in trade. The Activity worked well to navigate multiple external challenges while meeting its objectives. Despite such progress, there are several areas for improvement to consider in future activity design.

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ACRONYMS

AEO	-	Authorized Economic Operator
AMECOMEX	-	Association of Women Specialists in Foreign Trade (Asociación de Mujeres Especialistas en Comercio Exterior)
ANEP	-	National Association of Private Enterprises
BPM	-	Business Process Management
CAMARASAL	-	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of El Salvador (Cámara de Comercio e Industria de El Salvador)
CCIC	-	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Cortés (Honduras) (Cámara de Comercio e Industria de Cortés)
CIFACIL	-	The Inter-Cooperation Commission for Trade Facilitation (El Salvador) (Comisión Intergremial para la Facilitación del Comercio)
CLV	-	Certification of Free Sale (Certificación de libre venta)
COEXPORT	-	Corporation of Exporters (Gremial de los Exportadores de El Salvador) (El Salvador)
COMIECO	-	Council of Ministers for Economic Integration
CONFACO	-	National Committee for Trade Facilitation (Honduras) (Comité Nacional de Facilitación de Comercio)
COP	-	Chief of Party
CTPAT	-	US Customs and Border Protection's Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism
DGA	-	Customs Agency (El Salvador) (Dirección General de Aduanas)
DNM	-	National Directorate of Medicines (Dirección Nacional de Medicamentos)
DR-CAFTA	-	Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement
DRCPFA	-	Department of Regulation and Control of Pharmaceutical and Related Products (Guatemala) (Departamento de Regulación y Control de Productos Farmacéuticos y Afines)
ECAM	-	USAID/Central America Regional Mission
EQ	-	Evaluation Question
ET	-	Evaluation Team
FYDUCA	-	Central American Invoice and Single Declaration (Factura y Declaración Única Centroamericana)
HS	-	Harmonized System

IDB	-	Inter-American Development Bank
INS	-	National Institute of Health (Instituto Nacional de Salud) (El Salvador)
IP	-	Implementing Partner
KII	-	Key Informant Interview
LEAP	-	Learning, Evaluation and Analysis Project
MAG	-	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (El Salvador) (Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería)
MEL	-	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MINEC	-	Ministry of Economy (El Salvador) (Ministerio de Economía)
MINFIN	-	Ministry of Finance (Guatemala) (Ministerio de Finanzas Públicas)
MINSAL	-	Ministry of Health (El Salvador) (Ministerio de Salud)
MOU	-	Memorandum of Understanding
MSPAS	-	Ministry of Health and Public Assistance (Guatemala) (Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social)
NCA	-	Northern Central America
NTFC	-	National Trade Facilitation Committee
RDCS	-	Regional Development Cooperation Strategy
RFID	-	Radio Frequency Identification
RTFB	-	Regional Trade Facilitation and Border Management
SARAH	-	Honduras Automated System for Customs Revenues (Sistema Automatizado de Rentas Aduaneras de Honduras)
SAT	-	Superintendence of the Tax Administration (Guatemala) (Superintendencia de Administración Tributaria)
SDE	-	Economic Development Secretariat
SEFIN	-	Finance Secretary
SENASA	-	National Service of Agri-food Health and Safety (Honduras) (Sanidad e Inocuidad Agroalimentaria)
SIECA	-	Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration (Secretaría de Integración Económica Centroamericana)
SME	-	Small and Medium Enterprise
TFA	-	Trade Facilitation Agreement

- USAID** - United States Agency for International Development
- WCO** - World Customs Organization
- WTO** - World Trade Organization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The Regional Trade Facilitation and Border Management (RTFB) Activity is a five-year activity (2018 - 2023) that seeks to improve regional trade efficiency in the Northern Central American (NCA) countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala by reducing time and costs of cross-border trade and providing public- and private-sector institutions with the necessary capacity to achieve greater trade competitiveness in the region. By enhancing regional integration and improving trade facilitation, the Activity seeks to increase cross-border trade and thus contribute to broad-based economic growth in the region. USAID/El Salvador contracted USAID LEAP III to conduct a final evaluation of the RTFB Activity to determine 1) which RTFB interventions are perceived as most effective for enhancing regional trade integration, and why; 2) which interventions are perceived as most effective for increasing regional trade competitiveness, and why; and 3) whether RTFB interventions have contributed to overall regional economic growth. The purpose of this evaluation is to analyze key stakeholder perceptions, performance data, and secondary document review to understand what is working well, not working well, and areas for improvement for the final year of the RTFB Activity and to inform future activity design.

Specifically, this evaluation employs a non-experimental approach to address five evaluation questions (EQs):

1. To what extent has economic integration for cross-border trade in Central America been strengthened since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to these changes?
2. To what degree have public institutions' capacities to facilitate/expedite cross-border trade changed since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to these changes?
3. To what extent has the trade competitiveness of Central American businesses in international markets changed since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to this change?
4. To what extent has the growth of cross-border trade in the Central American region changed since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to growth in cross-border trade in the region?
5. What is the likelihood that trade integration and facilitation capacities introduced by RTFB will be sustained following completion of the activity?

METHODOLOGY

To answer the above five EQs, the Evaluation Team (ET) collected, analyzed, and triangulated multiple data sources, including: 1) a desk review of relevant activity documents provided by USAID and relevant stakeholders; 2) review of Activity performance monitoring and context data; 3) 45 key informant interviews (KIIs) with key stakeholders, including from the public and private sector, IP staff, and USAID; and 4) direct observation at port of entries in Honduras (two) and Guatemala (one).

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY EQ

TABLE I: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY EQ	
FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
EQ1: To what extent has economic integration for cross-border trade in Central America been strengthened since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to these changes?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity interventions, such as digitization (and the expediting) of registration processes, helped to improve information sharing and coordination between and among the private sector and national border control agencies. <i>In process, likely to succeed.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In future activity design, USAID should consider engaging government and private sector stakeholders in the initial design phase when developing the project design plan to determine specific technologies and IT systems working well from the RTFB Activity. Future activities can then continue capacity building support for the use of these technologies and identify ongoing technology assistance needs to promote NCA governments taking ownership for their effective deployment and maintenance over time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Honduras and Guatemala, there was a strong desire for improved radio frequency identification (RFID) technology, but there were challenges with its effectiveness and use, particularly around its maintenance and data sharing. <i>Remains a challenge.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future USAID support for RFID technology implementation, management, and use should consider conducting an assessment to understand reasons for hesitation in sharing RFID data among relevant stakeholders. Assistance should include measures to limit unauthorized copying or sharing of RFID data made available to Customs or other relevant border officials to reduce potential misuse of data. While continuing to support counterpart RFID technology implementation and management, USAID should consider designing and deploying alternative plans for “lower tech” risk management solutions to balance limitations and challenges faced when implementing and maintaining RFID technology.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTFB improved regional integration in Guatemala and Honduras through the Customs Union, however the Activity had to make necessary changes to the implementation approach in El Salvador in response to political challenges, which hindered the Activity’s influence on improved regional integration in El Salvador. <i>In process.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current and future IPs should implement strategies to improve targeted communications with government stakeholders in the NCA region, particularly with Customs officials in El Salvador, to promote stronger support for regional integration. Such communications strategies should be high-touch (i.e., increased frequency) and should engage those who do not have a history of difficult or politicized communications and interactions with relevant government stakeholders.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders found that the RTFB training and capacity building approach contributed to improvements in border management procedures and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of engagements with public sector stakeholders, the current IP should ensure that counterparts’ plans and projects for trade facilitation are considered and built into Activity assistance to strengthen more proactive participation from counterparts. This should be integrated as part of a public sector engagement strategy for future activities as well.

<p>coordination among agencies in the region. <i>In process.</i></p>	
<p>EQ2: To what degree have public institutions' capacities changed to facilitate/expedite cross-border trade since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to these changes?</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTFB assistance to support the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) programs were useful for participating companies to achieve certification and improve internal processes, but momentum for AEO programs has stalled, particularly in El Salvador. <i>In process, likely to succeed but some challenges.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IPs of future activities should consider engaging with key counterparts, like the DGA and MINEC, to design communication strategies for potential AEO candidates to better communicate the requirements and benefits of the AEO program and the financial and time commitments required as part of the program, among other aspects. This would help potential AEO candidates to learn of the requirements and value of the AEO program from the perspective of their own government. • The IP should continue supporting private sector entities interested in obtaining AEO status coupled with support targeted at strengthening mutual recognition of AEO certifications, particularly in El Salvador. • Current and future IPs of similar activities should engage with Customs authorities in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to promote better alignment on and fully harmonize the AEO programs in the NCA countries, particularly: 1) Help Customs and other border management officials better understand why supporting AEOs in their countries is in their respective country's best interest, and not just something being mandated in a top-down fashion from international donors and consultants, and 2) Taking steps to develop an agreed-upon, standardized set of requirements and process for certifying companies as AEOs in the NCA region can help mitigate these issues around mutual recognition in NCA countries.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance to streamline and expedite registration and processing systems was well received by public sector stakeholders and perceived to be effective. <i>In process, likely to succeed.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When designing future activities targeted at improving IT systems, USAID should consider coupling such improvements with training and best practices for cybersecurity, data protection, and disaster/continuity as part of the capacity building efforts. Trainings should be designed taking into account the human and financial resources as well as staff capacity in each institution and in line with their policies or regulations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building assistance was generally well received by public sector stakeholders for improved collaboration and information sharing between the public and private sectors, particularly in the NTFC and CONFACO, and improved coordination among government agencies. <i>In process.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current and future IPs of similar activities should continue to support Trade Facilitation Committees in developing and implementing national strategies. Specific for El Salvador, work with the NTFC to strengthen collaboration between public and private sector members, particularly with the goal to support CIFACIL members in gaining a representative voice in NTFC decision-making.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although the Activity provided capacity building opportunities on topics related to gender equality, inclusivity, and women’s empowerment for public institutions to support advancing gender equality among trade agencies, this component could be strengthened to monitor the impact of these opportunities on improving gender equality among institutions and potential outcomes for inclusivity. Unlikely to be achieved, unless the Activity integrates and deploys a follow up assessment to determine the outcomes and impacts of the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> USAID should embed MEL guidance or specific indicators into future activity design and MEL plans to ensure that attention to gender, youth, and marginalized groups is intentionally incorporated into the activity design and implementation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A general lack of understanding among public and private sector stakeholders of international trade agreements and best practices has hindered the uptake and effectiveness of RTFB assistance and capacity building efforts, especially in El Salvador and Honduras. In process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IPs implementing future activities should target public sector capacity building in El Salvador and Honduras to strengthen internal staff understanding of trade and Customs “best practices” according to international standards, and their ability to communicate these best practices internally. Such capacity building interventions should ensure public sector stakeholders understand why these best practices are important in the broader context of economic development and to foster the growth in regional integration and increase trade flows. This can help to maintain consistency and continuity during political and leadership turnover.
<p>EQ3: To what extent has the trade competitiveness of Central American businesses in international markets changed since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to this change?</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although the Activity contributed to reducing certain barriers to trade, barriers related to physical and digital infrastructure and harmonized classifications are outside the scope of the current Activity and remain to be addressed. Remains a challenge, and unlikely to be achieved as remaining challenges are beyond the scope of this Activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future activities should consider addressing physical and digital infrastructure challenges or collaborating with complementary activities or initiatives to strengthen infrastructure at border entry points in combination with targeted technical assistance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arbitrary and or inconsistent interpretation of key border clearance concepts in El Salvador limits the potential for cross-border trade and competitiveness, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The IP should collaborate with Customs and relevant border agencies to improve internal communications and understanding of Advance Rulings to improve more consistent use and application and to establish mechanisms to better communicate them through an accessible, searchable electronic database for officials to

<p>as reported by a few private sector stakeholders consulted for this evaluation. In process.</p>	<p>reference. Such a mechanism could lead to greater consistency with harmonized system (HS) classifications and admissibility requirements at border entries to reduce delays and promote a strong enabling environment for trade.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity performance indicators to measure time and cost reduction at border crossings were too broad and lacked necessary available data to inform baseline or monitoring efforts. Remains a challenge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicators measuring time-reductions should be narrowed to cover only what the intervention addressed (i.e., time to register phytosanitary products) rather than broad measures, such as ‘time to cross borders’, to reduce the likely influence of external factors in skewing results and to mitigate challenges around data availability, reliability, and comparability. USAID should consider conducting regional analyses at border entries to identify constraints and bottlenecks that impede improved logistics operations and use the findings of this analysis to inform future targeted activity interventions and establish baseline metrics for a future activity MEL plan to monitor progress.
<p>EQ4: To what extent has the growth of cross-border trade in the Central American region changed since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to growth in cross-border trade in the region?</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External factors, such as COVID-19, inflation, and supply chain disruptions, have influenced regional growth in cross-border trade since 2018. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> USAID should consider conducting an in-depth economic regional trade analysis to better understand trade flows in the region since 2020 and identify factors that enable or hinder regional trade post-COVID; and should consider using the findings of this analysis to inform future Activity design.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private sector stakeholders noted the lack of an enabling environment for trade, particularly in El Salvador. Remains a challenge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To mitigate negative outcomes of the current political environment in El Salvador, the IP should work strategically with the NTFC to strengthen relations, communications, and collaboration with the public and private sector members and key Business Unions to collaboratively establish a strong roadmap of International Trade Facilitation goals and priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTFB assistance targets larger companies as designed, overlooking potential opportunities to support smaller or marginalized enterprises to strengthen cross-border trade and promote growth. Remains a challenge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During future activity design, USAID should consider engaging a gender and/or inclusivity specialist with regional and sector expertise in trade to inform design strategies that effectively integrate inclusive approaches to target marginalized groups, including and specifically those that represent small enterprises, in promoting trade facilitation and growth in cross-border trade.
<p>EQ5: What is the likelihood that trade integration and facilitation capacities introduced by RTFB will be sustained following completion of the activity?</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders consistently reported the need for more strategic, targeted, and more frequent communication by the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of a risk management system, the IP should integrate an aggressive, high-touch communication strategy targeted at new officials during periods of turnover to reach new stakeholders

<p>Activity to share updates and ongoing interventions via wider channels to reach larger audiences. Remains a challenge.</p>	<p>quickly and get them up to speed on relevant trade topics as well as ongoing or planned Activity interventions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current IP could strengthen communication strategies with stakeholders to be higher touch and leverage an omni-channel approach, as stakeholders have specific preferences for receiving information. In addition to those already in the Activity’s communications strategy, such channels can include LinkedIn, Twitter, email campaigns, printed materials, and others, to routinely share Activity updates, new initiatives, relevant trade information, global updates on trade, and other topics. Embedded in the communications strategy should be a clearly articulated mechanism for stakeholders to ask questions, request additional information, and engage with Activity staff.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High staff turnover rates in the public sector are a challenge for Activity implementation and a concern for long-term sustainability of Activity achievements. Remains a challenge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing memoranda of understanding (MOU) and signed agreements of interventions and activities with public and private sector stakeholders has been a useful practice to mitigate delays and challenges associated with staff turnover and should be considered by the current and future IPs as a key practice moving forward. • Current and future IPs should integrate and implement stronger risk management systems for institutional governance practices to navigate the myriad challenges of constant counterpart staff turnover to reduce and mitigate project delays or potential pivots due to new counterparts’ outright rejection of ongoing interventions.

CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation concludes that the Activity had many strengths in addressing and contributing to improved regional economic integration, supporting public capacities for trade facilitation, strengthening competitiveness and potential for cross-border trade, and in ensuring the sustainability of progress made under the Activity. While this evaluation was not designed nor intended to make definitive statements of attribution, it did triangulate and synthesize evidence generated from stakeholder feedback and perceptions, observations, and secondary data to identify what is working well and areas for improvement to reach the Activity’s stated goals. Most notably, the Activity’s direct technical assistance and capacity building support for strengthened IT systems has yielded multifaceted outcomes. It has contributed to improved regional economic integration, public capacity for improved trade facilitation, and increased trade competitiveness, by contributing to quicker registration and approval processes, increasing the availability and reliability of information in a digitized format, increasing stakeholders’ ability to share information quicker, facilitating permit acquisition for imports and exports, reducing opportunities for corruption, and reducing time delays and challenges at the border points of entries for those engaged in trade. In general, the IP and USAID were responsive and flexible in adapting the Activity’s approaches and interventions to navigate a complex working environment and generally meet stakeholders’ needs. Key areas for improvement were also identified.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Regional Trade Facilitation and Border Management Activity (hereinafter referred to as “RTFB”) is a five-year activity that began in July 2018 and will end in July 2023 (Contract #: 72051918C00002; Award Amount \$17,577,226). Implemented by Nathan Associates, RTFB seeks to improve regional trade efficiency in the NCA countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala by reducing time and costs of cross-border trade and providing public- and private-sector institutions with the necessary capacity to achieve greater trade competitiveness in the region. By enhancing regional integration and improving trade facilitation, the Activity seeks to increase cross-border trade and thus contribute to broad-based economic growth in the region. The activity supports the implementation of key elements under the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and the Central American Trade Facilitation and Competitiveness Strategy namely under two main components:

1. Enhancing Central American economic integration with an emphasis on Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, and
2. Supporting comprehensive implementation of the WTO-TFA.

To achieve the first component, the Activity aims to 1) optimize border processes through reducing, pre-arrival processing, expediting protocols, and enhancing the work environment for border officials; 2) support the Customs union integration by improving customs union guides; 3) developing an integrated border management certification through the border management academy, establishing MOUs between key counterparts, 4) improving border control systems and facilities through improved IT systems, and strengthening public institutions capacity; 5) improving registration processes of a variety of key sector goods; and 6) improving digital and physical infrastructure at border points through RFID systems support. To achieve the second component, the Activity aims to 1) strengthen national trade facilitation committees (NTFCs) in all three countries; 2) strengthening public and private sector integration for trade facilitation; 3) implement and improve authorized economic operator programs in each country; 4) address integrated regional risk management processes; and 5) support private sector companies in El Salvador specifically. In addition to these components, the Activity aims to integrate gender and social inclusion considerations in all aspects of the Activity’s interventions.

USAID/El Salvador contracted USAID LEAP III to conduct a final evaluation of the RTFB Activity to determine 1) which RTFB interventions are perceived as most effective for enhancing regional trade integration, and why; 2) which interventions are perceived as most effective for increasing regional trade competitiveness, and why; and 3) whether RTFB interventions have contributed to overall regional economic growth. The purpose of this evaluation is to analyze key stakeholder perceptions, performance data, and secondary document review to understand what is working well, not working well, and areas for improvement for the final year of the RTFB Activity and to inform future activity design.

The target audience for this evaluation includes stakeholders in the USAID/Central America (ECAM) regional Mission, bilateral Missions in the region, and the Implementing Partner (IP), Nathan Associates Inc. (Nathan). The findings from this evaluation may help fill knowledge gaps and contribute to broader USAID Agency-level learning, including under the following learning questions in the USAID/ECAM RDSCS 2015-2019 Learning Plan:

1. Are there institutional or behavioral changes in each country's government institutions responsible for trade?
2. To what extent are institutional or behavioral changes in each country's central government institutions responsible for international trade, ensuring long-term sustainability of trade facilitation have been achieved?

The Evaluation Team (ET) conducted a non-experimental mixed-methods evaluation that combined a comprehensive, rigorous analysis of existing quantitative data with qualitative techniques to elicit primary data from a wide range of counterparts, partners, beneficiaries, and stakeholders.

The evaluation addressed the five evaluation questions (EQs), which seek to identify enabling conditions and challenges to achieve the Activity's desired outcomes. The key terms are defined in the methodology section to guide the measurement of each of the following EQs:

1. To what extent has economic integration for cross-border trade in Central America been strengthened since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to these changes?
2. To what degree have public institutions¹ capacities changed to facilitate/expedite cross-border trade since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to these changes?
3. To what extent has the trade competitiveness of Central American businesses in international markets changed since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to this change?
4. To what extent has the growth of cross-border trade in the Central American region changed since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to growth in cross-border trade in the region?
5. What is the likelihood that trade integration and facilitation capacities introduced by RTFB will be sustained following completion of the activity?

¹ These public institutions include the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Economy, Customs, Ministry of Health, and National Directorate of Medicines in El Salvador, SENASA, Customs, SDE (Ministry of Economy) in Honduras, and the Ministry of Health and Customs in Guatemala.

2. METHODOLOGY

The ET conducted a non-experimental, mixed method designed evaluation to assess the five EQs. The multiple methods and sources of data collected and analyzed include: 1) a desk review of relevant activity documents provided by USAID and relevant stakeholders; 2) a review of activity performance monitoring and context data; 3) direct observation through port of entry visits; and 4) KIs with key stakeholders.

2.1 SECONDARY DATA DESK REVIEW

2.1.1 DESK REVIEW

The ET reviewed secondary documents to inform the design of this evaluation and the findings. The documents reviewed as part of this evaluation include, but are not limited to, Activity quarterly and annual performance reports; relevant strategy documents; the Activity contract and amendments to the contract; the activity's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan; pre-implementation assessments; and other assessments, studies, or evaluations conducted by Nathan Associates between 2018 and the time of data collection in 2022.

2.1.2 PERFORMANCE MONITORING DATA

The ET also reviewed performance monitoring data collected and reported on by the IP. This evaluation defines key terms such as economic integration, facilitation, and competitiveness to answer the above EQs aligning with the following anticipated outcomes of the RTFB Activity results framework, as indicated by USAID during the design of this evaluation. The IP staff provided the ET with access to the performance monitoring database and key summaries of requested performance indicators to measure the stated objectives of this evaluation. These indicators are presented in Table 2.

KEY TERM	OUTCOME MEASUREMENT
Economic Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adoption by Customs Union of improved border management procedures, including an integrated customs procedures manual.• Improved coordination among national border control agencies (including adoption of an integrated border management certification).• Increased information sharing among trade and border control agencies (e.g., integration of government agency IT systems and adoption of RFID technology).• Adoption of improved product registration procedures that align with international standards.
Trade Facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthening of NTFC (e.g., improved consultative processes between NTFC and regional or national business associations and institutions; adoption of consultative mechanisms between business and government entities).• Adoption of improved trade facilitation processes for sanitary registration, commercialization permits, and import and export licenses.• Adoption and implementation of regional risk management systems.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strengthened AEO programs
Competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduced border crossing times. ● Elimination of other barriers to trade. ● Reduced costs of crossing borders. ● Increased private sector capacity to meet import/export requirements. ● Improved cross-border relationships between firms and clients

The ET used this data to analyze outputs aligned to each evaluation question, using descriptive statistics. Secondary quantitative data from the Secretaría de Integración Económica Centroamericana (SIECA) on regional export and import volumes since 2018 were also analyzed using descriptive statistics.

This data was triangulated with those collected during the key informant interviews, direct observations, and desk review.

2.2 PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

2.2.1 DIRECT OBSERVATIONS AT PORTS OF ENTRY

Direct observations were conducted at three ports of entry (two in Honduras and one in Guatemala) that received RTFB assistance (Figure 1), namely:

- Pedro de Alvarado, Guatemala
- El Amatillo, Honduras
- Puerto Cortes, Honduras

At the advice of USAID/El Salvador, the ET did not conduct direct observations at ports of entry in El Salvador due to external challenges. The direct observations were conducted by an experienced member of the ET who spent one day at each port to observe operations, processes, infrastructure, and other topics of interest using a structured observation data collection protocol that took into account the RFTB Activity’s focus and support provided (See [Annex C](#) for this protocol). Each observer took detailed notes and photographs during their visits.

FIGURE 1: MAP OF PORT AND BORDER OBSERVATION CITES



2.2.2 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

The ET conducted KIIs with IP and USAID staff who were directly involved in the management and implementation of this Activity, and public and private sector stakeholders who received assistance or capacity building from the RTFB Activity. Three separate KII protocols were developed to ask targeted, open-ended questions tailored to each stakeholder group (i.e., the private, public, IP and USAID stakeholders) aligned with the five evaluation questions (See [Annex C](#) for the KII protocols). These interviews were conducted either in-person in San Salvador, El Salvador or Guatemala City, Guatemala, or remotely in Honduras or at the preference of the stakeholder. When possible, two members of the ET joined an interview; one member led the interview, while the other took detailed notes. The detailed notes summarizing each response to the interview question served as the raw data for qualitative analysis. The interviews were conducted either in Spanish or English, depending on the preference of the stakeholder.

USAID/El Salvador and the IP provided the ET with an initial list of key public and private sector stakeholders to consult for this evaluation. The ET supplemented this list with requests for additional stakeholders drawn from Activity reports, IP and USAID staff, and snowball sampling. A total number of

64 stakeholders were contacted for an interview, and a total of 45 KIIs were conducted from public, private, USAID, and IP stakeholders in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Table 3).

TABLE 3: TOTAL NUMBER OF STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED BY GEOGRAPHIC AND STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATION					
STAKEHOLDER GROUP	EL SALVADOR	GUATEMALA	HONDURAS	REGIONAL	TOTAL
Public	10	4	3	-	17
Private	10	4	3	-	17
IP	1	1	1	7	10
USAID	-	-	1	-	1
Total	21	9	8	7	45

Of the 45 KIIs conducted, 47 percent were conducted with women and 53 percent were conducted with men. Figures 2 and 3 present the total percentage of informants that represent the different stakeholder categories and countries. Under the direction of USAID/El Salvador, in consideration of resource constraints to conduct this evaluation, the ET prioritized sampling stakeholders from El Salvador over those in Guatemala and Honduras. Thus, almost half of the stakeholders interviewed were from El Salvador. Regional stakeholders included members of the IP staff based in either San Salvador or Washington DC who supported interventions in all three countries.

FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF STAKEHOLDERS CATEGORIES REPRESENTED (N=45)

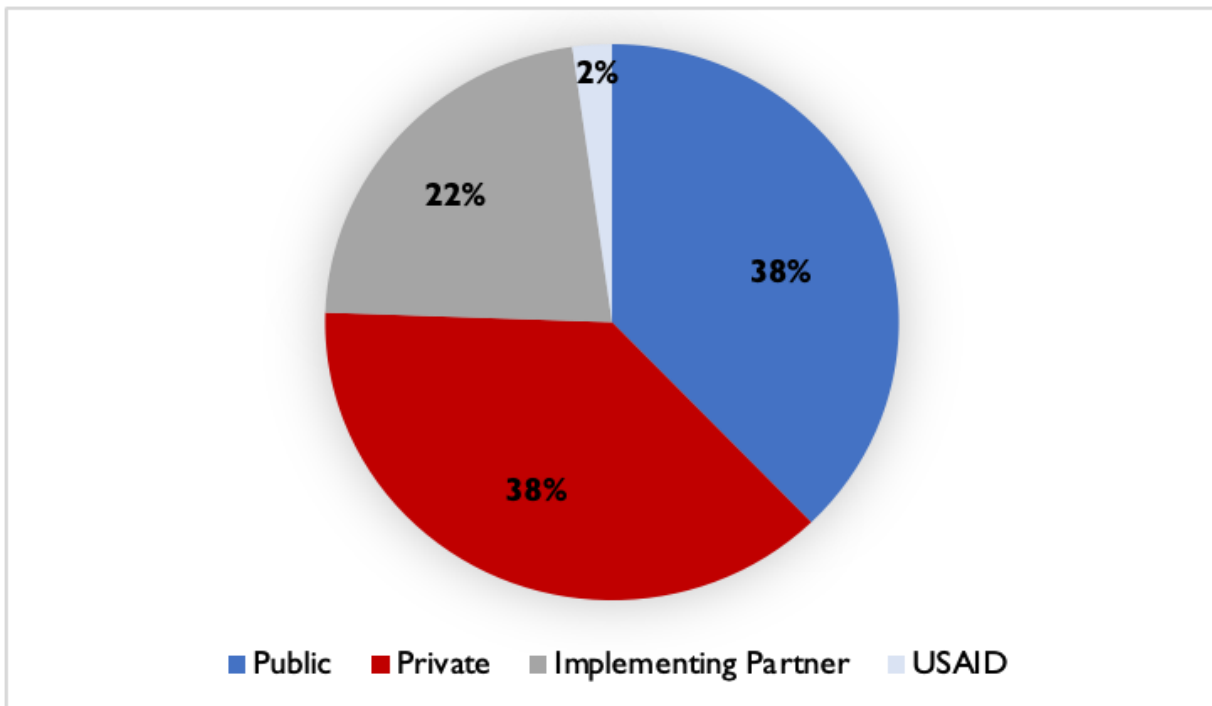
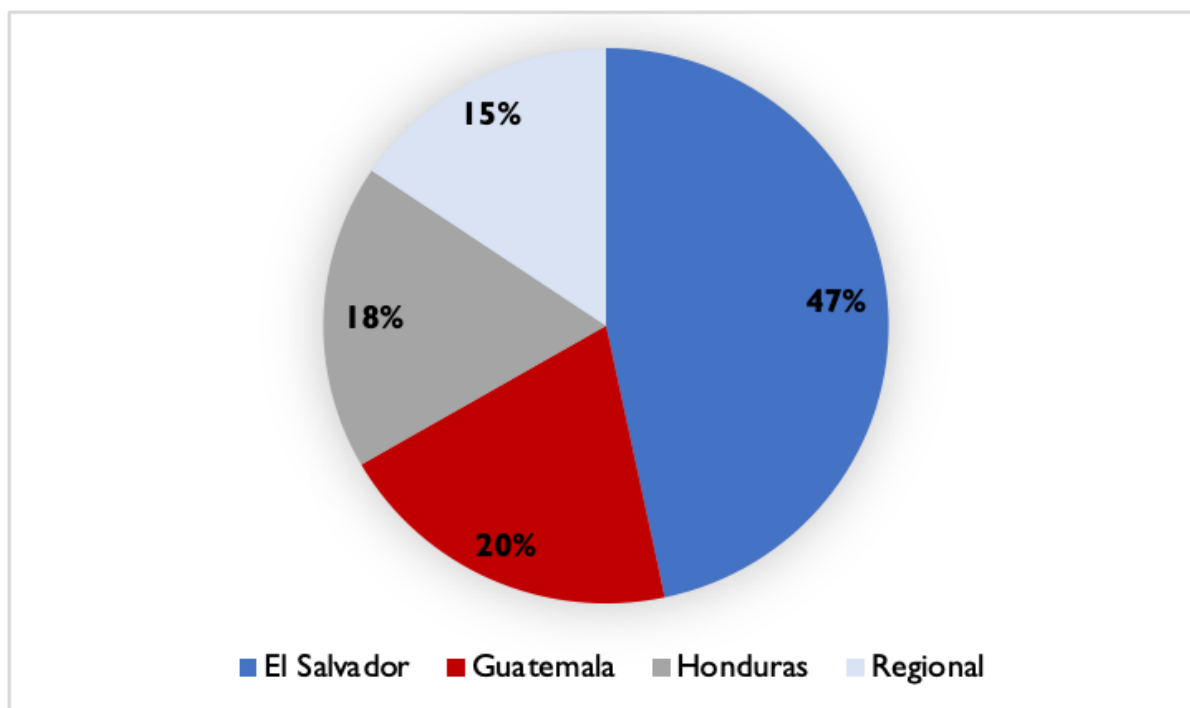


FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED IN EACH COUNTRY (N=45)



2.3 ANALYSIS

Primary qualitative data from key informant interviews and direct observations were analyzed using content analysis. All interview and observation notes were organized according to the responses from each stakeholder or port observation aligned with the evaluation questions and then grouped based on key categories, namely type of stakeholder (i.e., public, private, IP, or USAID) and geographic representation. Key themes aligning with each evaluation question were used to synthesize responses from across categories to determine key findings. For example, responses from all stakeholders in each country regarding the sustainability of activity interventions were synthesized to determine perceived strengths of the Activity in addressing sustainability and key areas of concerns according to different stakeholder types.

Secondary quantitative data from SIECA and performance monitoring data provided by the IP were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Data are presented using tables and figures when applicable.

Table 4 presents the data analyzed and triangulated to inform the findings under each of the five EQs.

TABLE 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND TRUANGULATION BY EQ	
EQ	DATA SOURCE FOR ANALYSIS
I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Performance monitoring data ● Document review ● Direct observation ● KII

2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Performance monitoring data ● Document review ● Direct observation ● KII
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Performance monitoring data ● Document review ● Direct observation ● KII
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Document review ● Direct observation ● KII
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Document review ● Direct observation ● KII

2.4 LIMITATIONS

The ET acknowledges several limitations to the evaluation design, data, and analysis presented herein.

Attribution. Overall, this evaluation was designed to assess key stakeholders’ – namely public and private sector recipients of the Activity’s interventions, IP staff, and USAID staff – perceptions, opinions, and feedback about the Activity’s interventions, what worked well, and what are areas for improvement for the current implementation and future activity design of similar regional activities targeting border management and trade facilitation. While this evaluation triangulated results with performance monitoring data reported by the IP, secondary research, and Activity reports, it was not an experimental or quasi-experimental design. Therefore, the ET cannot assess the Activity’s impact nor make statements of the Activity’s attribution in this evaluation.

Sample size. While every effort was exhausted to consult with as many relevant stakeholders in all three countries as possible during the data collection period as directed by the USAID/EI Salvador Mission, the final qualitative sample was relatively small to inform the analysis. Only 17 stakeholders for the private sector and 17 from the public sector were consulted. There was also intentionally less representation from stakeholders in Honduras and Guatemala under the direction of USAID/EI Salvador due to resource constraints in conducting this evaluation. An additional 19 potential stakeholders were contacted for an interview but did not respond to repeated requests and therefore were not included. As this is a limited sample, not all perspectives from recipients of each of the Activity’s interventions were able to be included in this evaluation. And finally, the ET interviewed one person from each representative public institution or private sector company identified as a key stakeholder under this Activity, which inherently only provides a limited perspective on the Activity’s interventions, benefits, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. This may have influenced the findings as we only report on experiences and feedback shared from individuals who were consulted during the key informant interviews, who typically were those in leadership positions and not necessarily those in operational positions.

Recall Bias. Recall bias may present limitations to the information shared by each stakeholder. Respondents may not have remembered or been able to relay all experiences or reflections on their participation in or knowledge of the RTFB Activity. Interviewers established rapport with all respondents to facilitate a comfortable and confidential environment to share their feedback and experiences and included specific probing questions to stimulate conversation about the specific RTFB interventions to which the interviewer was referring.

Positivity Bias. Also, given that RTFB is an ongoing Activity, key informants may have wanted to share only positive feedback. To reduce the influence of these forms of bias, the ET relied on targeted probing techniques and questions, and triangulated qualitative data with other primary and secondary data sources. In addition, before each interview, the interviewer informed respondents that their participation was completely voluntary and that their responses would be kept confidential.

Complex Environment. Finally, it is important to contextualize this evaluation in the environment in which the Activity was implemented, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery periods. Multiple complex additional factors have influenced regional dynamics related to cross-border trade and trade facilitation throughout this Activity, such as the outcome of presidential elections and changes in government, supply chain disruptions regionally and globally, and inflation. Although the ET recognizes and integrates such external factors into the analysis, this evaluation was not a robust study of how those factors influenced dynamics in the region.

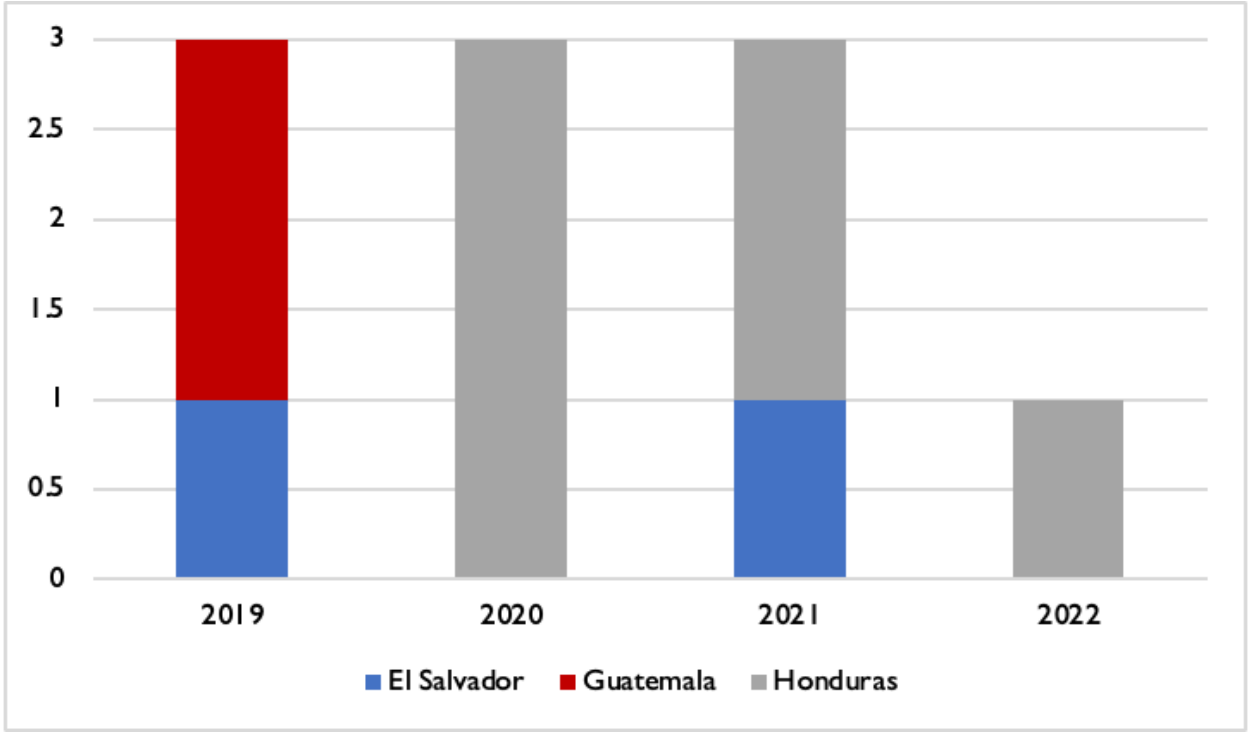
3. FINDINGS BY EVALUATION QUESTION

3.1 EQ1 TO WHAT EXTENT HAS ECONOMIC INTEGRATION FOR CROSS-BORDER TRADE IN CENTRAL AMERICA BEEN STRENGTHENED SINCE 2018? HOW HAS RTFB ASSISTANCE CONTRIBUTED TO THESE CHANGES?

3.1.1 EQ1, FINDING 1: ACTIVITY INTERVENTIONS, SUCH AS DIGITIZATION (AND THE EXPEDITING) OF REGISTRATION PROCESSES, HELPED TO IMPROVE INFORMATION SHARING AND COORDINATION BETWEEN THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND AMONG NATIONAL BORDER CONTROL AGENCIES.

The Activity aimed to implement mechanisms that facilitated increased information sharing among trade and border control agencies at both the international and national levels. Since its start in 2018, the Activity has worked with regional institutions to improve efficient communication by establishing or strengthening 10 interconnected systems within each country (two in El Salvador, two in Guatemala, and six in Honduras) (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF INTERCONNECTED SYSTEMS SUPPORTED BY RTFB ACTIVITY (N=10)



Source: RTFB Performance Monitoring Data, 2022.

Select examples of such interconnected systems include supporting the connections between the National Service of Agri-food Health and Safety (SENASA) in Honduras with other Honduran agencies like the Finance Secretary (SEFIN) in 2020, the National Federation of Farmers and Breeders in 2021, and

Honduran Customs in 2022. In El Salvador, the Activity supported the connection systems between the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) and the Ministry of Finance in 2021 and strengthened the RFID system at La Hachadura border in 2019. In Guatemala, the Activity supported the RFID system at Pedro de Alvarado in 2019 as well.

In Honduras and El Salvador, the Activity also conducted six reviews and updates to existing registration procedures, such as the Sanitary Registration of Type A, B and C Risk Products and the Special Authorization for the Importation of Prepackaged Food and Beverages in El Salvador for example, to update these in accordance with international standards, according to the performance data. These reviews and their current status² is presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5: REGISTRATION PROCEDURES REVIEWED AND UPDATED IN EL SALVADOR AND HONDURAS	
PROCEDURE REVIEWED	STATUS
EL SALVADOR	
Proposal of a new “Sanitary Technical Standard for the application of the Certificate of Free Sale (CLV), sanitary registration procedure for type “C” or low-risk products, and special authorization for the importation of pre-packaged food and beverages.”	Adopted on November 30, 2021, after its publication in the Official Diary.
Proposal of a new “Regulation for Sanitary Registration of Type A, B and C Risk Products and the Special Authorization for the Importation of Prepackaged Food and Beverages”	Partially adopted, on March 8, 2022. This new regulation replaced the above mentioned. It is partially adopted since the Ministry of Health based this regulation on the proposal made by the Project, but did not include every part that the Project proposed.
Proposal of a new “Salvadoran Technical Regulation of Supplements and Food for Special Regimes”	Currently under public consultation process
Proposal of a new “Regulation of Animal and Plants Health”	In development
HONDURAS	
Proposal of a new “Single Regulation for Agricultural Businesses’ safety”	In development
Proposal of a new “Regulations of agricultural quarantine and	In development

² As of September 2022.

pesticides”	
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Source: RTFB Performance Monitoring Data, 2022.

Public and private sector stakeholders in all three countries who received IT assistance from the Activity also observed that the Activity-supported enhanced IT systems at the border helped to enable information to be shared quicker and more effectively between relevant agencies and actors to ensure admissibility requirements for imports were met. Observations conducted at the ports of entry confirmed that Customs and border enforcement agencies in Honduras and Guatemala were using IT systems to facilitate and control trade, specifically to enable quicker registration procedures, permit approval processes, and submitting necessary documentation for license and permit applications from border agencies. Observations and conversations with public sector stakeholders in border agencies indicated that these systems allow for the necessary data and information to be digitized and more transparent, which helps to reduce corruption during processing. And public and private sector stakeholders in all three countries shared that various enhanced IT systems helped to improve processes at the borders, including the Single Window for International Trade collaboration between the Central Reserve Bank and Customs in El Salvador; the Single Window for the Ministry of Health in Guatemala; and the Sistema Automatizado de Rentas Aduaneras de Honduras or Honduras Automated System for Customs Revenues (SARAH) system in Honduras. The Director of Customs in El Salvador said that RTFB’s IT systems support and assistance was well received and that they appreciated this support. According to her, this type of assistance is considered more proactive and well received than other types of assistance that aim to address or adjust policy, practices, or procedures.

All the private sector stakeholders consulted for this evaluation shared that they have seen an increase in their ability to access websites, portals, and other relevant communication tools to register, submit required documentation, and communicate with respective government agencies involved in regulating and clearing goods for imports and exports. For example, one Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) in El Salvador that engages in imports and exports commented on how securing required registrations and permits from government agencies and clearing goods for export and import has become a quicker process with fewer physical visits to government agencies required.

3.1.2 EQ1, FINDING 2: IN HONDURAS AND GUATEMALA, THERE WAS A STRONG DESIRE FOR IMPROVED RFID TECHNOLOGY, BUT THERE WERE CHALLENGES WITH ITS EFFECTIVENESS AND USE, PARTICULARLY AROUND ITS MAINTENANCE AND DATA SHARING.

The deployment of RFID technology at border crossings in the NCA countries has been a high priority area of technical assistance and implementation for Customs Administrations around the world by the World Customs Organization (WCO) push for “Smart Borders”³ and is in alignment with and supports the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) of the World Trade Organization, including TFA Articles VII, VIII, and IV.⁴

In addition, more specific to Central America and the NCA and aligned with the WTO and WCO, USAID, SIECA, and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) have emphasized the importance of RFID

³ Mikuriya, K. “SMART Borders: a few words about the theme of the year.” 2022
⁴ WTO. “Agreement on Trade Facilitation.” 2017

deployment and the use of “Smart Technologies” in support of the Central American Trade Facilitation and Competitiveness Strategy for Coordinated Border Management.⁵ RFID technologies in use at border crossings gather “measurable” and actionable information from trucks, containers, and other international trade conveyances for improved risk management, trade facilitation, and other purposes, such as measuring numbers of vehicles and transactions and conducting time-release studies. USAID provides both financial resources and capacity building support to deliver multi-pronged approach in establishing and strengthening RFID technology use at the borders with the relevant stakeholders, similar to how other international donors have engaged with RFID strategies.

In Honduras and Guatemala, stakeholders shared that while they acknowledge some inputs into implementing RFID technology at the border entries, the technology is either not working or is not available to those who need to use it. The use of technology such as RFID by Customs officials is an important part of the WTO TFA, WCO SAFE and other international agreements and instruments. It is also important in the regional NCA context as it is part of SIECA’s work SIECA through the Central American Trade Facilitation Strategy and has been supported by the IDB in the NCA. In addition to the benefits and promise that RFID technology promises for the enhanced facilitation and control of trade, there have been a number of technological challenges and concerns over the security of data that has led to its adoption to falter, most notably in Guatemala and Honduras.

In Honduras, stakeholders from Customs and key border management agencies shared that although the technology has been adopted, there was limited understanding as to who had access to the RFID system-generated data, who manages this data, and how this technology is then used to improve border clearance processes. Although not explicitly mentioned during conversations with stakeholders, it is possible that there is some resistance around sharing such data generated from RFID technology due to concerns for potential information misuse, which are often heightened during periods of change in government. In Central America generally, there are often concerns over ensuring that data such as those generated by RFID systems is shared only with a narrow group of officials and on a “need to know basis.” At times, opening up access to the types of data generated by RFID systems does not take place due to concerns over the potential for misuse and the personal liabilities that Customs and other government officials may be subject to for making the information available and having it disclosed, even if they did not participate in such disclosures. Also, at Puerto Cortes, problems with antennas have caused RFID deployment and use to be inconsistent.

In Guatemala, stakeholders said that they are very interested in using RFID technology. They were very familiar that SIECA has promoted RFID in Central America, and they communicated that they understood the benefits this technology brings to border management and trade facilitation. However, according to stakeholders, this was a challenging aspect of the Activity assistance. Stakeholders said during consultations that the Activity supported the installation of antennas for RFID, but the Activity did not provide for the update and maintenance of the antennas. This became an issue, because the agreement with the supplier stipulated that it reserved the source code and therefore, only the supplier was able to provide any service, modification, or connection, which became extremely costly for Customs to maintain. Because of this, it was more costly for Customs to maintain the system than to buy a new one. In 2011, SIECA conducted an assessment and concluded that the antennas lacked maintenance. This was raised with RTFB by the Customs officials in Guatemala, but stakeholders understood that maintaining the antennas was beyond

⁵ SIECA. “Central American Strategy for Trade Facilitation.” 2015

the scope of the Activity's assistance (lack of funds and could not be integrated into the work plan). Therefore, Customs is researching alternative options, such as requesting additional assistance from other donors or using the national budget to maintain the antenna system.

3.1.3 EQ1, FINDING 3: RTFB IMPROVED REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN GUATEMALA AND HONDURAS THROUGH THE CUSTOMS UNION; HOWEVER, THE ACTIVITY HAD TO MAKE NECESSARY CHANGES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH IN EL SALVADOR IN RESPONSE TO POLITICAL CHALLENGES, WHICH HINDERED THE ACTIVITY'S INFLUENCE ON IMPROVED REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN EL SALVADOR.

The Activity was originally designed to strengthen regional border management by supporting El Salvador's entrance into the Customs Union between Guatemala and Honduras. However, this objective was hindered by the change in El Salvador's government in 2019, which had reservations about entering the Customs Union and "Deep Economic Integration." The former government had supported the Ministerial COMIECO Declaration,⁶ but the new administration put a pause on all foreign assistance and policy approaches to review against their administrative priorities. Therefore, the Activity had to pivot focus away from supporting regional integration through the Customs Union and toward a more policy-oriented and operational focus of interventions at the national level in El Salvador. According to IP stakeholders, this pivot, while necessary to respond to the external challenges, limited the Activity's ability to achieve its objectives for economic integration in El Salvador as originally designed. In July 2021, there was a public announcement that El Salvador was moving toward restarting the Customs Union process with Honduras and Guatemala, and in November 2021, it formalized its rejoining.⁷

The Activity has continued the planned interventions in Honduras and Guatemala to support regional deep integration by supporting the Customs Union. The Activity developed nine Customs Union Guides to provide guidance to various Customs Union actors on the correct use of the Central American Invoice and Single Declaration (FYDUCA), and all new procedures under the Customs Union. These guides were tailored to meet the needs of the various actors, including taxpayers, transferees, acquirers, non-taxpayers, transporters, logistics managers, students, and others. Public sector stakeholders in Honduras and El Salvador, and one private sector stakeholder in Honduras referenced that this type of support underpinned the development of electronic capabilities for transmissions of aforementioned documentation, which continues to strengthen deep integration and efforts toward *Aduanas Sin Papeles* and was a well-received aspect of the RTFB technical assistance.

3.1.4 EQ 1, FINDING 4: STAKEHOLDERS FOUND THAT THE RTFB TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING APPROACH CONTRIBUTED TO IMPROVED BORDER MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES AND COORDINATION AMONG AGENCIES IN THE REGION

In addition to the technical assistance provided, the RTFB Activity provided supplementary capacity building and training to the relevant stakeholders from public sector agencies engaged in trade facilitation or border management, as well as companies in the private sector. Over the life of the project to date,

⁶ Ministerio de Comercio Exterior. "Anexo I de Acuerdo 01-2015 Estrategia Centroamericana de Facilitación de Comercio y Competitividad con Énfasis en la Gestión Coordinada de Fronteras." 2015

⁷ As of November 20, 2021, El Salvador did officially rejoin the Deep Integration process and Customs Union. CBC Canal 6. "El Salvador se Reincorpora al Proceso de Integración Profunda con Guatemala y Honduras." 2021.

more than 1,800 public and private sector stakeholders have been trained or certified on topics related, but not limited to, strategic planning, biosafety in the workplace, governance and integrity, basic components of the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) programs and its certification process, “soft skills” related to change management, leadership, effective communication, and team integration, and training of trainers for trade facilitation. Public and private sector stakeholders in all three countries interviewed for this evaluation generally perceived these types of capacity building support to be useful. None of the stakeholders consulted who received some type of capacity building support shared negative feedback; overall participants were favorable to the trainings they had attended and the capacity building opportunities were well received. Several public and private sector stakeholders in all three countries discussed that the complementary human resource and soft skills training they received had tangible effects on improving internal dynamics and management processes. For example, in El Salvador, the Director of the IT Department at MAG commented that he and his staff found the human resource and soft skills training to be particularly helpful to him as he was new in his position after coming to work in the government from the private sector.

3.1.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the ET provides several recommendations for consideration for the current implementation of the RTFB Activity in its last year and for future activity designs to strengthen interventions that address regional economic integration in NCA countries.

- In future activity design, USAID should consider engaging government and private sector stakeholders in the design phase to determine specific technologies and IT Systems working well from the RTFB Activity to continue supporting capacity building for the use of these technologies and identify ongoing technology assistance needs to promote NCA governments taking ownership for their effective deployment and maintenance over time.
- While continuing to support counterpart RFID technology implementation and management, USAID should consider designing and deploying alternative plans for “lower tech” risk management solutions to balance limitations and challenges faced when implementing and maintaining RFID technology.
- Future USAID support for RFID technology implementation, management, and use should consider conducting an assessment to understand reasons for hesitation in sharing RFID data among relevant stakeholders. Assistance should include measures to limit unauthorized copying or sharing of RFID data made available to Customs or other relevant border officials to reduce potential misuse of data.
- Current and future IPs should implement strategies to improve targeted communications with government stakeholders in the NCA region, particularly with those in El Salvador in Customs, to promote stronger support for regional integration. Such communications strategies should be designed to be high-touch (i.e., increased frequency) and should engage those who do not have a history of difficult or politicized communications and interactions with relevant government stakeholders.
- As part of engagements with public sector stakeholders, the current IP should ensure that counterparts’ plans and projects for trade facilitation are considered and built into Activity assistance to strengthen more proactive participation from counterparts. This should be

integrated as part of a public sector engagement strategy for future activities as well.

3.2 EQ2 TO WHAT DEGREE HAVE PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS' CAPACITIES CHANGED TO FACILITATE/EXPEDITE CROSS-BORDER TRADE SINCE 2018? HOW HAS RTFB ASSISTANCE CONTRIBUTED TO THESE CHANGES?

3.2.1 EQ2, FINDING 1: RTFB ASSISTANCE TO SUPPORT THE AEO PROGRAMS WAS USEFUL, BUT MOMENTUM FOR AEO PROGRAMS HAS STALLED, PARTICULARLY IN EL SALVADOR

The RTFB Activity provided direct technical assistance for companies to become certified as an AEO in their respective countries. This assistance included self-assessment support to identify gaps and solutions to address those gaps, capacity building for staff, preparation of dossiers, and continued follow up with relevant Customs authorities to ensure the company obtains the certification. By the time of writing this report, there is stronger uptake and interest among stakeholders in Guatemala and Honduras for AEO support compared to El Salvador. The Activity has supported 14 companies in Guatemala to become certified and 11 companies are pending certification at the time of writing.⁸ No companies in Honduras or El Salvador have received or are pending certification yet, but according to the IP, it is expected that at least some companies will receive this certification by the end of the project in 2023.

TABLE 6: RTFB ASSISTANCE PROVIDED IN EACH COUNTRY FOR AEO SUPPORT		
COUNTRY	COMPANIES CERTIFIED	PROMOTERS CERTIFIED
El Salvador	0	0
Guatemala	14 (11 pending)	6
Honduras	0	7

Source: RTFB Performance Monitoring Data, 2022.

Several private sector stakeholders who received assistance from RTFB for AEO certification shared positive feedback about this support for improving internal processes and enabling them to receiving certification. In Guatemala, for example, most company representatives interviewed noted they were working to obtain AEO certification and train internal auditors. One certified company in Guatemala reflected on the benefits from participating in the program, namely that it reduced their number of inspections by 21 percent and reduced their storage costs at Customs by 67 percent. Additionally, the Guatemalan Tax Administration (Superintendencia de Administración Tributaria - SAT) is promoting other institutions to support and work with AEO program to include security and agriculture authorities and recently signed an action plan with US Customs and Border Protection's Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (CTPAT) to begin negotiating a Mutual Recognition Agreement.

⁸ September, 2022.

As part of the Activity's sustainability efforts, the RTFB Activity trained six AEO promoters in Guatemala and seven promoters in Honduras, who will be responsible for continuing to provide support to companies to achieve certification status. Public and private sector stakeholders consulted noted that the AEO certification training support for the "gestores"⁹ was beneficial and enabled better support to companies to become AEO-certified in Guatemala and Honduras. This support has not only contributed to the expansion of the AEO program but contributed to trade facilitation in general by opening communication channels with Customs authorities and incentivizing compliance. Some public and private sector stakeholders in all three countries shared that the Activity strengthened the understanding of the WTO Trade Facilitation agreement and its implementation in NCA Customs among those trained; however, remaining challenges include moving from a theoretical understanding of these principles to conducting and maintaining operational implementation.

However, there was a shared concern among some private and public sector stakeholders regarding the value of an AEO certification, due to a perceived lack of concrete benefits and a robust mutual recognition program between the NCA countries for AEO-certified companies. There is no standardized set of recognized criteria across countries for the certification process itself or consistent benefits for AEO-certified companies. El Salvador's change in government in 2019 created a lag as it paused to review their approach to AEO certification processes and procedures, causing concern among private sector companies. Stakeholders shared that because of this, they began to reevaluate their motivations to receive an AEO certification and the expected benefits. Stakeholders noted that the recent change in government in Honduras and the upcoming elections in Guatemala instilled concern over the uncertainty for how the AEO certifications would be recognized and beneficial to them, generating a stall in the momentum for AEO support. This dynamic around AEO certifications and benefits is not unique to NCA countries and has been a topic of global debate.¹⁰

Additionally, several representatives of companies who were seeking or received the AEO certification expressed frustration with aspects of the Activity's support, specifically around the change in consultants (See Finding 20, which further discusses this challenge). Having continuity when working through the AEO certification process is important for companies as there are not linear, standardized paths to certification. With a turnover of consultants during this process, valuable time is lost getting all parties on the same page and deciding where to start to continue the process.

3.2.2 EQ2, FINDING 2: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO STREAMLINE AND EXPEDITE REGISTRATION AND PROCESSING SYSTEMS WAS WELL RECEIVED BY PUBLIC SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS AND PERCEIVED TO BE EFFECTIVE

Observations during port visits confirmed that IT systems were in place, working, and being used by various border agencies to digitize different processes at the border. This reflects the impact of capacity building assistance provided by the RTFB Activity to train and support agency stakeholders to adopt and operate IT systems to digitize, and thus expedite, these processes.

The RTFB Activity implemented 12 interventions with public sector agencies to drastically reduce the time it takes to conduct various export and import processes. Table 7 presents the types of interventions

⁹ Gestores were individuals who attended training and met all requirements set out by the RTFB Activity to become "agents" that accompany a company through the process of becoming certified as an AEO. The gestores received certificates as such from the RTFB and USAID.

¹⁰ Gonzalez, A. "Above the Fold: Is C-TPAT Membership Worth It?" 2019.

implemented for the respective stakeholders in each country. Benefits extend to more than just cost reduction, but also to process automatization. In Guatemala, public sector stakeholders shared observations that the Activity’s interventions benefitted users to automate processes for receiving sanitary licenses, and registering different health related and pharmaceutical products. In Honduras and El Salvador, public stakeholders also noted this support was well received and that they must continue the digitization and automation of processes and procedures for registering and processing data because it saves costs, improves services to users, and reduces response time.

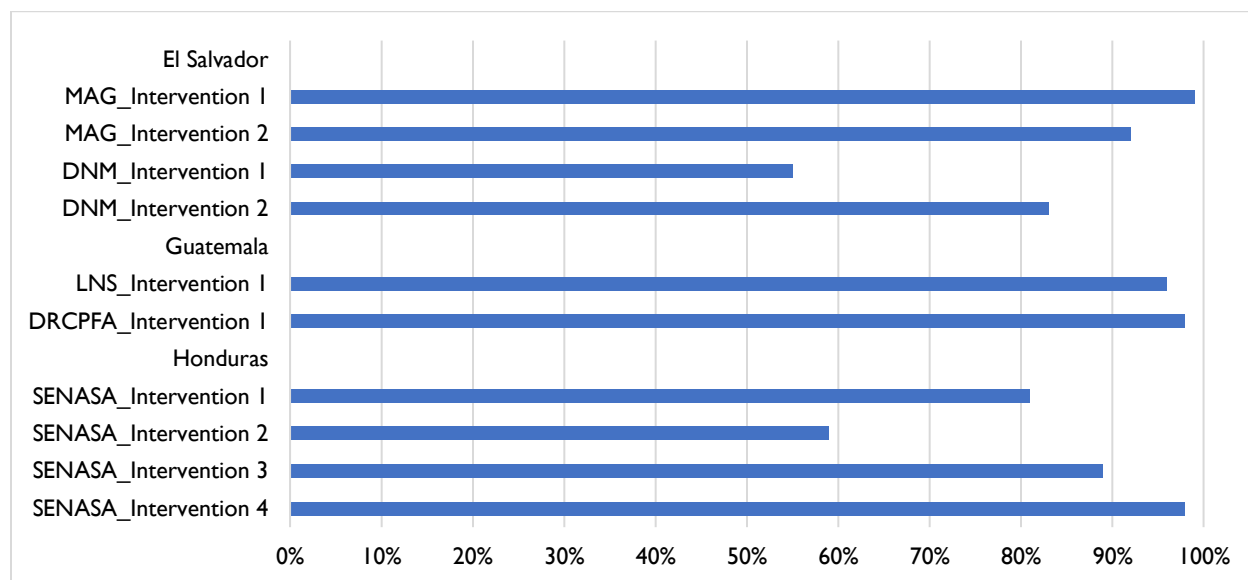
TABLE 7: TYPES OF RTFB IT INTERVENTIONS BY COUNTRY AND STAKEHOLDER	
STAKEHOLDER	DEVELOPMENT OF IT MODULES INTERVENTION(S)
EL SALVADOR	
DNM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Issue special import licenses ● Register legal representatives for agricultural businesses, as part of the Business Process Management (BPM) system
MAG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Electronic payments for agricultural services ● Interconnection between MAG and the Central Bank of El Salvador’s Single Window to issue import licenses for agricultural inputs ● Register agricultural businesses ● Issue sanitary registrations for agricultural inputs
Honduras	
SENASA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Issue import licenses for plants and seeds ● Issue import licenses for live animals and animal products ● Issue import licenses for pesticides ● Issue import licenses for veterinary products
GUATEMALA	
DRCPFA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Electronic payments for sanitary registration procedures
INS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Electronic payments for laboratory procedures as part of the sanitary registration requirements

Source: RTFB Performance Monitoring Data, 2022.

Figure 5 presents the percentage in time reduction achieved for 10 of the 12 interventions, as reported

by the IP,¹¹ indicating that all interventions reduced the time by more than 50 percent in every case. Public sector stakeholders corroborated this information, reflecting that the IT system and capacity building training assistance received from the Activity contributed to quicker registration processes, as detailed below.

FIGURE 5: PERCENT REDUCTION IN TIME IN REGISTRATION, LICENSE, AND PERMIT PROCESSES



Source: RTFB Performance Monitoring Data, 2022.

In five cases, the Activity’s intervention led to more than a 90 percent time reduction. For example, RTFB developed an interconnection between the MAG and the Central Bank of El Salvador to issue import licenses for agricultural inputs. Before this interconnected system, it took MAG and the Central Bank one day to issue a license and after the system implementation, it took five minutes, representing a 99 percent reduction in the time to issue an import license for agricultural inputs, according to the IP’s performance monitoring data.

Finally, the Activity also supported SIECA in Guatemala and Honduras to expedite and improve pre-arrival processing procedures for goods exchanged between the two countries. According to the IP performance monitoring data, this IT system and support from RTFB led to a drastic 550 percent increase in the number of procedures able to be conducted each day and a 37 percent reduction in the time required to implement each processing procedure to expedite the flow of goods between the two countries (Table 8 below).

¹¹ Time reduction figures for two interventions were still being calculated at the time of this report, September 2022.

TABLE 8: PRE ARRIVAL PROCESSING PROCEDURE IMPROVEMENTS BETWEEN HONDURAS AND GUATEMALA AS A RESULT OF RTFB ACTIVITY ASSISTANCE

PRE-RTFB ASSISTANCE	POST-RTFB ASSISTANCE	PERCENTAGE OF CHANGE
330 pre-arrival processing procedures (monthly)	2,146 pre-arrival processing procedures (monthly)	550 percent increase
27 hours for cargo release	17 hours for cargo release	37 percent time reduction

Source: RTFB Performance Monitoring Data, 2022.

In March 2021, Guatemala and Honduras implemented the first phase of the Pre-Arrival Processing Procedure in the one-stop border post of Corinto, consisting of electronic transmissions and presentation of all support documentation prior to the arrival, facilitating border crossing since all documentation is processed and taxes are paid in advance. Some public and private sector stakeholders reflected that the main benefits of such procedures are time and cost reduction, expedited border crossing, higher level of compliance with non-tariff regulations (permits, certifications, etc.), and less congestion at the border.

In August 2022, pre-arrival processing was implemented between Guatemala and El Salvador for the border of La Hachadura-Pedro de Alvarado. Although this was not implemented under direct RTFB assistance, the IT systems technical support and capacity building with border agencies provided by the Activity contributed to the relevant border agencies' capacity to implement such procedures to improve trade facilitation. This pre-arrival processing will operate 24/7 and it is expected to reduce congestion at the border post, thus reducing time and cost.

3.2.3 EQ2, FINDING 3: CAPACITY BUILDING ASSISTANCE WAS GENERALLY WELL RECEIVED BY PUBLIC SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS FOR IMPROVED COLLABORATION AND INFORMATION SHARING BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS AND IMPROVED COORDINATION AMONG GOVERNMENT AGENCIES.

According to the Activity performance data, the RTFB Activity supported the Economic Development Secretariat (SDE) of Honduras to develop a Strategic Plan for their National Trade Facilitation Committee (CONFACO). This plan (2020-2024) worked with CONFACO to develop a strategic vision, mission, strategic pillars, and operative plans, which were used by their members to officially start working toward trade facilitation. In 2022, the Activity is also supporting CONFACO to review and update this Strategic Plan to align with Honduras' current needs and priorities, supporting CONFACO's operationalization under a legal framework. Most stakeholders interviewed from Honduras reflected that this assistance has been well received and has helped to facilitate the relationship between the public and private sectors, particularly as the RTFB assistance helped CONFACO define private sector participation in its operations. One CONFACO official, who was involved with the formulation and implementation of trade policy and a representative in CONFACO, shared that the new change in administration may be of concern for progress made under RTFB. Many key officials from Customs and other government agencies that had

worked on the CONFACO were replaced by appointees of the new government, which led to loss of institutional support and a slowdown in progress made under RTFB as new incoming governments assess the program and determine the approach they will take going forward.

In addition to support provided to CONFACO in Honduras, the Activity supported the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) in El Salvador to establish a National Strategy that is aligned with El Salvador's current national needs and priorities. The Activity is coordinating with public and private representatives to define specific strategic actions to guide El Salvador toward improved trade facilitation. CIFACIL, the private sector representative for El Salvador's NTFC, brings together the seven largest Business Associations and is involved in the activities of International Trade and Logistics, Imports and Exports. A member of CIFACIL's executive leadership noted that private sector members, as part of CIFACIL, put forth more than 80 percent of initiatives included in the short, medium, and long-term work plans, but that these members did not have a vote in the NTFC. The NTFC is presided over by an official from MINEC, and this official does not grant members of CIFACIL a vote in the NTFC, but grants them opportunity to share and put forth ideas and initiatives. CIFACIL leaders and members, including those representing COEXPORT, AMCHAM, and private enterprises, acknowledged the Activity's assistance, but said that it was important to have more communication and facilitated collaboration between private and public sector stakeholders in the NTFC, and that the Activity should work with the NTFC to grant the private sector stakeholders that were part of CIFACIL a vote. These stakeholders from CIFACIL also noted that such targeted support for CIFACIL representatives as active members of the NTFC would further support better integration of public and private sector collaboration under the NTFC and would accelerate the implementation of best practices within the WCO's SAFE Framework of Standards¹² and relevant WTO and WCO agreements.

3.2.4 EQ 2, FINDING 4: CAPACITY BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES TO ADDRESS GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT COULD BE STRENGTHENED.

A key objective of the Activity is to promote gender and social inclusivity throughout all interventions. In addition to collecting sex-disaggregated data on project participants, the Activity implemented a capacity building program titled, "Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality" to assist counterparts in developing action plans to implement actions within their institutions that promote gender equality and women's empowerment. This program occurred over three general phases: 1) an initial gender assessment to identify the counterparts' needs; 2) a training program that shared knowledge for trade-related actors on key topics (listed below); and 3) a work plan development and follow up with a portion of participating counterparts to develop specific workplans and a training of trainers curriculum to continue implementing strategies to promote gender equality in their workplace.

The initial gender assessment was conducted by an external Gender Expert, which identified several high-level findings, namely that all three countries have legislation, national policies, and actions plans that align and comply with key international agreements and conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), for example. In all three countries, there exist national anti-discrimination legislation, but not all institutional policies adhere to best practices for equality or anti-discrimination in the workplace. Issues of workplace discrimination, lack

¹² WCO. "SAFE Framework Standards." 2021.

of gender equality, or potential acts of gender-based violence were identified as areas for improvement from the gender assessment.

The counterparts that participated in each country are presented in Table 9. As part of this program, the Activity delivered in-person and online workshops focused on topics such as gender equity, human rights, non-discrimination, cultural biases, machismo culture, among other topics. In total, 15 counterpart agencies sent staff to participate in these five-session trainings. After these trainings, eight of the 15 agencies continued with the program, where the Activity worked with them to develop workplans and tailored training of trainers curriculum to enable trainees to replicate this training to additional staff. These subsequent training of trainer curriculums covered five gender-related topics (masculinities, imposter syndrome, cultural bias, inclusive language, and sexism culture) were delivered to an additional 123 women and 46 men across several counterpart agencies.

TABLE 9: PARTICIPATING COUNTERPARTS IN GENDER AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT TRAINING PROGRAM BY COUNTRY	
COUNTRY	PARTICIPATING COUNTERPARTS
El Salvador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● DGA (5 women, 0 men) ● MAG (2 women, 0 men) ● DNM (2 women, 2 men) ● COEXPORT (1 woman, 1 man) ● MINSAL (3 women, 2 men) ● CAMARASAL (2 women, 0 men)
Guatemala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SAT (3 women, 1 man) ● MSPAS (1 woman, 0 men) ● MINECO (2 women, 0 men) ● MINFIN (1 woman, 0 men)
Honduras	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AMECOMEX (1 woman, 0 men) ● CCIC (5 women, 2 men) ● Aduanas (1 woman, 0 men) ● SENASA (2 women, 0 men)
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SIECA (0 women, 1 man)

Source: RTFB FY2021 Quarter 2 Report, 2021.

Note: Those counterparts in bold participated in the third phase of this program.

IP staff observed that this training was a useful contribution to promote gender equality and women's empowerment within counterpart institutions. They noted that while this program was generally well received, there was no additional follow-up from the Activity after phase three and a final close out

meeting they held with counterparts. There have yet to be any analysis or follow up to understand how this program led to any changes or impacts on gender equality and inclusive outcomes at the counterpart institutions. Additionally, other staff noted that this type of program was delivered to meet the Activity's key objectives for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, but the lack of specific MEL indicators on such targets contributed to no follow-up or limited tracking of such outcomes.

3.2.5 EQ 2, FINDING 5: A GENERAL LACK OF UNDERSTANDING AMONG PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS AND BEST PRACTICES HAS HINDERED THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RTFB ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING, ESPECIALLY IN EL SALVADOR AND HONDURAS.

Many private and some public sector stakeholders in El Salvador and Honduras were not aware of, nor had technical background on, WTO, WCO, bilateral, regional and multilateral agreements and instruments such as the WCO Revised Kyoto Convention, WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, Chapter 5 of the Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) on Customs Administration and Trade Facilitation, or SIECA's Central American Trade Facilitation Strategy, among other things. In some cases, this was due to the fact that some of the officials consulted for this evaluation were new in their positions and have received minimal or no professional development and training on the topics. This issue contributes to concerns over sustainability during periods of high public sector staff turnover (see Finding 19 for more discussion on this topic). However, this was not strongly observed with public sector stakeholders in Guatemala. Customs authorities in Guatemala have been very active in the WCO, as Guatemala recently became the 131st contracting party to the WCO Revised Kyoto Convention and currently is the WCO Vice-Chair to the Americas and the Caribbean. Public sector officials in Guatemala were well informed on the WTO, WCO, bilateral, regional, and multilateral agreements and instruments.

During interviews with private sector stakeholders, several displayed a misconception that directives or initiatives were coming from USAID, RFTB, or other technical assistance programs in a top-down approach, rather than in alignment with international best practices and agreements, which limited motivation and trust in the guidance provided.

For example, in El Salvador, some private sector stakeholders said that they were surprised and uncomfortable with the information requested by General Customs Directorate (*Dirección General de Aduanas* - DGA) because they considered this information (i.e., company procedure manuals) to be company property and were not open to sharing. However, such requests for accounting records and compliance manuals tend to be a routine requirement for receiving an AEO certification, as defined in the WCO Framework of Standards.¹³ This highlights a lack of understanding or awareness of international standards guiding best practices for AEO certifications among private sector stakeholders.

¹³ The WCO Framework of Standards stipulates that companies found to be “low risk” for commercial compliance and supply chain security can be certified as an AEO, as such Customs authorities will want to review measures to secure their facilities and supply chains as well as written internal controls, manuals and accounting records as part of this process. It is important to note that the certification process used by Customs in different countries to determine eligibility for AEO certifications are not harmonized and can vary by country. NCA countries do not have a standardized process for certifying companies as AEOs. Generally, AEO programs were globally launched based on the WCO Framework of Standards after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA in order to ensure supply chain security and facilitate trade for the certified companies. Providing information to Customs including financial information, procedures, and manuals around trade compliance and physical security measures can be part of the routine requirements to secure certification.

3.2.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the ET provides the following recommendations for consideration for the current implementation of the RTFB Activity in its last year and for future activity designs to improve interventions that aim to strengthen public capacity for economic integration and cross-border trade:

- IPs of future activities should consider engaging with key counterparts, like the DGA and MINEC, to design communication strategies for potential AEO candidates to better communicate the requirements and benefits of the AEO program, financial and time commitments required as part of the program, among other aspects. This would help potential AEO candidates learn the requirements and value of the AEO program from the perspective of their own government.
- The IP should continue supporting private sector entities that are interested in obtaining AEO status coupled with support targeted at strengthening mutual recognition of AEO certifications, particularly in El Salvador.
- Current and future IPs of similar activities should engage with Customs authorities in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to promote better alignment on and fully harmonize the AEO programs in the NCA countries. Help Customs and other border management officials better understand why supporting AEOs in their countries is in their respective country's best interest and not just something being mandated in a top-down fashion from international donors and consultants. Taking steps to develop an agreed-upon, standardized set of requirements and process for certifying companies as AEOs in the NCA region can help mitigate these issues around mutual recognition in NCA countries.
- When designing future activities targeted at improving IT systems, USAID should consider coupling such improvements with training and best practices for cybersecurity, data protection and disaster/continuity as part of the capacity building efforts.
- Current and future IPs of similar activities should continue to support Trade Facilitation Committees in developing and implementing national strategies. Specific for El Salvador, work with the NTFC to strengthen collaboration between public and private sector members, particularly with the goal to support CIFACIL members in gaining a representative voice in NTFC decision-making.
- USAID should embed MEL guidance or specific indicators into future activity design and MEL plans to ensure that attention to gender, youth, and marginalized groups are intentionally incorporated into the activity design and implementation.
- IPs implementing future activities should aim to build capacity for public sector stakeholders' communications in El Salvador and Honduras specifically to strengthen their internal understanding of trade and Customs "best practices" and why they are important in the broader context of economic development and to foster the growth in regional integration and increase trade flows. This can help to maintain consistency and continuity during political and leadership turnover.

3.3 EQ3 TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE TRADE COMPETITIVENESS OF CENTRAL AMERICAN BUSINESSES IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETS CHANGED SINCE 2018? HOW HAS RTFB ASSISTANCE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS CHANGE?

3.3.1 EQ3, FINDING 1: PRIVATE SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS CREDIT RTFB FOR IMPROVING INTERNAL PROCESSES THAT INCREASED THEIR COMPETITIVENESS FOR CROSS-BORDER TRADE.

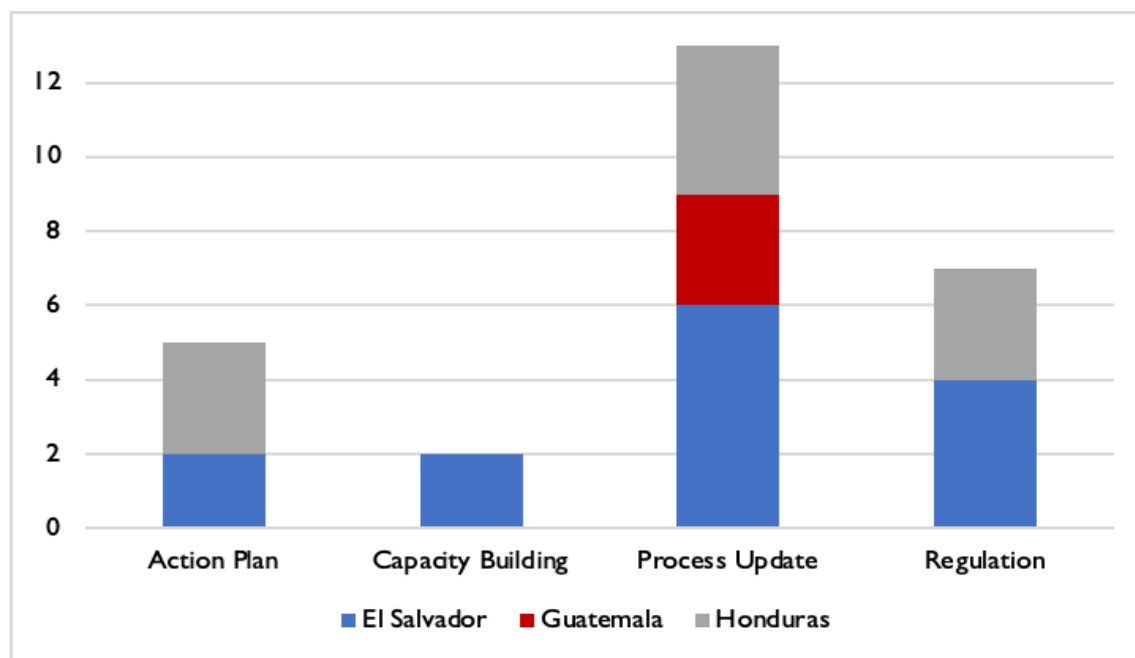
All private sector stakeholders interviewed from each country shared that assistance provided by RTFB contributed to their improved competitiveness for cross-border trade in the region. In all three countries, private sector stakeholders who received AEO certification assistance from RTFB noted that this support, in particular, was useful, among other types of support that helped to improve internal processes for enabling trade (See section 3.2.1 - EQ2's Finding 1 for further discussion about the Activity's support on the AEO program).

Private sector stakeholders also said that through capacity building and technical assistance received from the Activity, they adjusted internal controls and procedures and processes for security, documentation, and recording, which improved their trade activities and operations. For example, one company in El Salvador mentioned that addressing the security requirements of the AEO program helped them to reduce costs as they lowered inventory loss and pilferage rates. The same company explained that they pay closer attention to accuracy with their Customs paperwork, which lowers the risk for them to receive a fine or penalty or be asked to pay additional Customs duties due to misclassifications under the Harmonized System (HS) or for improperly declared Customs valuations. In Guatemala, stakeholders mentioned that simply having the AEO status is the main benefit. It has helped them focus on becoming more compliant and efficient with their processes, improving efficiency at each step of their supply chain.

3.3.2 EQ3, FINDING 2: WHILE THE ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTED TO REDUCING CERTAIN BARRIERS TO TRADE, BARRIERS RELATED TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND HARMONIZED CLASSIFICATIONS REMAIN.

The Activity implemented multiple interventions to address existing barriers to trade, either through capacity building efforts, process updates, action plans, and regulation reforms (Figure 6). Table 10 details the various interventions implemented by the activity to address barriers to trade in each country.

FIGURE 6: NUMBER OF SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED TO ADDRESS TRADE BARRIERS BY TYPE OF SOLUTION AND COUNTRY (N= 27)



Source: RTFB Performance Monitoring Data, 2022.

TABLE 10: SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED TO ADDRESS TRADE BARRIERS BY STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND COUNTRY	
TYPE OF INTERVENTION	STATUS ¹⁴
EL SALVADOR	
Salvadoran National Strategy for Trade Facilitation	Proposed
Strategic plan for the Salvadoran National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC)	Under Review
Technical assistance to MINSAL for the improvement of LAT processes	Under Review
Improvement of support processes at the MINSAL's LAT	Under Review
Legal reform to food supplement products at MINSAL	Under Review
Technical assistance to MINSAL for legal reform to CLV in revision phase	Under Review
Trainer of Trainers program for MINSAL	Implemented

¹⁴ As of September, 2022.

Improved sample reception processes in MINSAL	Implemented
MAG's Agricultural Records Modules	Implemented
Reform to risk regulation A and B for MINSAL	Implemented
Reform to free sale regulation for MINSAL	Implemented
Reform to regulation supplements for MINSAL	Implemented
GUATEMALA	
Food supplements RTS	Under Review
AEO Program in Guatemala	Implemented
Pre-arrival processing in Guatemala and Honduras	Implemented
HONDURAS	
Development of a single regulation for agricultural businesses' safety for SENASA	Proposed
Review and update existing regulations for pesticides and related products for SENASA	Proposed
Review and update existing regulations of agricultural quarantine for SENASA	Proposed
Six operative plans for CONFACO	Under Review
CONFACO's strategic plan	Implemented
AEO Program in Honduras	Implemented
Pre-arrival processing in Guatemala and Honduras	Implemented
SENASA's online import system	Implemented

Source: RTFB Performance Monitoring Data, 2022.

Both public and private sector stakeholders from all three countries shared that the Activity addressed pre-registration processes to make products admissible into NCA countries and other markets, and to move goods more quickly across borders. The aforementioned IT systems assistance has improved access by the private sector to the registration systems and provided users with more direct communication

with the government regulatory agencies that oversee their products. According to stakeholders, it also has allowed government agencies to exercise more effective regulatory control over the products and to enhance their risk analysis and risk management capabilities. Ultimately, it has helped to facilitate the digital registration processes for specific products that are regulated for phytosanitary and health and safety purposes, as well as promoting on-line payment mechanisms.

However, existing barriers to trade not addressed by the Activity still limit competitiveness. Interviews with stakeholders and direct observations indicated that the lack of physical and digital infrastructure development at ports of entry, while beyond the scope of the Activity, impedes competitiveness and cross-border trade, and limits potential progress made from Activity interventions. Such infrastructure issues include the number of lanes available at each border entry, including commercial and public lanes; a lack of WiFi systems to facilitate digital connectivity or poorly working WiFi systems; other communications systems technical issues; IT improvements without the specific capacity to maintain the systems; unused or unfinished buildings; and the use of or lack thereof RFID systems. These issues create bottlenecks that impede access to, passage through, and exit of primary border areas. This presents serious ongoing challenges as solutions to such infrastructure conditions are complex as they require multistakeholder involvement from various public agencies to prioritize and agree on solutions for improvement, and to identifying funding and human resources for both infrastructure installation and maintenance. The lack of multiple designated lanes for entry and exit for commercial and public passage creates significant time delays and backlogs. In general, the non-existence of areas inside border entries for parking and other maneuvers, and in certain areas, the lack of necessary bridges, makes mobility difficult.

These infrastructure challenges impede potential for improved competitiveness. For example, in Pedro de Alvarado, even as exports represent 60 percent of the operations, there is only one entry lane for both commercial and public transports, making it impossible to provide benefits for AEO or any other way of expediting the procedures.

Other infrastructure limitations were observed at the El Amatillo border crossing in Honduras. Prior to arriving at the border, a line of trucks waiting to be processed approximately 5 kilometers long was waiting to cross from El Salvador to Honduras. This demonstrated a key bottleneck that impeded the facilitation of people and cargo to and from the border due to a lack of multiple and designated lanes.

In addition, an unfinished building intended to house Customs and other government agencies who participate in coordinated border management was observed. At the time of the visit, the interior spaces were being used to store furniture and other equipment. Other areas that remained unfinished were the cold storage and refrigeration section. Additional office spaces for border agencies were not wired with the necessary computer systems, and there was limited lighting in the inspection area on the outside of the building. This lack of lighting is a potential cargo security issue that may impede inspections and processing of cargo at night and is also a concern for women's safety and security at points of entry. Finally, it was observed that the covered area for inspecting trucks at El Amatillo had a limited number of berths available for trucks to park during inspection, and there were no seating options available for workers who load and unload cargo.

Technical assistance and capacity building is important, but unless infrastructure issues are addressed, any advance in simplification of procedures, IT innovation, and training will be hindered and not fully effective to facilitate improved border entry processes. Addressing such infrastructure challenges is a key priority under the Central American Trade Facilitation and Competitiveness Strategy.

3.3.3 EQ3, FINDING 3: ARBITRARY AND OR INCONSISTENT INTERPRETATION OF KEY BORDER CLEARANCE CONCEPTS IN EL SALVADOR LIMITS THE POTENTIAL FOR CROSS-BORDER TRADE AND COMPETITIVENESS.

Stakeholders in El Salvador perceived that Advance Rulings, as stipulated in the WTO TFA, are not being used by El Salvador Customs on a consistent basis. Communication challenges between Customs headquarters and borders can lead to a lack of harmonized and consistent determinations by Customs as to proper HS classifications.

Private sector stakeholders provided examples of how Customs officials rejected an importer or exporter's HS classification. When this happens, cargo is not released quickly, which leads to additional costs as personnel are idled, cargo may have to be stored, and cargo is at risk of deterioration or spoilage in the case of perishable goods. Such companies are also vulnerable to contractual disputes between contracted buyers when they cannot deliver goods as stipulated in their contractual and commercial agreements, contributing to a poor enabling environment for trade that limits competitiveness. For example, one private sector stakeholder from a large, multinational corporation relayed an instance where their products were labeled and registered for export in accordance with the requirements, however, they were rejected by a Customs official at the border. They had to relabel their products in accordance with the Customs official's request, which incurred significant delays, wasted resources, and frustration when exporting their products.

3.3.4 EQ3, FINDING 4: ACTIVITY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS TO MEASURE TIME AND COST REDUCTION AT BORDER CROSSINGS WERE TOO BROAD AND LACKED NECESSARY AVAILABLE DATA TO INFORM BASELINE OR MONITORING EFFORTS

The RFTB performance indicators to track “reduced border time crossings” intended to measure the Activity's contractual agreement to “reduce average border crossing time by at least 30 percent in at least three ports of entry in Northern Central America” proved problematic for several reasons.¹⁵ First, the Activity experienced significant challenges with data availability to inform baseline and performance results for this indicator. Initially, the Activity intended to make use of RFID data installed at the borders, but was unable to, because not all the antennas were connected to SIECA's monitoring platform. The Activity then pivoted to conduct multiple Time Release Studies¹⁶ using WTO methodology, but these proved to be too significant in terms of resources required to effectively conduct each study on a quarterly basis as intended. To circumvent these challenges, the Activity pivoted to requesting GPS data from companies that received assistance from the Activity to analyze their respective times to cross the border and measure the relative impact of the Activity. IP staff said that although this approach worked in some cases, it proved problematic overall for several reasons: many companies did not share this data; this data was not comparable to other data collection efforts for this indicator; and this approach only measured companies as a proxy and not specific border crossing points. As a result of this approach, however, the Activity found that two companies, for example, reduced their time to cross the border by 22 percent and 40 percent, respectively.

¹⁵ Such issues were outlined in the RTFB Activity's Data Quality Assessment for this indicator, which is still pending at the time of this evaluation.

¹⁶ USAID. “Informe Estudios de Tiempos de Despacho Frontera la Hachadura El Salvador – Pedro de Alvarado Guatemala.” 2019.

As an additional challenge, the objective to reduce border crossing times was written into the Activity design, before the change in El Salvador’s government and the delay in their rejoining the Customs Union. Because of this, the Activity had to pivot and did not provide direct assistance at El Salvador border control points as originally planned and instead provided support to private sector stakeholders. The Activity then had to define new baselines at the following border crossing points to track time reductions: Puerto Cortés (Honduras), El Amatillo (Honduras), El Poy (Honduras), La Mesa (Honduras), and Pedro de Alvarado (Guatemala). Data to inform both baseline and endline results on average border time crossings will come directly from Customs in Honduras and Guatemala, respectively, which will strengthen data quality to inform these assessments. However, because these border entry points are not those originally intended, these results do not yet exist at the time of this evaluation.

The indicator of “reduced border time crossings” is broadly defined, and whereas Activity assistance would likely contribute to any time changes experienced, it is likely also influenced by external factors beyond the scope of the Activity. For example, issues surrounding transportation delays, poor or limited infrastructure, COVID-19 delays, supply chain challenges, among others, can influence the time required to cross borders, influencing the data generated from such an indicator. Only certain Activity interventions were determined by the IP to have had an influence in time reductions for border crossings, including: the use of technology to implement “Paperless Customs” at Puerto Cortés; fostering coordination between Customs and Agriculture at Honduran border entries; improving international transit procedures at El Poy and El Amatillo; and the roof installation at Pedro de Alvarado.

Finally, another indicator — “the reduced costs of border crossing” — directly depends on the data from the time to reduce border crossing indicator, discussed above. Because the time data could not be generated for this Activity, the indicator to assess cost reduction could also not be measured.

3.3.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the ET provides several recommendations for consideration for the current implementation of the RTFB Activity in its last year and for future activity designs to improve interventions to address trade competitiveness.

- Future activities should consider addressing infrastructure challenges or collaborating with complementary activities or initiatives to strengthen infrastructure at border entry points in combination with targeted technical assistance.
- The IP should collaborate with Customs and relevant border agencies to improve internal communications and understanding of Advance Rulings to improve more consistent use and application of Advance Rulings in practice and establish mechanisms to better communicate them through an accessible, searchable electronic database for officials to reference. Such a mechanism could lead to greater consistency with HS classifications and admissibility requirements at border entries to reduce delays and promote a strong enabling environment for trade.
- Indicators measuring time-reductions should be narrowed to cover only what the intervention addressed (i.e., time to register phytosanitary products) rather than broad measures, such as ‘time to cross borders’, to reduce the likely influence of external factors in skewing results and to mitigate challenges around data availability, reliability, and comparability.
- USAID should consider conducting regional analyses at border entries to identify constraints and

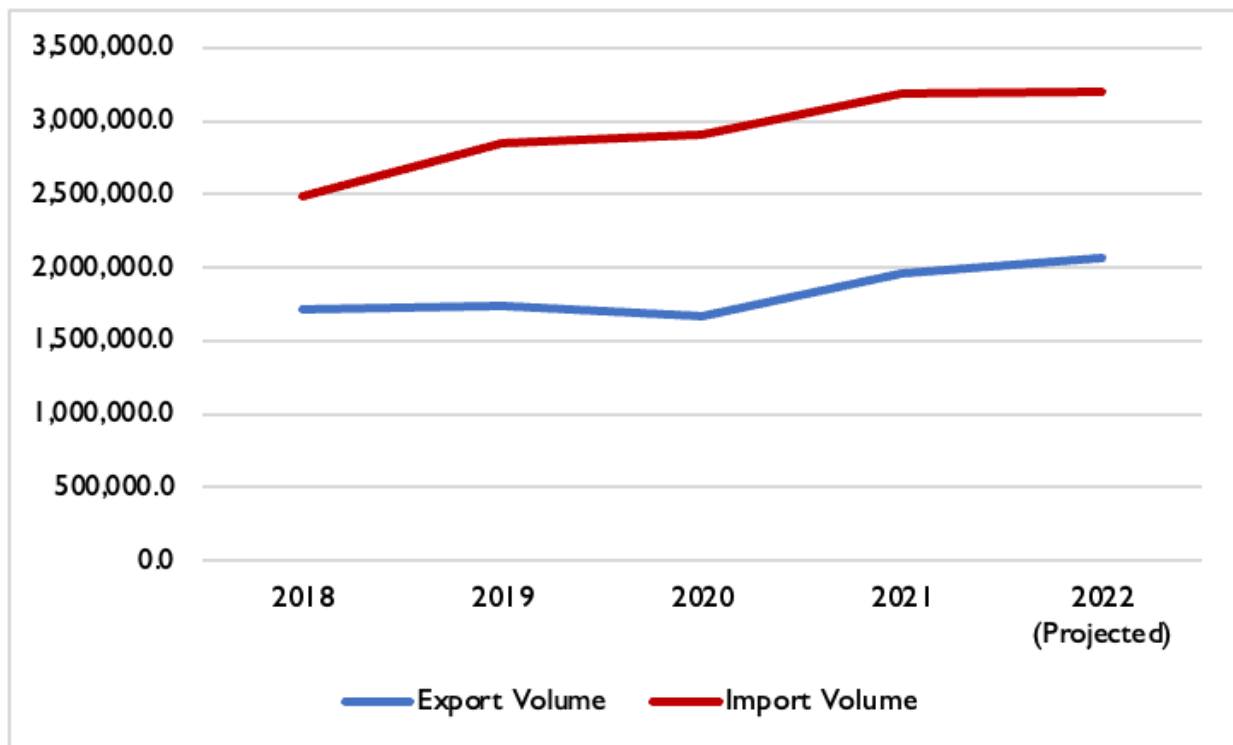
bottlenecks that impede improved logistics operations and use the findings of this analysis to inform future targeted activity interventions and establish baseline metrics for a future activity MEL plan to monitor progress.

3.4 EQ4 TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE GROWTH OF CROSS-BORDER TRADE IN THE CENTRAL AMERICAN REGION CHANGED SINCE 2018? HOW HAS RTFB ASSISTANCE CONTRIBUTED TO GROWTH IN CROSS-BORDER TRADE IN THE REGION?

3.4.1 EQ4, FINDING 1: EXTERNAL FACTORS, SUCH AS COVID-19, INFLATION, AND SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS HAVE INFLUENCED REGIONAL GROWTH IN CROSS-BORDER TRADE SINCE 2018.

Available data on regional trade (2018-2019 from UN Comtrade) and (2018-2021 from SIECA) indicates a reduction in volume of exports during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in El Salvador (2020), but since El Salvador has experienced general increases in trade (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: EL SALVADOR IMPORT / EXPORT TRADE VOLUMES 2018-2022



Source: SIECA, 2022.

However, it is unclear what is influencing or driving these increases worldwide.¹⁷ For example, there is speculation that trade figures could be influenced or driven by inflation, pent up consumer demand, and products related to the response to the pandemic, such as medication and personal protection equipment (PPE). There is also a delay in reporting of UN Comtrade data from the three countries, as the latest available data is from 2019. There is a high level of uncertainty and cost adjustments that international trade has been facing worldwide. One key learning resulting from such uncertainty and influence of COVID-19 is the level to which international markets are interconnected and similarly affected by economic setbacks induced by the pandemic.

3.4.2 EQ4, FINDING 2: PRIVATE SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS NOTED A LACK OF AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR TRADE, PARTICULARLY IN EL SALVADOR.

Several stakeholders from private sector companies noted inconsistent application of trade enforcement of the HS laws and regulations, which ultimately leads to a poor trade-enabling environment, specifically in El Salvador. Some large companies voiced concerns about this issue during interviews, noting that delays at the border due to poor procedures and adherence to trade enforcement requirements led to frustration and increased costs. Several stakeholders specifically noted this as a key concern and expressed interest in pursuing business elsewhere. One very large multinational in particular noted that it considered pulling out its operations in El Salvador due to this poor enabling environment, and the inconsistent and arbitrary enforcement of trade laws and regulations by Customs and other authorities. For example, a stakeholder representing this company explained that it experienced repeated border delays due to already stamped goods being pulled for physical inspections at the land borders while being X-rayed. This unnecessary step incurred significant time delays in addition to frustration as the company had to work with the respective Embassy and authorities to stop these additional inspections from occurring. This was one example of an arbitrary and unnecessary enforcement step that created a poor enabling environment, causing the company to rethink its strategy in El Salvador. This company operates a regional distribution center in El Salvador, where it generates 5,000 jobs, and generates an additional 35,000 jobs in Central America. Such a move to switch operations to other countries due to poor enabling environments by a large multinational would have a large impact on trade in the region, representing a very possible and detrimental effect the poor enabling environment for trade can have on regional dynamics and growth.

Another major company that provides international transportation, cargo and Customs clearance throughout the Central American region said that it still experiences what it considers to be arbitrary and inconsistent interpretations on admissibility issues and procedures to clear cargo across borders. This harms their operations because customers tend to associate such delays to their poor operations, rather than a challenging trade environment, which can hurt their bottom line.

Other stakeholders in El Salvador also noted the poor trade enabling environment particularly how it impacts the private sector, including the National Association of Private Enterprises (ANEP) members. For example, they explained how the breakdown of communication between the public and private sectors slowed progress with the implementation of the NTFC, which is a requirement of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. One such example is how the NTFC in El Salvador, which is presided over by a representative from MINEC, does not grant CIFACIL members a representative vote.

¹⁷ Peterson, E. "The Coronavirus and International Trade." 2021.

3.4.3 EQ4, FINDING 3: RTFB ASSISTANCE TARGETS LARGER COMPANIES AS DESIGNED, OVERLOOKING POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT SMALLER OR MARGINALIZED ENTERPRISES TO STRENGTHEN CROSS-BORDER TRADE AND PROMOTE GROWTH

USAID and some IP stakeholders observed that the Activity could have been designed to take a more intentional approach to target assistance toward segments of small and medium enterprises or private sector stakeholders representing marginalized groups, such as those owned or operated by women, minorities, or youth. Much of the assistance goes to larger companies and multinationals, representing an area for improvement for future similar Activity designs. Targeting small and medium enterprises for strengthening their capacity for cross-border trade is a key opportunity recognized by governments and practitioners as a means for growth.¹⁸ Other trade initiatives and programming focused on promoting inclusive growth leverage opportunities to provide assistance in the e-commerce space, where women-owned businesses are more prevalent, and where women are able to better navigate normative and structural barriers to participate in domestic, regional, and international trade.¹⁹ Digitizing and digitally connecting women-owned businesses in Central America is a key component of the recent White House “In Her Hands” initiative announced by Vice President Harris in 2022.²⁰ There are opportunities to target women- or other marginalized group-owned businesses in the e-commerce space to provide targeted assistance and capacity building training on relevant trade topics, digitization, and requirements to enter domestic, regional, and international markets to strengthen this component of USAID trade assistance for promoting growth in cross-border trade.

3.4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the ET provides several recommendations for consideration for the current implementation of the RTFB Activity in its last year and for future activity designs to improve interventions to support growth for cross-border trade.

- USAID should consider conducting an in-depth economic regional trade analysis to better understand trade flows in the region since 2020 and identify factors that enable or hinder regional trade post-COVID; and consider using the findings of this analysis to inform future Activity design.
- To mitigate negative outcomes of the current political environment in El Salvador, the IP should work strategically with the NTFC to strengthen relations, communications, and collaboration with the public and private sector members and key Business Unions to collaboratively establish a strong road map of International Trade Facilitation goals and priorities.
- During future activity design, USAID should consider engaging a gender and/or inclusivity specialist with regional and sector expertise in trade to inform design strategies that effectively integrate inclusive approaches to target marginalized groups in promoting trade facilitation and growth in cross-border trade.

¹⁸ Abdulazis Albaz et al. “Unlocking growth in small and medium enterprises”. 2022.; Penelope Naas. “The digital divide: Why SMEs must cross borders.” 2022.

¹⁹ Fernández Ortiz et al. “Can online platforms encourage women-owned firms in international trade? In the case of ConnectAmericas, yes.” 2022.; Barafani, M. et al. “Género y comercio: Una Relación a Distintas Velocidades.” 2022.

²⁰ The United States Government. “FACT SHEET: Vice President Harris Announces New Commitments Supporting Women’s Economic Empowerment in Latin America.” 2022.

3.5 EQ5 WHAT IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT TRADE INTEGRATION AND FACILITATION CAPACITIES INTRODUCED BY RTFB WILL BE SUSTAINED FOLLOWING COMPLETION OF THE ACTIVITY?

3.5.1 EQ5, FINDING 1: WHILE THE IT SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT PROVIDED BY RTFB WERE WELL RECEIVED, STAKEHOLDERS EXPRESSED CONCERNS OVER ITS SUSTAINABILITY.

As described in earlier sections of this report, the digitization of registration and management processes reduced the time required to complete these tasks by relevant border actors and have been very well received by both public and private sector stakeholders. However, although the various IT systems were delivered in tandem with capacity building to facilitate ownership over the respective system maintenance, beneficiaries and IP stakeholders shared concerns that these systems are quickly outdated and in need of updates to newer versions, which requires both funding resources and additional capacity building beyond what the Activity could provide.

There is a concern that the systems will remain in place or stored in government facilities and not be useful beyond the Activity once they become outdated. Outdated systems no longer have the capacity to meet trade growth needs; to be intraoperative with changes to technologies, the relevant border agency officials need to be able to share and communicate with data. Stakeholders in Guatemala shared that understanding budget management plays an essential role, as there are separate budgets required for both the installment of the technology and its upkeep and maintenance.

Such challenges pose implications for the potential sustainability of gains made under RTFB. First, some officials may not “respect” the new systems or new administrations may not understand how certain systems, policies, and procedures came into place and therefore deprioritize them, both with funding and capacity. Some stakeholders observed that Customs and other government officials under existing and potentially new administrations often lack the knowledge and context of motivations or reasoning to implement such IT improvements, thinking they are driven from USAID and the RTFB Activity instead of from international agreements signed at the regional (deep integration, Customs Union, Central American Common Market) or multilateral level (DR-CAFTA, WTO TFA); WCO (SAFE and Revised Kyoto Convention).

Also, government officials from different agencies in all three countries cited the limitations they have with sufficient human resources to maintain these IT systems means that some of the extensive amount of time required to keep the gains sustainable is shifted to different work as priorities change.

Finally, stakeholders noted additional needs for IT support to optimize the advancements made under RTFB assistance. For example, Honduras Customs officials at Puerto Cortés identified a need for more handheld communication devices, as they often are not able to provide them to all the officials who need them at the same time. Several other stakeholders noted that there is a need to address cybersecurity and data privacy procedures when handling sensitive data for regional trade, such as the data generated from RFID technology. Such areas were not addressed by the Activity assistance and could strengthen the sustainability of IT systems use in future activities.

3.5.2 EQ5, FINDING 2: STAKEHOLDERS CONSISTENTLY REPORTED THE NEED FOR MORE STRATEGIC, TARGETED, AND MORE FREQUENT COMMUNICATION BY THE ACTIVITY

Several public and private sector stakeholders in all three countries shared that they did not receive regular communications about the Activity's interventions, updates, or new information. They compared this Activity's communications to others in the region and noted that they were not always informed about ongoing interventions or projects related to the Activity. It is possible that the Activity was sharing regular updates, but just not through channels that these stakeholders frequently used to receive information. Stakeholders reflected that they would have appreciated more communications from the Activity about updates and new information and would have liked a better mechanism to engage with Activity staff to ask questions or request additional information.

3.5.3 EQ5, FINDING 3: HIGH RATES OF STAFF TURNOVER IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR IS A CHALLENGE FOR ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION AND A CONCERN FOR LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF ACTIVITY ACHIEVEMENTS

A common challenge reported by multiple stakeholders is the frequent turnover of public sector staff in key decision-making and leadership positions, which has significant impact on the ability of USAID and the IP to continue engagements and interventions as planned and on the overall sustainability and continuity of advances made under the RTFB Activity. In Guatemala, the government has recently faced changes in authorities in the Ministry of Economy; not only did the minister change, but so did five vice-ministers. Guatemala will also have presidential elections next year for potentially full administration changes.

In 2019, El Salvador experienced a total change in government that led to a total pause on programs related to foreign assistance and policy while they reviewed current programming against new national priorities and agendas, which yielded significant implications for trade activities, described throughout this report.

Recently in Honduras, the Customs administration under the newly elected President brought in a new Director General, key port administrators, and other management and technical staff, including to the ports of Puerto Cortés and El Amatillo. These new Administrators, including those consulted for this evaluation, were very forthcoming that they were new in their positions and had a lot to learn. Existing Customs officials were concerned that they would be replaced soon, suggesting more turnover is to be expected.

Any change in leadership or key decision-making positions in the public sector always incurs delays — sometimes significant — in continuing projects and interventions, regardless of the stage at which the intervention was operating at the time of the administration changes. This high turnover in public sector staff at different levels requires new efforts and processes to secure the approval and buy-in of new leadership, who may not want to continue programs or interventions started under previous administrations or may lack similar political priorities to want to continue such programs. There is the potential for questioning of and/or the rejection of former administration priorities, procedures and processes among new public sector staff. For example, El Salvador's delayed its decision to engage in the deep integration and Customs process with Guatemala, and Honduras was undoubtedly impacted by a change in government and the resulting change in personnel.

There is also the potential for an initial distrust of initiatives implemented by former administrations by incoming government staff who may lack the contextual understanding that these initiatives are not merely those of the former governments but driven by international agreements and best practices for improving regional integration, trade facilitation, and border management. This can occur for those in Customs

Administration or other ministries as well. This can impact sustainability because initiatives can either represent a lower priority for new officials or be terminated as they might not align with new political priorities or initiatives.

Specific to the Activity interventions, frequent turnover of public sector stakeholders can yield a loss of institutional knowledge, skills, and capacity gained from the RTFB assistance, a general concern for sustainability if these processes and procedures are not carried forth from previous to incoming administrations.

3.5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the ET provides several recommendations for consideration for the current implementation of the RTFB Activity in its last year and for future activity designs to improve the activity interventions' likelihood of sustainable outcomes and impacts.

- As part of a Risk Management system, the IP should integrate an aggressive, high-touch, and prepared communication strategy targeted at new officials during periods of turnover to reach new stakeholders quickly and get them up to speed on relevant trade topics as well as ongoing or planned Activity interventions.
- The current IP could strengthen communication strategies with stakeholders to be higher touch and leverage an omnichannel approach as different stakeholders have specific preferences for receiving information. In addition to those already in the Activity's communications strategy,²¹ such channels can include LinkedIn, Twitter, email campaigns, printed materials, and others, to routinely share Activity updates, new initiatives, relevant trade information, global updates on trade, and other topics. Embedded in the communications strategy should be a clearly articulated mechanism for stakeholders to ask questions, request additional information, and engage with Activity staff.
- The current and future IPs should integrate and implement stronger Risk Management systems for institutional governance practices to navigate the myriad challenges of constant counterpart staff turnover in order to reduce and mitigate project delays or potential pivots due to new counterparts' outright rejection of ongoing interventions.
- Establishing memoranda of understanding (MOU) and signed agreements of interventions and activities with public and private sector stakeholders has been a useful practice to mitigate delays and challenges associated with staff turnover and should be considered by the current and future IPs as a key practice moving forward.

3.6 ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

While this evaluation sought to answer the five EQs, it also learned of best practices and areas for improvement from all stakeholders regarding how the Activity has been managed and delivered in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This section presents the associated findings and recommendations.

²¹ Nathan Associates, Inc. "Communications Strategy." 2020.

3.6.1 EQ6, FINDING 1: COMPARED TO HONDURAS AND GUATEMALA, A COMPLEX POLITICAL AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT IN EL SALVADOR RESULTED IN CHALLENGES, REQUIRED PIVOTS, AND DELAYS TO ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION.

Particularly in El Salvador, the RTFB Activity and IP experienced difficulty in working with key counterpart agencies, such as the DGA, who were not amenable to the Activity's objectives after the change in government in 2019. As one key example already referenced throughout the report, El Salvador did not rejoin the Custom Union as originally planned, which required significant Activity pivots in El Salvador and impacted the Activity's implementation region wide.

The difficult relationship between the Activity and Customs led to limited frequency, quality, and types of communications between the Activity and Customs, and limited the types of interventions the Activity was able to implement in El Salvador. To continue working to achieve the Activity's designed objectives, the IP had to work through MINEC and other amenable government agencies, in some cases, on issues that were related to Customs and other border management counterparts.

Public sector stakeholders in El Salvador also increasingly required stronger oversight and involvement in the hiring and approval of the Activity's consultants to deliver capacity building and technical assistance. Such oversight often led to current consultants being terminated or delays in identifying and hiring consultants to deliver the planned interventions. Reasons for termination or delays often surrounded finding consultants with the right balance of regional or country-specific expertise and experience, but without ties or experience working in previous administrations. Sometimes this led to the hiring of consultants with the wrong or poor-quality expertise, but right experience in that they were not affiliated with previous administrations. Public sector stakeholders consulted for this evaluation shared different instances where they had requested consultant changes, because, in some cases, a consultant had ties to previous administrations or would reference outdated policies from previous administrations.

Private sector stakeholders and those receiving assistance from the Activity expressed frustration with the change in consultants, which were often abrupt and unannounced. These stakeholders did not understand the reason behind the changes and perceived them negatively, as if they were due to a lack of interest in supporting them. This was a major frustration in the Activity delivery shared by private sector stakeholders.

Overall, this challenge led to many delays in the implementation of Activity's interventions and poor confidence among stakeholders in the delivery of assistance.

3.6.2 EQ6, FINDING 2: WHILE MANY OPERATIONAL AND EXTERNAL CHALLENGES LED TO DELAYS IN THE ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE OR CHANGED THE ACTIVITY'S ORIGINAL OBJECTIVES, USAID AND THE IP WERE BOTH VERY FLEXIBLE TO ADAPT AS NEEDED.

Several external challenges affected the timely implementation of the Activity as originally designed. First, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 required a total shift in the working environment of the IP staff, counterparts and private sector stakeholders, and engagement between the two to continue implementation of the Activity. IP and USAID staff observed that the Chief of Party (COP) did an excellent job at managing this shift, while acknowledging that it did inevitably lead to delays in when and how interventions were implemented.

Additionally, between 2019 and 2020, the U.S. Administration withheld or reallocated funding from the NCA region,²² which delayed Activity implementation and induced uncertainty in the future of the Activity implementation during the 14-month period. This was cited as a key challenge affecting timelines of Activity implementation. However, IP staff noted that USAID was extremely supportive, flexible, and proactive in managing this challenge with the IP.

Finally, stakeholders noted that there were varying levels of involvement and engagement from regional Mission staff to support the Activity. In addition to technical assistance and direction, USAID support was critical in engaging with government counterparts to facilitate buy-in into Activity interventions.

3.6.3 EQ6, FINDING 3: BALANCING TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE FOR IP STAFF LEADERSHIP WAS IDENTIFIED AS AN AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT IN FUTURE ACTIVITY DESIGN

Several IP and USAID staff stakeholders observed that in hindsight, certain key positions leading the Activity lacked an optimal balance between technical expertise and management skills. In some cases, this led to internal frustrations for IP staff to fulfill their roles. For example, staff that interact heavily with government counterparts should have strong technical expertise as a priority over management experience, and conversely, staff managing country offices should have strong project management experience as a priority over technical expertise. These observations were only shared from IP and USAID staff and were not raised by public or private sector stakeholders.

3.6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the ET provides some recommendations for consideration for future activity designs to improve activity management and implementation.

- When designing future regional activities, the Mission should ensure buy-in from regional missions and outline plans for support/active participation from regional missions, particularly for projects with politically sensitive interventions, like cross-border trade.
- In future activity staffing plans, USAID and the IP consider balancing technical and regional expertise with project management experience for key staff managing country offices or engaging frequently with political counterparts.

²² GAO. "Northern Triangle of Central America: The 2019 Suspension and Reprogramming of U.S. Funding Adversely Affected Assistance Projects." 2021.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation of the RTFB Activity implemented in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras was based on secondary reports, Activity performance data, 45 stakeholder consultations, and three direct observations at port visits. Although this evaluation was not experimentally designed nor intended to attribute impact from RTFB assistance, it did provide high-level lessons learned for strengths of the Activity's design and interventions and identified areas for improvement in both current implementation and future activity designs.

This evaluation concludes that the Activity had many strengths in addressing and contributing to improved regional economic integration, supporting public capacities for trade facilitation, strengthening competitiveness and potential for cross-border trade, and in ensuring the sustainability of progress made under the Activity. In general, the IP and USAID were responsive and flexible in adapting the Activity's approaches and interventions to navigate a complex working environment and generally meet stakeholders' needs.

Overall, it was clear from this evaluation that the assistance provided on the IT systems and associated capacity building training was well received by public and private sector stakeholders in all three NCA countries. The provision of hardware and technological solutions were key contributions of the Activity and were cited as needed improvements with high likelihood of sustainable use. For example, the Director General of Customs (DGA) in El Salvador specifically mentioned that it found aspects of the IT and technological solutions particularly helpful. She also said that this is an area that they see as being promising to help make the RFTB Activity's successes sustainable and where they would like to continue collaboration with USAID. The improved IT systems and associated capacity building had cross-cutting contributions to regional integration, improving public capacity for improved trade facilitation, and strengthening competitiveness for cross-border trade.

Specifically, assistance to the AEO program was also noted as particularly helpful for improving risk management strategies and strengthening trade competitiveness, even though this assistance was mitigated due to existing challenges surrounding the mutual recognition of the AEO. The "gestores" or promoters of the AEO program were generally recognized for being knowledgeable and helpful. In addition, the AEO certification training and assistance programs promoted by COEXPORT in El Salvador and the Cortés Chamber of Commerce in Honduras and undertaken were well received by the companies, which also highlighted various benefits that accrue to participating companies for improving competitiveness for cross-border trade.

Finally, with respect to the Activity's overall management and implementation, stakeholders observed that both USAID and the IP were able to sufficiently navigate and adapt to ongoing external challenges posed by COVID-19, USG Administration policy changes, a complex working and political environment in El Salvador, and other political challenges throughout the region. The technical assistance provided by the Activity was generally well received and stakeholders observed that the various forms of assistance helped to promote trade competitiveness and regional integration in the three target countries.

However, while the Activity demonstrated key strengths described above, this evaluation identified several key areas for improvement. First, although improved IT systems and assistance were strong components of this Activity, there are additional areas for improvement to ensure continued maintenance and

sustainability of these IT systems. Namely, strategies need to be in place to ensure that counterparts are able to maintain and update the IT systems with both human and financial resources, specifically RFID. Additional technical assistance surrounding cybersecurity, data privacy and protection, and other matters are also areas to consider for future IT support.

Second, the Activity's communications strategy could be improved to integrate higher touch updates to all stakeholders using omnichannel approaches and a feedback mechanism to allow stakeholders to ask questions or receive additional information about ongoing initiatives, trade concepts, implementation, or general updates. The Activity could also strengthen its capacity building approaches to implement targeted capacity building and training for internal communications that helps relevant private and public sector stakeholders better understand key international, bilateral, regional, and multilateral agreements and policies and how they link to underpinnings of the RFTB objectives.

Although infrastructure development was not a key focus of this Activity, limitations to or poor infrastructure, particularly at border entry points, impede or mitigate any progress made via technical assistance and capacity building delivered by the Activity. Future activity designs should consider how to either directly support infrastructure development in tandem with targeted technical assistance and capacity building efforts or should identify complementary activities or initiatives to leverage assistance provided to optimize the impact.

The Activity was implemented under a complex political and working environment in El Salvador which led to various challenges and delays in effective intervention implementation. Notably, this complex environment required counterparts in El Salvador to sign off on all consultants hired to deliver technical assistance, which created not only delays for Activity staff but also resulted in frustration and miscommunications on behalf of stakeholders who did not understand the reason behind abrupt changes in consultants. Additionally, government counterparts did not want consultants with ties to former administrations to be hired, which reduced the pool of qualified experts to deliver assistance, sometimes resulting in consultants without the correct or sufficient quality experience and expertise to engage with stakeholders. Although stakeholders in general perceived that the IP effectively navigated and pivoted in response to external challenges, this is an area for improvement to implement more proactive strategies to strengthen this response to predictable challenges, such as change in governments or administrations.

In conclusion, the RFTB Activity has implemented several interventions to support trade competitiveness and regional integration in the NCA countries. While this evaluation was not designed nor intended to make definitive statements of attribution, it did triangulate and synthesize evidence generated from stakeholder feedback and perceptions, observations, and secondary data to identify what is working well and areas for improvement to reach the Activity's stated goals. Overall, the Activity's direct technical assistance and capacity building support for strengthened IT systems has yielded multifaceted outcomes. It has contributed to improved regional economic integration, public capacity for improved trade facilitation, and increased trade competitiveness, by contributing to quicker registration and approval processes, increasing the availability and reliability of information in a digitized format, increasing stakeholders' ability to share information quicker, facilitating permit acquisition for imports and exports, reducing opportunities for corruption, and reducing time delays and challenges at the border points of entries for those engaged in trade. Overall, the Activity worked well to navigate multiple external challenges while meeting its objectives. Despite such progress, there are several areas for improvement to consider in future activity design.

ANNEX A: SCOPE OF WORK

LEAP III ACTIVITY AUTHORIZATION REQUEST

Contract Title: LEAP III: Learning, Evaluation, and Analysis Project
Contract Number: GS-10F-083CA / 7200AA18M0004
Activity Number: 1009.1079
Submitted: June 23, 2022
Contractor: Integra Government Services International LLC
1156 15th Street, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005
USAID COR: Katie Qutub – kqutub@usaid.gov

I. BACKGROUND

The Regional Trade Facilitation and Border Management Activity (hereinafter referred to as “RTFB”) is a five-year activity that began in July 2018 and will end in July 2023. RTFB seeks to improve regional trade efficiency in the northern Central American countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala by reducing time and costs of cross-border trade and providing public- and private-sector institutions with the necessary capacity to achieve greater trade competitiveness in the region. By enhancing regional integration and improving trade facilitation, the Project seeks to increase cross-border trade and thus contribute to broad-based economic growth in the region.

2. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this mid-term evaluation is to determine 1) which RTFB interventions are perceived as most effective for enhancing regional trade integration, and why; 2) which interventions are perceived as most effective for increasing regional trade competitiveness, and why; and 3) whether RTFB interventions have contributed to overall regional economic growth. The Mission will use evaluation findings to inform adaptive management during the remaining life of the project as well as design of future trade interventions.

The target audience for this evaluation includes stakeholders in the USAID/Central America (ECAM) regional Mission, in bilateral Missions in the region, and at Nathan Associates Inc. (Nathan), who leads implementation of RTFB. Interested actors in the ECAM Mission may include Mission leadership, the Economic Growth and Education Office (EGE), the Regional Office of Acquisition and Assistance (ROAA), and the Regional Program Office (RPO). Other USAID audiences may include the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL); the Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation/Center for Economics and Market Development; and the Northern Triangle Task Force. External audiences may include private-sector beneficiaries; representatives of the Governments of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras; the Central American Economic Integration Secretariat (SIECA); and other international donors working on issues of economic competitiveness and productivity.

Findings from this evaluation may help fill knowledge gaps and contribute to broader USAID Agency-level learning. The USAID/ECAM RDCS 2015-2019 Learning Plan includes the following learning questions relevant to this evaluation:

1. Are there institutional or behavioral changes in each country’s government institutions responsible for trade?
2. To what extent are institutional or behavioral changes in each country’s central government institutions responsible for international trade ensuring long-term sustainability of trade facilitation have been achieved?

3. TECHNICAL APPROACH

The evaluation team will conduct a non-experimental mixed-methods evaluation that combines a comprehensive, rigorous analysis of existing quantitative data with qualitative techniques designed to elicit primary data from a wide range of counterparts, partners, beneficiaries, and stakeholders.

To reach quality data and findings the evaluation team will conduct: 1) a desk review of relevant activity documents provided by USAID and relevant stakeholders; 2) review of activity performance monitoring and context data; 3) key informant interviews and/or group discussions with key stakeholders; and 4) direct observation through site visits. Primary qualitative data collection will incorporate collaboration and dialogue among participating respondents to ensure all participants' perspectives and feedback are collected.

The evaluation will address the following evaluation questions, which seek to test RTFB's Development Hypothesis and identify enabling conditions and challenges to achieve the Activity's desired outcomes:

1. To what extent has economic integration for cross-border trade in Central America been strengthened since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to these changes?
2. To what degree have public institutions²³ capacities changed to facilitate/expedite cross-border trade since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to these changes?
3. To what extent has the trade competitiveness of Central American businesses in international markets changed since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to this change?
4. To what extent has the growth of cross-border trade in the Central American region changed since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to growth in cross-border trade in the region?
5. What is the likelihood that trade integration and facilitation capacities introduced by RTFB will be sustained following completion of the activity?

3.1 DESK REVIEW

USAID will provide the Evaluation Team with all relevant activity documents, including relevant strategy documents; the Activity contract and all amendments to the contract; activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan; pre-implementation assessments; annual work plans; quarterly and annual performance reports and performance data; and any other assessments, studies, or evaluations conducted by the implementing partner.

The Evaluation Team will review these documents and other relevant literature as outlined in the SOW in preparation for the initial team planning meetings and before meeting with local stakeholders for interviews. The Evaluation Team will also conduct its own literature review and create a Review Matrix to be delivered to USAID as part of the final Evaluation Report, which indicates how key information extracted from reviewed documents and other methodologies link to each evaluation question.

²³ These public institutions include the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Economy, Customs, Ministry of Health, and National Directorate of Medicines in El Salvador, SENASA, Customs, SDE (Ministry of Economy) in Honduras, and the Ministry of Health and Customs in Guatemala.

3.2 PERFORMANCE MONITORING ANALYSIS

RTFB has an Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan and collects data on several standard and custom indicators as part of activity implementation. This monitoring data is an important data source for measuring progress toward project objectives and outcomes. USAID and/or the Implementing Partner will provide the LEAP III Evaluation Team with this performance monitoring data. The LEAP III Evaluation Team will analyze this performance data using descriptive analytic techniques to inform the research questions. Context data will also be considered to the extent possible to inform and explain evaluation findings.²⁴

3.3 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

During fieldwork, the LEAP III ET will conduct semi-structured key informant interviews or small group interviews with identified stakeholders and beneficiaries, including but not limited to the following groups:

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GROUPS	
STAKEHOLDERS	BENEFICIARIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key USAID/El Salvador staff (Contracting Officer’s Representative, EGE Backstops in RPO, EGE Management)²⁵ • Nathan Associates RTFB staff • Relevant USAID staff in Washington D.C. (e.g., LAC, etc.) • Other donors assisting with trade facilitation, such as the World Bank, IDB, and IMF • Other USG agencies that may provide insight into USAID programmatic impacts, such as US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), US Department of Agriculture (USDA), and US Department of Commerce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Import and export companies • Customs Brokers and Freight Forwarders • Transportation companies including truckers • Government entities in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Ministries of Economy, Registration Government entities, Customs Authorities, Ministries of Agriculture) • SIECA • National Trade Facilitation Committees in El Salvador and Honduras • Local associations such as COEXPORT and CIFACIL in El Salvador and AGEXPORT and CIG in Guatemala

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted in-person unless the stakeholder requests a remote interview option or is located outside of the fieldwork areas. Key stakeholders and beneficiaries

²⁴ Examples of relevant context indicators for this evaluation include macroeconomic data from the Central Bank, trade-related data provided by SIECA, World Bank’s Doing Business Report, and the World Economic Forum’s World Competitiveness Report. The Evaluation Team is encouraged to use national and regional context data as needed to supplement its analysis.

²⁵ Key USAID/Guatemala and USAID/Honduras staff will also be considered for interviews if deemed appropriate and depending on the level involvement in the Activity.

will be identified and agreed upon in collaboration with the LEAP III ET and USAID/El Salvador after finalization of this AAR and during the Evaluation Plan design process. Once selected, the LEAP III ET team will begin reaching out to the interviewees to schedule their interviews. The interviews will be scheduled during the field work in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The number of interviews will be sufficient to capture the responses of all key categories of stakeholders/beneficiaries, recognizing budget limitations, estimated at 30 stakeholders consulted in El Salvador and 15 stakeholders consulted in Guatemala and Honduras, respectively.

Stakeholders will be purposively sampled based on the stakeholders' role. Beneficiaries will be randomly selected from a list of potential beneficiaries provided to the LEAP III ET from USAID and the IP (Nathan). The ET will ensure that both men, women, and stakeholders from vulnerable groups are represented in the qualitative sample.

Stakeholders may be grouped into group interviews depending on the feasibility of logistics, preference of stakeholders, and stakeholder role. All interviews will be conducted in line with best practices for conducting both remote and in-person qualitative data collection by trained interviewers. Interviewers will follow a semi-structure interview guide and will take diligent summary notes to serve as the raw qualitative data. Interviews will be conducted in the preferred language of the respondent, either English or Spanish.

3.4 DIRECT OBSERVATION

During field work, the LEAP III ET will identify relevant opportunities for direct observation, in consultation with USAID/El Salvador and RTFB staff. The structured sampling plan for selecting these opportunities will be designed during the Evaluation Plan design process but will ensure that these relevant opportunities occur during the time period of field work in each country. Specific intervention sites for direct observation will include, at a minimum, the following:

- Puerto Acajutla in El Salvador
- Pedro de Alvarado border in Guatemala
- Puerto Cortes and El Amatillo Border in Honduras

Other such sites may include events hosted or sponsored by RTFB during fieldwork. The IP will provide the LEAP III ET a list of such events after finalization of this AAR and during the Evaluation Plan design process to enable the ET to identify and select which events will be attended during field work.

A structured observation guide will be developed by the LEAP III ET to ensure the direct observation activities inform the Evaluation Questions.

3.5 ANALYTIC APPROACH

The ET will use appropriate analytic techniques to analyze and triangulate the gathered secondary and primary quantitative and qualitative data to inform an evidence-based response to each evaluation question. Secondary quantitative data will likely be analyzed using appropriate descriptive statistical techniques. Secondary qualitative and quantitative data collected during the desk review phase will be analyzed using content analysis approaches to extract and synthesize relevant information that informs the evaluation questions and/or triangulates other sources of

data. Finally, primary qualitative data collected during the interviews and direct observation will use the detailed notes as the raw data for analysis and will be analyzed using content and thematic qualitative analytic techniques. Data will be disaggregated by gender or other socioeconomic characteristics as appropriate throughout the analysis. The ET will use relevant software to enable qualitative data analysis, such as NVIVO, and quantitative analysis, such as Microsoft Excel or R. All primary data collection will follow USAID guidance and best practices for ethical data collection procedures.

3.6 DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

All primary data collected as part of this evaluation will be securely stored in a Google Drive folder only accessible to the LEAP III team. For interviews, the interviewer and/or notetaker will take detailed summary notes of each interview and submit these notes to the Google Folder to serve as the raw qualitative data from interviews. For direct observation, the observers will take detailed observation notes and submit these to the Google Folder to serve as the raw qualitative observational data. The primary data files will not be shared beyond the LEAP III team to protect personally identifiable information of respondents and to ensure the confidentiality of their responses. All primary data will be collected following the best practices for ethical qualitative data collection to ensure voluntary consent is received from all respondents to participate in the interviews.

4. TASKS AND DELIVERABLES

The LEAP III team proposes the following tasks and deliverables:

4.1 DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTIVITY AUTHORIZATION REQUEST

Based on initial conversations with the EL Salvador Mission, the LEAP III team will provide an AAR for review, feedback, and approval (i.e., this document). This AAR outlines the background, technical approach, staffing plan, anticipated timeline, as well as the budget for this performance evaluation. The AAR serves as a working document and can be refined and edited per the Mission's comments and feedback. We request USAID approval within one week of receipt of this AAR.

4.2 EVALUATION PLAN

The ET will draft and complete an Evaluation Plan within 14 working days after USAID approval of this AAR, pending receipt of a list of potential stakeholders and beneficiaries from USAID/EI Salvador and the IP (Nathan). USAID will receive the Evaluation Plan via electronic mail and provide comments no later than 5 working days after receiving the document. As part of the process to draft the Evaluation Plan, USAID/EI Salvador and the IP (Nathan) will provide the ET with a list of potential stakeholders and their contact information, a list of potential beneficiaries and their contact information, and a list of potential events or opportunities for site visits that the ET can complete during the fieldwork period. The Evaluation Plan will include the following sections: 1) evaluation background, 2) technical approach, 3) analysis plan, 4) data collection plan including the identified sample selection and scheduled site observations, 5) data management plan, 6) data collection protocols for key informant interviews and structured observations, and 7) evaluation team composition and roles.

4.3 DESK REVIEW

As a result of the Desk Review completed by the ET, the ET will create a Review Matrix to be delivered to USAID as part of the final Evaluation Report. This Review Matrix will indicate how key information was extracted from reviewed documents and other methodologies link to each evaluation question.

4.4 PRE-FIELDWORK KICK-OFF BRIEFING

The ET will deliver a Kick-Off Briefing the first day they are in country to present the evaluation plan. This will provide USAID and the Implementing Partner with a briefing on the evaluation data collection plan along with an opportunity collaborate on the evaluation approach.

4.5 FIELD WORK AND PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

Members of the ET will travel to El Salvador to collect primary data from key stakeholders and to meet with members of the USAID/El Salvador Mission staff. The ET will travel to San Salvador during the weeks of July 18 to July 30. Outside of the core ET travelling to El Salvador, there will be two local consultants, one in Honduras and one in Guatemala, to conduct the in-person field work and data collection in each country respectively. The data collection in Honduras and Guatemala will run concurrently with the data collection in El Salvador.

During field work, the ET will collect primary data from semi-structured key informant or group interviews with purposively sampled stakeholders. Detailed summary notes of the interviews will serve as the basis for the raw qualitative data for analysis. The ET will also conduct site visits of purposively sampled locations at specific times to observe activity interventions and to triangulate other sources of data to inform the evaluation questions. Structured observation notes will serve as the raw observational data for analysis.

4.6 VALIDATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS WORKSHOPS²⁶

The LEAP III ET will validate findings, conclusions, and recommendations with USAID and/or other relevant stakeholders (including the IP) during a Recommendations Workshop to ensure recommendations are evidence-based, actionable, practical, and specific. Inputs provided from the Mission, Nathan, and other stakeholders during the Recommendations Workshop will supplement learning from the field and strengthen final recommendations in the report. The Evaluation Team proposes to hold one virtual Recommendations Workshop that will enable stakeholders based in the US, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala to participate in a facilitated discussion and share structured feedback. The LEAP III ET will corroborate inputs before incorporating them into findings, and outputs of the Recommendations Workshop will be treated as data and properly documented to have a record of the change. The LEAP III ET has ultimate discretion over final recommendations.

²⁶ LEAP III proposes to conduct a Validation and Recommendations workshop as a useful mechanism to present preliminary findings, conclusions, and recommendations to solicit broader feedback from a wider range of stakeholders and to validate findings prior to drafting the final report.

4.7 DRAFT AND FINAL REPORT²⁷

Based off the secondary and primary data analysis and integration of feedback from the Recommendations Workshop, the LEAP III ET will draft the Final Report. An outline of this report will be agreed upon with the Mission prior to drafting the report. LEAP III will submit the draft report to USAID for written feedback and comments prior to the presentation of findings to the broader USAID team.

Within 10 days of receiving USAID written feedback and comments on the draft report and integrating feedback from the USAID presentation, LEAP III will address feedback and finalize the report.

4.8 FINAL FINDINGS PRESENTATION

The LEAP III ET will present findings, conclusions, and recommendations (with a slide deck) to USAID staff and any other stakeholders that USAID considers relevant via a virtual presentation format. Depending on the audience, the presentation may take place in English or Spanish. The presentation will take place no later than 100 calendar days after the starting date of the evaluation. The relevant team members will be present for the final presentation, particularly depending on whether the presentation is held in Spanish or English. The LEAP III ET will upload the final presentation to the DEC and submit an electronic copy of the final presentation to the COR of this evaluation.

4.9 ONE-PAGE BRIEF

Upon completion of the final report and final findings presentation, the ET will provide a one-page summary of the evaluation purpose, findings, conclusions, and recommendations to USAID/EI Salvador. This will be prepared in English, Spanish, and in PDF format.

5. STAFFING PLAN

TEAM LEAD / MEL EXPERT, SARAH EISSLER

Dr. Sarah Eissler, PhD, will serve as the Team Lead for this evaluation. She will take responsibility for the design of the evaluation, data collection and analysis, and reporting of findings. She will lead meetings both internally and out-facing with the client, and lead any presentation of findings. Ms. Eissler will also lead the drafting of the final evaluation report.

Ms. Eissler is an independent consultant with over eight years' experience of mixed-methods evaluation in the social sciences, including work on several USAID evaluations. She has subject matter expertise in gender and women's empowerment; agricultural value chains; and environmental and climate change. Her evaluation skills include process, performance, and impact evaluations; program and project assessments; mixed- and multi-method research designs; quantitative and qualitative analysis methodologies; quantitative and qualitative data management; and enumerator training. Her field experience includes qualitative impact evaluations for IFPRI on agricultural programs in Benin, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, and Nigeria from 2018-22; and conducting

²⁷ The SOW requested an MEL Systems Assessment to this activity. This aspect of the Activity has been removed from the AAR and deliverables due to lack of budget.

mixed-methods research for Feed the Future activities in Indonesia and Vietnam in 2017. In 2021, she conducted a realist synthesis evidence review with colleagues from IFPRI to assess available evidence for advancing women's empowerment in agricultural value chains for the UN Food Systems Summit. This work was published at the UN Food Systems Summit, IFPRI Discussion Paper series, and upcoming at the Journal of Global Food Security. In 2019, Sarah designed trainings on resilience for the Crop Improvement Innovation Lab with Cultural Practice LLC; and in 2020, she co-led a program review of Conservation International's Gender Program. Her software capabilities include SPSS, SAS, NVIVO, and CommCare, among others.

Sarah's current and past work under Integra's LEAP III contract include: the Private Sector Landscape Analysis (PSLA) for USAID/Egypt; the mid-term evaluation of Partnering for Acceleration of Entrepreneurship (PACE) Initiative; a portfolio review of the Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative; a review of the Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) portfolio; data analysis for the US-SEGA evaluation; and support on the USAID/Ukraine CEP program. She has also conducted remote gender assessments for USAID activities in Kyrgyzstan, Bosnia, and Burundi. Sarah holds a PhD in Rural Sociology and dual M.S. degrees in Rural Sociology and International Agriculture and Development from Penn State University. Her work has been published in several journals, including *Global Environmental Change*, *Agriculture, Food Security and Community Development*, *Global Food Security*, *Sustainable Finance and Investment*, and *Development and Change*.

TRADE FACILITATION EXPERT, ANTHONY CAMBAS

Mr. Anthony Cambas will serve as the Trade Facilitation Expert for this evaluation. He will take responsibility for providing advice and expertise concerning the technical aspects of trade facilitation processes and its indicators. He will work with the Team Lead in planning the evaluation, conducting key informant interviews, collecting and analyzing data, and drafting the final reports and out briefs.

Mr. Cambas has extensive experience in International Trade Facilitation and knowledge of the LAC region – lending over 20 years of experience to this evaluation. Notably, since 2012 Mr. Cambas serves as the Director of the Wes Watkins Center for International Trade and Development and Director of the International Trade Center at Oklahoma State University where he conducts extensive research on international trade markets and analyzes global data on trade flows and foreign direct investments. Additionally, Mr. Cambas has over two decades experience as a Senior International Trade and Customs Advisor/Expert, having advised in 25 countries, he has focused a lot of time in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Specifically, Mr. Cambas served as the Chief of Party at Booz Allen Hamilton for the USAID funded project in El Salvador – Customs and Business Environment that Promotes Commerce and Investment.

Mr. Cambas has a Master's Degree in International Customs Law and Administration, is a U.S. licensed Customs Broker, and Certified Customs Specialist. Additionally, he is fluent in both English and Spanish, serving as an added benefit to this team.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE EXPERT, ANGELA BIGUEUR

Ms. Bigueur (bio forthcoming) will serve as the international trade expert for this evaluation. She will take responsibility for providing advice and expertise concerning the technical aspects of international trade processes and their indicators, support the Team Lead and Trade Facilitation Expert in planning the evaluation, drafting interview protocols, analyzing data, and drafting the final reports and out briefs. Ms. Bigueur will conduct key informant interviews and participate in direct site observations.

GUATEMALA TRADE CONSULTANT, TBD

The Trade Consultant in Guatemala will be responsible for managing data collection in Guatemala, coordinating logistics and scheduling with identified stakeholders, conducting key informant interviews and direct site observations, and finalizing and submitting written notes for each data collection activity. The Trade Consultant will also provide expertise and country context advice concerning technical aspects of the trade process in Guatemala to all aspects of this evaluation.

HONDURAS TRADE CONSULTANT, TBD

The Trade Consultant in Honduras will be responsible for managing data collection in Guatemala, coordinating logistics and scheduling with identified stakeholders, conducting key informant interviews and direct site observations, and finalizing and submitting written notes for each data collection activity. The Trade Consultant will also provide expertise and country context advice concerning technical aspects of the trade process in Honduras to all aspects of this evaluation.

CHIEF OF PARTY / QUALITY ASSURANCE LEAD, DAVID QUINN

Mr. David Quinn serves as Integra's Chief Technical Officer and the Chief of Party for the USAID LEAP III project. Mr. Quinn has over a decade of experience overseeing U.S. government projects and has served as Project Director/Chief of Party on the USAID LEAP III, USAID Emerging Opportunities, MCC AgMARKETS Philippines, and MCC Philippines Agribusiness Commercial Legal and Institutional Reform Project. He specializes in policy and enabling environment reform, and public private partnerships (PPPs), and has worked extensively in Asia, including in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kyrgyz Republic, Indonesia, and Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Philippines. Most recently, Mr. Quinn has been working with the Government of Vietnam to draft a new law on PPPs.

Mr. Quinn will serve as Quality Assurance Lead to ensure all deliverables meet or exceed USAID expectations.

LEAP III SUPPORT PERSONNEL

As LEAP III is set-up as a demand-driven mechanism, core operations and administrative functions of the project are also billed directly to the activity (i.e., development of the activity authorization, recruitment, contracting and fielding consultants, organizing travel). Ms. Theresa Miles, Director of Operations will oversee activity operations and finance. Penelope Norton will serve as the Activity's Coordinator and Research Assistant. She will support desk research and interview preparation, operations such as recruitment and invoicing, coordination for in country field work, and aid in the completion of the final report.

5. TIMELINE

Deliverables by Week	June 20	June 27	July 4	July 11	July 18	July 25	Aug 1	Aug 8	Aug 15	Aug 22	Aug 29	Sept 5	Sept 12	Sept 19	Sept 26
Draft and Submit AAR															
USAID Approval															
Draft and Submit Evaluation Design Plan															
USAID Approval															
Desk review															
Pre-fieldwork Kick-Off Briefing															
Field work (in country - El Salvador, Guatemala, & Honduras)															
Data Analysis															
Validation and recommendations workshop															
Draft and submit final report															

Final findings presentation															
USAID approval															

ANNEX I

COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS (CBA)

Under this performance evaluation, a cost-benefit analysis will be conducted to evaluate the social returns and/or sustainability of increasing trade through trade integration and facilitation interventions. This CBA will be conducted by USAID/DDI, in partnership with LEAP III, but LEAP III will not be responsible for the timeline, budget, and production of the CBA. USAID/DDI may consider availability of secondary data for a cost-benefit analysis as well as the feasibility of determining attribution of increases in trade volume at RTFB intervention sites as part of this CBA.²⁸

²⁸ USAID Office of Economic Policy guidance notes the value of cost-benefit analyses for determining a) whether the impact of the project is worth the investment; b) the variables that are likely to determine the project's success; c) who stands to gain the most from this project, and who may lose the most; and d) whether a project will be financially sustainable after the intervention is complete.

ANNEX B: EVALUATION WORK PLAN

LEAP III EVALUATION PLAN

FINAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF THE USAID REGIONAL TRADE FACILITATION AND BORDER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

Contract Title: LEAP III: Learning, Evaluation, and Analysis Project
Contract Number: GS-10F-083CA / 7200AA18M0004
Activity Number: 1009.1079
Submitted: July 18, 2022
Contractor: Integra Government Services International LLC
1156 15th Street, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005
USAID COR: Katie Qutub – kqutub@usaid.gov

I. BACKGROUND

The Regional Trade Facilitation and Border Management Activity (hereinafter referred to as “RTFB”) is a five-year activity that began in July 2018 and will end in July 2023. RTFB seeks to improve regional trade efficiency in the northern Central American countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala by reducing time and costs of cross-border trade and providing public- and private-sector institutions with the necessary capacity to achieve greater trade competitiveness in the region. By enhancing regional integration and improving trade facilitation, the Project seeks to increase cross-border trade and thus contribute to broad-based economic growth in the region.

2. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this evaluation is to determine 1) which RTFB interventions are perceived as most effective for enhancing regional trade integration, and why; 2) which interventions are perceived as most effective for increasing regional trade competitiveness, and why; and 3) whether RTFB interventions have contributed to overall regional economic growth. The Mission will use evaluation findings to inform adaptive management during the remaining life of the project as well as design of future trade interventions.

The target audience for this evaluation includes stakeholders in the USAID/Central America (ECAM) regional Mission, in bilateral Missions in the region, and at Nathan Associates Inc. (Nathan), who leads implementation of RTFB. Interested actors in the ECAM Mission may include Mission leadership, the Economic Growth and Education Office (EGE), the Regional Office of Acquisition and Assistance (ROAA), and the Regional Program Office (RPO). Other USAID audiences may include the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL); the Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation/Center for Economics and Market Development; and the Northern Triangle Task Force. External audiences may include private-sector beneficiaries; representatives of the Governments of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras; the Central American Economic Integration Secretariat (SIECA); and other international donors working on issues of economic competitiveness and productivity.

Findings from this evaluation may help fill knowledge gaps and contribute to broader USAID Agency-level learning. The USAID/ECAM RDCS 2015-2019 Learning Plan includes the following learning questions relevant to this evaluation:

1. Are there institutional or behavioral changes in each country’s government institutions responsible for trade?
2. To what extent are institutional or behavioral changes in each country’s central government institutions responsible for international trade ensuring long-term sustainability of trade facilitation have been achieved?

3. TECHNICAL APPROACH

The evaluation team will conduct a non-experimental mixed-methods evaluation that combines a comprehensive, rigorous analysis of existing quantitative data with qualitative techniques designed to elicit primary data from a wide range of counterparts, partners, beneficiaries, and stakeholders.

To reach quality data and findings the evaluation team will conduct: 1) a desk review of relevant activity documents provided by USAID and relevant stakeholders; 2) review of activity performance monitoring and context data; 3) key informant interviews and/or group discussions with key stakeholders; and 4) direct observation through site visits. Primary qualitative data collection will incorporate collaboration and dialogue among participating respondents to ensure all participants' perspectives and feedback are collected.

The evaluation will address the following evaluation questions, which seek to test RTFB's Development Hypothesis and identify enabling conditions and challenges to achieve the Activity's desired outcomes:

1. To what extent has economic integration for cross-border trade in Central America been strengthened since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to these changes?
2. To what degree have public institutions²⁹ capacities changed to facilitate/expedite cross-border trade since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to these changes?
3. To what extent has the trade competitiveness of Central American businesses in international markets changed since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to this change?
4. To what extent has the growth of cross-border trade in the Central American region changed since 2018? How has RTFB assistance contributed to growth in cross-border trade in the region?
5. What is the likelihood that trade integration and facilitation capacities introduced by RTFB will be sustained following completion of the activity?

3.1 DESK REVIEW

USAID will provide the Evaluation Team with all relevant activity documents, including relevant strategy documents; the Activity contract and all amendments to the contract; activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan; pre-implementation assessments; annual work plans; quarterly and annual performance reports and performance data; and any other assessments, studies, or evaluations conducted by the implementing partner.

The Evaluation Team will review these documents and other relevant literature as outlined in the SOW in preparation for the initial team planning meetings and before meeting with local stakeholders for interviews. The Evaluation Team will also conduct its own literature review and create a Review Matrix to be delivered to USAID as part of the final Evaluation Report, which indicates how key information extracted from reviewed documents and other methodologies link to each evaluation question.

²⁹ These public institutions include the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Economy, Customs, Ministry of Health, and National Directorate of Medicines in El Salvador, SENASA, Customs, SDE (Ministry of Economy) in Honduras, and the Ministry of Health and Customs in Guatemala.

3.2 PERFORMANCE MONITORING ANALYSIS

RTFB has an Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan and collects data on several standard and custom indicators as part of activity implementation. This monitoring data is an important data source for measuring progress toward project objectives and outcomes. USAID and/or the Implementing Partner will provide the LEAP III Evaluation Team with this performance monitoring data. The LEAP III Evaluation Team will analyze this performance data using descriptive analytic techniques to inform the research questions. Context data will also be considered to the extent possible to inform and explain evaluation findings.³⁰

3.3 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

During fieldwork, the LEAP III ET will conduct semi-structured key informant interviews or small group interviews with identified stakeholders and beneficiaries, including but not limited to the following groups:

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GROUPS	
STAKEHOLDERS	BENEFICIARIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key USAID/EI Salvador staff (Contracting Officer’s Representative, EGE Backstops in RPO, EGE Management)³¹ • Nathan Associates RTFB staff • Relevant USAID staff in Washington D.C. (e.g., LAC, etc.) • Other donors assisting with trade facilitation, such as the World Bank, IDB, and IMF • Other USG agencies that may provide insight into USAID programmatic impacts, such as US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), US Department of Agriculture (USDA), and US Department of Commerce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Import and export companies • Customs Brokers and Freight Forwarders • Transportation companies including truckers • Government entities in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Ministries of Economy, Registration Government entities, Customs Authorities, Ministries of Agriculture) • SIECA • National Trade Facilitation Committees in El Salvador and Honduras • Local associations such as COEXPORT and CIFACIL in El Salvador and AGEXPORT and CIG in Guatemala

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted in-person unless the stakeholder requests a remote interview option or is located outside of the fieldwork areas. Key stakeholders and beneficiaries will be identified and agreed upon in collaboration with the LEAP III ET and USAID/EI Salvador after finalization of this AAR and during the Evaluation Plan design process. Once selected, the LEAP III ET team will begin reaching out to the interviewees to schedule their interviews. The interviews will be scheduled during the field work in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The number of interviews will be sufficient to capture the responses of all key categories of stakeholders/beneficiaries, recognizing budget limitations, estimated

³⁰ Examples of relevant context indicators for this evaluation include macroeconomic data from the Central Bank, trade-related data provided by SIECA, World Bank’s Doing Business Report, and the World Economic Forum’s World Competitiveness Report. The Evaluation Team is encouraged to use national and regional context data as needed to supplement its analysis.

³¹ Key USAID/Guatemala and USAID/Honduras staff will also be considered for interviews if deemed appropriate and depending on the level of involvement in the Activity.

at 30 stakeholders consulted in El Salvador and 15 stakeholders consulted in Guatemala and Honduras, respectively.

Stakeholders will be purposively sampled based on the stakeholders' role. Beneficiaries will be randomly selected from a list of potential beneficiaries provided to the LEAP III ET from USAID and the IP (Nathan). The ET will ensure that both men, women, and stakeholders from vulnerable groups are represented in the qualitative sample.

Stakeholders may be grouped into group interviews depending on the feasibility of logistics, preference of stakeholders, and stakeholder role. All interviews will be conducted in line with best practices for conducting both remote and in-person qualitative data collection by trained interviewers. Interviewers will follow a semi-structured interview guide and will take diligent summary notes to serve as the raw qualitative data. Interviews will be conducted in the preferred language of the respondent, either English or Spanish.

3.4 DIRECT OBSERVATION

During field work, the LEAP III ET will identify relevant opportunities for direct observation, in consultation with USAID/El Salvador and RTFB staff. The structured sampling plan for selecting these opportunities will be designed during the Evaluation Plan design process but will ensure that these relevant opportunities occur during the time period of field work in each country. Specific intervention sites for direct observation will include, at a minimum, the following:

- Pedro de Alvarado border in Guatemala
- Puerto Cortés and El Amatillo Border in Honduras

Other such sites may include events hosted or sponsored by RTFB during fieldwork. Due to external circumstances, LEAP III will not observe Puerto Acajutla in El Salvador. The IP will provide the LEAP III ET a list of such events after finalization of this AAR and during the Evaluation Plan design process to enable the ET to identify and select which events will be attended during field work.

A structured observation guide will be developed by the LEAP III ET to ensure the direct observation activities inform the Evaluation Questions.

4. ANALYSIS PLAN

The ET will use appropriate analytic techniques to analyze and triangulate the gathered secondary and primary quantitative and qualitative data to inform an evidence-based response to each evaluation question. Secondary quantitative data will likely be analyzed using appropriate descriptive statistical techniques. Secondary qualitative and quantitative data collected during the desk review phase will be analyzed using content analysis approaches to extract and synthesize relevant information that informs the evaluation questions and/or triangulates other sources of data. Finally, primary qualitative data collected during the interviews and direct observation will use the detailed notes as the raw data for analysis and will be analyzed using content and thematic qualitative analytic techniques. Data will be disaggregated by gender or other socioeconomic characteristics as appropriate throughout the analysis. The ET will use relevant software to enable qualitative data analysis, such as NVIVO, and quantitative analysis, such as Microsoft Excel or R. All primary data collection will follow USAID guidance and best

practices for ethical data collection procedures. The data will be analyzed by different axes of comparison, specifically looking at differences in outcomes and challenges between countries and perspectives by types of stakeholders (public and private).

5. DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

All primary data collected as part of this evaluation will be securely stored in a Google Drive folder only accessible to the LEAP III team. For interviews, the interviewer and/or notetaker will take detailed summary notes of each interview and submit these notes to the Google Folder to serve as the raw qualitative data from interviews. For direct observation, the observers will take detailed observation notes and submit these to the Google Folder to serve as the raw qualitative observational data. The primary data files will not be shared beyond the LEAP III team to protect personally identifiable information of respondents and to ensure the confidentiality of their responses. All primary data will be collected following the best practices for ethical qualitative data collection to ensure voluntary consent is received from all respondents to participate in the interviews.

6. TEAM COMPOSITION

TEAM LEAD / MEL EXPERT, SARAH EISSLER

Dr. Sarah Eissler, PhD, will serve as the Team Lead for this evaluation. She will take responsibility for the design of the evaluation, data collection and analysis, and reporting of findings. She will lead meetings both internally and out-facing with the client and lead any presentation of findings. Dr. Eissler will also lead the drafting of the final evaluation report.

Dr. Eissler is an independent consultant with over ten years' experience of mixed-methods evaluation in the social sciences, including work on several USAID evaluations. She has subject matter expertise in gender and women's empowerment; agricultural value chains; and environmental and climate change. Her evaluation skills include process, performance, and impact evaluations; program and project assessments; mixed- and multi-method research designs; quantitative and qualitative analysis methodologies; quantitative and qualitative data management; and enumerator training. Her field experience includes qualitative impact evaluations for IFPRI on agricultural programs in Benin, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, and Nigeria from 2018-22; and conducting mixed-methods research for Feed the Future activities in Indonesia and Vietnam in 2017. Sarah's recent and current work for USAID includes: the Private Sector Landscape Analysis (PSLA) for USAID/Egypt; the mid-term evaluation of Partnering for Acceleration of Entrepreneurship (PACE) Initiative; a portfolio review of the Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative; a review of the Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) portfolio; and support on the USAID/Ukraine CEP program. Sarah holds a PhD in Rural Sociology and dual M.S. degrees in Rural Sociology and International Agriculture and Development from Penn State University. Her work has been published in several journals, including *Global Environmental Change*, *Agriculture*, *Food Security and Community Development*, *Global Food Security*, *Sustainable Finance and Investment*, and *Development and Change*.

TRADE FACILITATION EXPERT, ANTHONY CAMBAS

Mr. Anthony Cambas will serve as the Trade Facilitation Expert for this evaluation. He will take responsibility for providing advice and expertise concerning the technical aspects of trade facilitation processes and its indicators. He will work with the Team Lead in planning the evaluation, conducting key informant interviews, collecting and analyzing data, and drafting the final reports and out briefs.

Mr. Cambas has extensive experience in International Trade Facilitation and knowledge of the LAC region – lending over 20 years of experience to this evaluation. Notably, since 2012 Mr. Cambas serves as the Director of the Wes Watkins Center for International Trade and Development and Director of the International Trade Center at Oklahoma State University where he conducts extensive research on international trade markets and analyzes global data on trade flows and foreign direct investments. Additionally, Mr. Cambas has over two decades experience as a Senior International Trade and Customs Advisor/Expert, having advised in 25 countries, he has focused a lot of time in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Specifically, Mr. Cambas served as the Chief of Party at Booz Allen Hamilton for the USAID funded project in El Salvador – Customs and Business Environment that Promotes Commerce and Investment.

Mr. Cambas has a Master’s Degree in International Customs Law and Administration, is a U.S. licensed Customs Broker, and Certified Customs Specialist. Additionally, he is fluent in both English and Spanish, serving as an added benefit to this team.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE EXPERT, ANGELA BIGUEUR

Ms. Angela Bigueur will serve as the international trade expert for this evaluation. She will take responsibility for providing advice and expertise concerning the technical aspects of international trade processes and their indicators, support the Team Lead and Trade Facilitation Expert in planning the evaluation, drafting interview protocols, analyzing data, and drafting the final reports and out briefs. Ms. Bigueur will conduct key informant interviews and participate in direct site observations.

Ms. Bigueur has over 30 years of experience in local, regional, and international trade. Ms. Bigueur serves as a Senior Trade and Logistics Advisor to the Commission for the Facilitation of International Trade and Logistics. Previously, she served as the Director General of Customs for the Government of El Salvador with the responsibility of the comprehensive management of the country’s Customs policies. Additionally, Ms. Bigueur has held acclaimed positions such as Vice Minister of the Economy in the Government of El Salvador, Vice President to the El Salvadoran Chamber of Consulting Companies, President of the Association of Banks in El Salvador, and Executive Director in private sector companies. She also has over 10 years of experience as an independent consultant in International Trade, Finance, Management, Customs and Business.

GUATEMALA TRADE CONSULTANT, ROSEMARIE LUNA

Ms. Rosemarie Luna will serve as the Trade Consultant in Guatemala will be responsible for managing data collection in Guatemala, coordinating logistics and scheduling with identified stakeholders, conducting key informant interviews and direct site observations, and finalizing and submitting written notes for each data collection activity. The Trade Consultant will also provide expertise and country context advice concerning technical aspects of the trade process in Guatemala to all aspects of this evaluation.

Ms. Luna has over twenty years of experience in international law and trade, having worked with the private sector and government, especially in areas regarding trade, logistics, customs and legal affairs at national and international level. She is currently a partner in the regional law firm García & Bodán, where she is the regional director for the international trade and customs practice.

Ms. Luna was in charge of the International Relations of the Guatemalan Tax Administration, having worked on the project of the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) for Guatemala, and at their request, represented the World Customs Organization –WCO- in a Workshop on the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1540 (2004) held in Costa Rica and as a lecturer on the Revised Kyoto Convention for the WCO AEO Conference for Central America. Also, in the area of international taxation she was part of the team that began the negotiation of Exchange of Information Agreements and the representation of SAT in the Global Forum of Transparency and Exchange of Information. She has worked very closely with the customs intendance on Trade Facilitation issues.

CHIEF OF PARTY / QUALITY ASSURANCE LEAD, DAVID QUINN

Mr. David Quinn serves as Integra’s Chief Technical Officer and the Chief of Party for the USAID LEAP III project. Mr. Quinn has over a decade of experience overseeing U.S. government projects and has served as Project Director/Chief of Party on the USAID LEAP III, USAID Emerging Opportunities, MCC AgMARKETS Philippines, and MCC Philippines Agribusiness Commercial Legal and Institutional Reform Project. He specializes in policy and enabling environment reform, and public private partnerships (PPPs), and has worked extensively in Asia, including in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kyrgyz Republic, Indonesia, and Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Philippines. Most recently, Mr. Quinn has been working with the Government of Vietnam to draft a new law on PPPs.

Mr. Quinn will serve as Quality Assurance Lead to ensure all deliverables meet or exceed USAID expectations.

LEAP III SUPPORT PERSONNEL

As LEAP III is set-up as a demand-driven mechanism, core operations and administrative functions of the project are also billed directly to the activity (i.e., development of the activity authorization, recruitment, contracting and fielding consultants, organizing travel). Ms. Theresa Miles, Director of Operations will oversee activity operations and finance. Penelope Norton will serve as the Activity’s Coordinator and Research Assistant. She will support desk research and interview preparation, operations such as recruitment and invoicing, coordination for in-country field work, and aid in the completion of the final report.

ANNEX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

B.I KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDES

B.I.I USAID AND IMPLEMENTING PARTNER

The Data Collector will complete this section prior to conducting the KII.

Date of Interview	
Location of Interview	
Name of Data Collector	
Name of Respondent	
Role or Position/Title of Respondent	
Male/Female	
USAID / Nathan	

1. Can you describe your position and your role with respect to RTFB Activity?
2. In your own words, can you describe the main objectives of the RTFB Activity?
 - a. Probes: trade competitiveness, facilitating and growing cross-border trade, strengthening public institution capacities to facilitate cross-border trade
3. At this stage, what challenges influence the RTFB Activity's ability to achieve these objectives?
 - a. How has the Implementing Partner (Nathan) navigated these challenges? Have these pivots been successful? Please describe with examples.
4. Can you describe how USAID and the Nathan have collaborated to manage and implement this activity? Is this process working well or what can be improved? Please describe.
5. To what extent have women, youth, or marginalized groups been incorporated into the activity's design, implementation, and data collection efforts? How can this be improved?
6. In your opinion, at this stage of the activity, what interventions or strategies employed by the RTFB activity are working well and why? What factors enable this to work well?

7. In your opinion, at this stage, what interventions or strategies employed by the RTFB activity are not working well and why? What factors are causing this to not work well?
8. To date, what are the key accomplishments of the RTFB activity with respect to the following categories and how have these Activity accomplishments impacted the sector:
 - a. Customs Union (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras)
 - b. Implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)
 - c. Economic integration for cross-border trade
 - d. Public institutions' capacities to facilitate/expedite cross-border trade
 - e. Trade competitiveness of Central American businesses in international markets
 - f. Growth of cross-border trade
9. To what extent do you think these accomplishments and impact will be sustained after the end of the activity? Why do you think this is?
 - a. What could the Activity do to improve the likelihood these accomplishments and impact can be sustained?
10. What are areas for improvement for the RTFB activity and future activities that focus on trade facilitation and border management?
 - a. How do you think these can be achieved?
11. Do you have anything additional to share?

Thank you for your time and participation.

B.1.2 PUBLIC STAKEHOLDER

The Data Collector will complete this section prior to conducting the KII.

Date of Interview	
Location of Interview	
Name of Data Collector	
Name of Respondent	
Role or Position/Title of Respondent	
Years in Role	
Male/Female	
Government Institution and Department	

1. Describe your position and your responsibilities? How long have you been in this position?
2. When did you learn of the RTFB Activity? Can you describe how you have been involved in or impacted by the Activity?
3. In your own words, can you describe the main objectives of the RTFB Activity?
 - a. Probes: trade competitiveness, facilitating and growing cross-border trade, strengthening public institution capacities to facilitate cross-border trade
4. Can you describe how you in your official capacity and your institution approached trade facilitation? How did you implement trade facilitation activities, and can you discuss your capacity prior to your participation in the RFTB Activity?
 - a. How has the RTFB Activity influenced your role or the capacity of your institution specifically in Trade Facilitation? Please describe with examples.
 - b. In your understanding, how did this Activity impact or influence other public institutions?
5. From your perspective, what aspects / strategies / interventions of the RTFB activity are strong? What factors enable this to work well?
6. What interventions or strategies employed by the RTFB activity are not working well or could be improved? And why? What factors influence this?

7. From your perspective, how has the RTFB Activity influenced the following categories in the Northern Central American region (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador)? Please be specific with examples that support this project.
 - a. Economic integration for cross-border trade
 - b. Public institutions' capacities to facilitate/expedite cross-border trade
 - c. Trade competitiveness of Central American businesses in international markets
 - d. Growth of cross-border trade
8. To what extent do you think these accomplishments and impact will be sustained after the end of the activity? Why do you think this is?
 - a. What do you think the Activity could do to improve the likelihood these accomplishments and impact can be sustained?
9. What are areas for improvement for the RTFB activity and future activities that focus on trade facilitation and border management?
 - a. How do you think these can be achieved?
10. Do you have anything additional to share?

Thank you for your time and participation.

B.1.3 PRIVATE STAKEHOLDER

The Data Collector will complete this section prior to conducting the KII.

Date of Interview	
Location of Interview	
Name of Data Collector	
Name of Respondent	
Role or Position/Title of Respondent	
Male/Female	
Company / Organization Name	

1. Briefly describe your company and what it does?
 - a. Can you describe your position and your responsibilities, especially those related to international trade?
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. When did you learn of the RTFB Activity? Discuss how you have been involved in or impacted by it?
4. In your own words, please describe the main objectives of the RTFB Activity?
 - a. Probes: trade competitiveness, facilitating and growing cross-border trade, strengthening public institution capacities to facilitate cross-border trade
5. Prior to your participation in the RTFB Activity, can you describe how your company and you in your official role operated to achieve your company objectives [related to X]?
 - a. How has the RTFB Activity influenced your role or the operations/capacity of your company to achieve your objectives? Please describe with examples. (Probe: time saving strategies)
 - b. What is the impact overall of this influence?
6. From your perspective, what aspects / strategies / interventions of the RTFB activity are strong? What factors enable this to work well?
7. What interventions or strategies employed by the RTFB activity are not working well or could be improved? And why? What factors influence this?

8. From your perspective, how has the RTFB Activity influenced the following categories in the Northern Central America region (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador)? Please be specific with examples.
 - a. Economic integration for cross-border trade
 - b. Public institutions' capacities to facilitate/expedite cross-border trade
 - c. Trade competitiveness of Central American businesses in international markets
 - d. Growth of cross-border trade
9. To what extent do you think these accomplishments and impact will be sustained after the end of the activity? Why do you think this is?
 - a. What do you think the Activity could do to improve the likelihood these accomplishments and impact can be sustained?
10. What are suggested areas for improvement for the RTFB activity and future activities that focus on trade facilitation and border management?
 - b. How do you think these can be achieved?
11. Do you have anything additional to share?

Thank you for your time and participation.

B.2 DIRECT OBSERVATION

Date of Visit	
Team Member	
Country	
Port / Border Crossing Of observation	

CATEGORIES FOR DIRECT OBSERVATION

Category	Description
1. General overview	Describe the general types of activities undertaken at the port such as imports, exports, domestic and international transit, Customs Clearance etc., which agencies have a presence at the port, which agencies coordinate activities with each other, etc.
[Insert observations here]	
2. Equipment	Describe the types of equipment used to facilitate trade and enforcement activities such as X-ray machines, drug detection, radiation measurement, cameras, computer systems, RFID, license plate readers etc.
[Insert observations here]	
3. Physical Layout	Describe how the port is laid out to facilitate and enforce trade security and commercial compliance. Do the Customs and Other Government Agency processing and inspection areas have a roof or some other type of protection from rain and other elements?
[Insert observations here]	

4. Safety/Security	Describe any observable safety and security measures in place such as fencing, cameras etc. or unsafe practices observed
[Insert observations here]	
5. Activity level	Describe the level of activity and operations at the port. Example questions to consider: is it really busy, really slow? Are people milling about? Are unauthorized people walking through the port? Level of friendliness between Customs and traders
[Insert observations here]	
6. Coordinated / Integrated Border Management (CBM)	Describe the level of coordination (integration) and cooperation between Customs and other Border Management government Agencies and authorized private sector port of entry management entities. Discuss chains of command as well.
[Insert observations here]	
7. Use of Risk Management to facilitate “low risk” taking into account factors such as shipments, products, traders, country of origin etc. versus enforcement efforts on “medium” to “high risk” shipments, products, traders, country of origin etc.	Describe the level of automation and different treatment that shipments with different levels of risk receive with a
[Insert observations here]	

B.3 INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS IN SPANISH

B.3.1 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW WITH USAID/NATHAN

El recopilador de datos rellenará esta sección antes de realizar la KII.

Fecha de la Entrevista	
Lugar de la Entrevista	
Nombre del entrevistador	
Nombre del encuestado	
Función o cargo/título del encuestado	
Femenino /Masculino	
USAID / Nathan	

1. ¿Puede describir su posición y su rol con respecto a la Actividad de RTFB?
2. ¿En sus propias palabras, puede describir los objetivos principales de la Actividad de RTFB?
 - a. Sondeo: competitividad comercial, facilitación y crecimiento del comercio transfronterizo, fortalecimiento de las capacidades de las instituciones públicas para facilitar el comercio transfronterizo.
3. En esta fase, ¿qué retos influyen en la capacidad de la actividad de RTFB para alcanzar estos objetivos?
 - a. ¿Cómo ha superado el socio ejecutor (Nathan) estos retos? ¿Han tenido éxito estos giros? Describa con ejemplos.
4. ¿Puede describir cómo han colaborado USAID y Nathan para gestionar y ejecutar esta actividad? ¿Funciona bien este proceso o qué se puede mejorar? Por favor, descríbalos.
5. ¿En qué medida se ha incorporado a las mujeres, los jóvenes o los grupos marginados en el diseño, la ejecución y la recopilación de datos de la actividad? ¿Cómo se puede mejorar esto?
6. En su opinión, en esta fase de la actividad, ¿qué intervenciones o estrategias empleadas por la actividad de RTFB están funcionando bien y por qué? ¿Qué factores permiten que esto funcione bien?

7. En su opinión, en esta fase, ¿qué intervenciones o estrategias empleadas por la actividad de RTFB no están funcionando bien y por qué? ¿Qué factores están provocando que no funcionen bien?
8. Hasta la fecha, ¿cuáles son los principales logros de la actividad del RTFB con respecto a las siguientes categorías y cómo han repercutido estos logros de la actividad en el sector?
 - a. Unión aduanera (El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras)
 - b. Aplicación del Acuerdo de Facilitación del Comercio (AFC) de la OMC
 - c. Integración económica para el comercio transfronterizo
 - d. Capacidades de las instituciones públicas para facilitar/expedir el comercio transfronterizo
 - e. Competitividad comercial de las empresas centroamericanas en los mercados internacionales
 - f. Crecimiento del comercio transfronterizo
9. ¿En qué medida cree que estos logros y el impacto se mantendrán tras la finalización de la actividad? ¿Por qué cree que es así?
 - a. ¿Qué podría hacer la Actividad para mejorar la probabilidad de que estos logros e impactos puedan ser sostenibles?
10. ¿Cuáles son las áreas de mejora para la actividad de RTFB y futuras actividades?
 - a. ¿Cómo cree que se puede lograr esto?
11. ¿Tiene algo adicional que compartir?

Thank you for your time and participation.

B.3.2 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW WITH PUBLIC STAKEHOLDERS

El recopilador de datos rellenará esta sección antes de realizar la KII.

Fecha de la Entrevista	
Lugar de la Entrevista	
Nombre del entrevistador	
Nombre del encuestado	
Función o cargo/título del encuestado	
Años en el puesto	
Femenino /Masculino	
Institución y Departamento de Gobierno	

1. ¿Describa brevemente su institución pública y a que se dedica? ¿Por cuánto tiempo ha estado en esta posición?
2. ¿Cuándo conoció la actividad de RTFB? Comente ¿cómo se ha visto involucrado o impactado por ella?
3. En sus propias palabras, describa los principales objetivos de la actividad de RTFB
 - a. Sondeo: competitividad comercial, facilitación y crecimiento del comercio transfronterizo, fortalecimiento de las capacidades de las instituciones públicas para facilitar el comercio transfronterizo.
4. ¿Puede describir cómo usted, en su posición oficial y en su institución, abordó la facilitación del comercio? ¿Cómo implementó las actividades de facilitación del comercio? ¿Puede discutir su capacidad antes de su participación en la Actividad RFTB?
 - a. ¿Cómo ha influido RTFB en su función o en las operaciones/ capacidad de su institución pública para alcanzar sus objetivos? Describa con ejemplos. (Estrategias de ahorro de tiempo)
 - b. A su entender, ¿cómo impactó o influyó esta Actividad en otras instituciones públicas?
5. Desde su punto de vista, ¿qué aspectos / estrategias / intervenciones de la actividad de RTFB son fuertes? ¿Qué factores permiten que funcione bien?

6. ¿Qué intervenciones o estrategias empleadas por la actividad de RTFB no están funcionando bien o podrían mejorarse? ¿Y por qué? ¿Qué factores influyen en ello?
7. Desde su punto de vista, ¿cómo ha influido la Actividad RTFB en las siguientes categorías de la región del Triángulo Norte (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador)? Por favor, especifique con ejemplos
 - a. Integración económica para el comercio transfronterizo
 - b. Capacidades de las instituciones públicas para facilitar/expedir el comercio transfronterizo
 - c. Competitividad comercial de las empresas centroamericanas en los mercados internacionales
 - d. Crecimiento del comercio transfronterizo
8. ¿Hasta qué punto cree que estos logros y el impacto se mantendrán tras la finalización de la actividad? ¿Por qué cree que es así?
 - a. ¿Qué cree que podría hacer la Actividad para mejorar la probabilidad de que estos logros e impactos puedan ser sostenidos?
9. ¿Cuáles son las áreas de mejora sugeridas para la actividad de RTFB y futuras actividades?
 - a. ¿Cómo cree que se pueden conseguir?
10. ¿Tiene algo más que compartir?

Muchas gracias por su tiempo y participación

B.3.3 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW WITH PRIVATE STAKEHOLDERS

El recopilador de datos rellenará esta sección antes de realizar la KII.

Fecha de la Entrevista	
Lugar de la Entrevista	
Nombre del entrevistador	
Nombre del encuestado	
Función o cargo/título del encuestado	
Femenino /Masculino	
Nombre de Empresa / Organización	

1. ¿Describa brevemente su empresa y a que se dedica?
 - a. ¿Puede describir su puesto y sus responsabilidades, especialmente relacionados con el comercio internacional? ¿Por cuánto tiempo ha estado en esta posición?
2. ¿Cuándo conoció la actividad de RTFB? Comente ¿cómo se ha visto involucrado o impactado por ella?
3. En sus propias palabras, describa los principales objetivos de la actividad de RTFB
 - b. Sondeo: competitividad comercial, facilitación y crecimiento del comercio transfronterizo, fortalecimiento de las capacidades de las instituciones públicas para facilitar el comercio transfronterizo.
4. Antes de su participación en la Actividad RTFB, ¿puede describir cómo operaba su empresa y usted en su función oficial para lograr los objetivos de su empresa [relacionados con X]?
 - c. ¿Cómo ha influido RTFB en su función o en las operaciones/ capacidad de su empresa para alcanzar sus objetivos? Describa con ejemplos. (Estrategias de ahorro de tiempo)
 - d. ¿Cuál es el impacto general de esta influencia?
5. Desde su punto de vista, ¿qué aspectos / estrategias / intervenciones de la actividad de RTFB son fuertes? ¿Qué factores permiten que funcione bien?
6. ¿Qué intervenciones o estrategias empleadas por la actividad de RTFB no están funcionando bien o podrían mejorarse? ¿Y por qué? ¿Qué factores influyen en ello?

7. Desde su punto de vista, ¿cómo ha influido la Actividad RTFB en las siguientes categorías de la región del Triángulo Norte (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador)? Por favor, especifique con ejemplos
- e. Integración económica para el comercio transfronterizo
 - f. Capacidades de las instituciones públicas para facilitar/expedir el comercio transfronterizo
 - g. Competitividad comercial de las empresas centroamericanas en los mercados internacionales
 - h. Crecimiento del comercio transfronterizo
8. ¿Hasta qué punto cree que estos logros y el impacto se mantendrán tras la finalización de la actividad? ¿Por qué cree que es así?
- b. ¿Qué cree que podría hacer la Actividad para mejorar la probabilidad de que estos logros e impactos puedan ser sostenidos?
9. ¿Cuáles son las áreas de mejora sugeridas para la actividad de RTFB y futuras actividades?
- e. ¿Cómo cree que se pueden conseguir?
10. ¿Tiene algo más que compartir?

Muchas gracias por su tiempo y participación.

B.3.4 DIRECT OBSERVATION

Fecha de la visita	
Miembro del equipo	
País	
Puerto/ Cruce de fronteras De Observación	

Categorías para la observación directa

Categoría	Descripción
1. Visión General	Describa los tipos generales de actividades que se realizan en el puerto, como las importaciones, las exportaciones, el tránsito nacional e internacional, el despacho de aduanas, etc., qué organismos están presentes en el puerto, qué organismos coordinan las actividades entre sí, etc.
[Anote sus observaciones aquí]	
2. Equipo	Describa los tipos de equipos utilizados para facilitar el comercio y las actividades de aplicación de la ley, como máquinas de rayos X, detección de drogas, medición de radiaciones, cámaras, sistemas informáticos, RFID, lectores de matrículas, etc.
[Anote sus observaciones aquí]	
3. Disposición física	Describa cómo está dispuesto el puerto para facilitar y aplicar la seguridad comercial y el cumplimiento de las normas comerciales. ¿Tienen las zonas de procesamiento e inspección de las aduanas y otros organismos gubernamentales un techo o algún otro tipo de protección contra la lluvia y otros elementos?
[Anote sus observaciones aquí]	

<p>4. Seguridad</p>	<p>Describa las medidas de seguridad y protección observadas, como vallas, cámaras, etc., o las prácticas inseguras observadas</p>
<p>[Anote sus observaciones aquí]</p>	
<p>5. Nivel de Actividad</p>	<p>Describa el nivel de actividad y operaciones del puerto. Ejemplos de preguntas a tener en cuenta: ¿está muy ocupado, muy lento? ¿Hay gente deambulando? ¿Pasan por el puerto personas no autorizadas? Nivel de amabilidad entre las aduanas y los comerciantes</p>
<p>[Anote sus observaciones aquí]</p>	
<p>6. Gestión coordinada/integrada de las fronteras (CBM)</p>	<p>Describa el nivel de coordinación (integración) y cooperación entre las aduanas y otros organismos gubernamentales de gestión de fronteras y las entidades de gestión de puertos de entrada del sector privado autorizadas. Describa también las cadenas de mando.</p>
<p>[Anote sus observaciones aquí]</p>	
<p>7. Uso de la gestión de riesgos para facilitar el "bajo riesgo" teniendo en cuenta factores como los envíos, los productos, los comerciantes, el país de origen, etc., frente a los esfuerzos de aplicación de la ley en los envíos, productos, comerciantes, país de origen de "riesgo medio" a "alto".</p>	<p>Describa el nivel de automatización y el diferente tratamiento que reciben los envíos con diferentes niveles de riesgo con un</p>
<p>[Anotes sus observaciones aquí]</p>	

ANNEX D: DISCLOSURES OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

TEAM LEAD: SARAH EISSLER

DISCLOSURE OF REAL OR POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

USAID Disclosure of Real or Potential Conflict of Interest for External Evaluation Team Members

Name	Sarah Eissler
Title	Team Lead and Evaluation Specialist
Organization	Independent Consultant / Integra LLC Team Member
Evaluation Position	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Team Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Team member
Evaluation Award Number <i>(contract or other instrument)</i>	Contract: GS-10F-083CA / 7200AA18M0004 Activity Number: 1009.1079
USAID Activity(s) Evaluated <i>(Include activity name(s), implementer name(s) and award number(s), if applicable)</i>	Evaluation of the USAID Regional Trade Facilitation and Border Management Activity
I have real or potential conflicts of interest to disclose.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts: <i>Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:</i>	

DISCLOSURE OF REAL OR POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

<p>CONTINUED</p> <p>If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts:</p> <p><i>Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Current or previous work experience or seeking employment with the USAID operating unit managing the evaluation or the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated. 5. Current or previous work experience with an organization that may be seen as an industry competitor with the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated. 6. Preconceived ideas toward individuals, groups, organizations, or objectives of the particular activities and organizations being evaluated that could bias the evaluation. 	
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I certify (1) that I have completed this disclosure form fully and to the best of my ability and (2) that I will update this disclosure form promptly if relevant circumstances change. If I gain access to proprietary information of other companies, then I agree to protect their information from unauthorized use or disclosure for as long as it remains proprietary and refrain from using the information for any purpose other than that for which it was furnished.

Date	October 13, 2022
Signature	

INTERNATIONAL TRADE EXPERT: ANGELA BIGUEUR

DISCLOSURE OF REAL OR POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

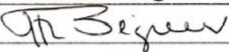
USAID Disclosure of Real or Potential Conflict of Interest for External Evaluation Team Members

Name	Angela Bigueur
Title	International Trade Expert
Organization	Independent Consultant / Integra LLC Team Member
Evaluation Position	<input type="checkbox"/> Team Leader <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Team member
Evaluation Award Number <i>(contract or other instrument)</i>	Contract: GS-10F-083CA / 7200AA18M0004 Activity Number: 1009.1079
USAID Activity(s) Evaluated <i>(Include activity name(s), implementer name(s) and award number(s), if applicable)</i>	Evaluation of the USAID Regional Trade Facilitation and Border Management Activity
I have real or potential conflicts of interest to disclose.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts: <i>Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:</i>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Close family member who is an employee of the USAID operating unit managing the activity(s) being evaluated or the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated. 2. Financial interest that is direct, or is significant though indirect, in the implementing organization(s) whose activities are being evaluated or in the outcome of the evaluation. 3. Current or previous direct or significant though indirect experience with the activity(s) being evaluated, including involvement in the activity design or previous iterations of the activity. 	

DISCLOSURE OF REAL OR POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

<p>CONTINUED</p> <p>If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts:</p> <p><i>Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Current or previous work experience or seeking employment with the USAID operating unit managing the evaluation or the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated.5. Current or previous work experience with an organization that may be seen as an industry competitor with the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated.6. Preconceived ideas toward individuals, groups, organizations, or objectives of the particular activities and organizations being evaluated that could bias the evaluation.	
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I certify (1) that I have completed this disclosure form fully and to the best of my ability and (2) that I will update this disclosure form promptly if relevant circumstances change. If I gain access to proprietary information of other companies, then I agree to protect their information from unauthorized use or disclosure for as long as it remains proprietary and refrain from using the information for any purpose other than that for which it was furnished.

Date	13 OCTOBRE 2022	
Signature		

TRADE FACILITATION EXPERT: ANTHONY CAMBAS

DISCLOSURE OF REAL OR POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST


USAID Disclosure of Real or Potential Conflict of Interest for External Evaluation Team Members

Name	Anthony Cambas
Title	Trade Facilitation Expert
Organization	Independent Consultant / Integra LLC Team Member
Evaluation Position	<input type="checkbox"/> Team Leader <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Team member
Evaluation Award Number <i>(contract or other instrument)</i>	Contract: GS-10F-083CA / 7200AA18M0004 Activity Number: 1009.1079
USAID Activity(s) Evaluated <i>(Include activity name(s), implementer name(s) and award number(s), if applicable)</i>	Evaluation of the USAID Regional Trade Facilitation and Border Management Activity
I have real or potential conflicts of interest to disclose.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts: <i>Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Close family member who is an employee of the USAID operating unit managing the activity(s) being evaluated or the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated. 2. Financial interest that is direct, or is significant though indirect, in the implementing organization(s) whose activities are being evaluated or in the outcome of the evaluation. 3. Current or previous direct or significant though indirect experience with the activity(s) being evaluated, including involvement in the activity design or previous iterations of the activity. 	

DISCLOSURE OF REAL OR POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

<p>CONTINUED</p> <p>If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts:</p> <p><i>Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Current or previous work experience or seeking employment with the USAID operating unit managing the evaluation or the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated.5. Current or previous work experience with an organization that may be seen as an industry competitor with the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated.6. Preconceived ideas toward individuals, groups, organizations, or objectives of the particular activities and organizations being evaluated that could bias the evaluation.	
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I certify (1) that I have completed this disclosure form fully and to the best of my ability and (2) that I will update this disclosure form promptly if relevant circumstances change. If I gain access to proprietary information of other companies, then I agree to protect their information from unauthorized use or disclosure for as long as it remains proprietary and refrain from using the information for any purpose other than that for which it was furnished.

Date	10/13/2022	
Signature		Anthony Cambas

GUATEMALA TRADE EXPERT: ROSEMARIE LUNA

DISCLOSURE OF REAL OR POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

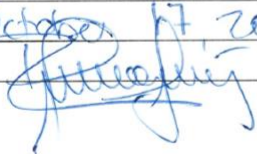
USAID Disclosure of Real or Potential Conflict of Interest for External Evaluation Team Members

Name	Rosemarie Luna
Title	Guatemala Trade Consultant
Organization	Independent Consultant / Integra LLC Team Member
Evaluation Position	<input type="checkbox"/> Team Leader <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Team member
Evaluation Award Number <i>(contract or other instrument)</i>	Contract: GS-10F-083CA / 7200AA18M0004 Activity Number: 1009.1079
USAID Activity(s) Evaluated <i>(Include activity name(s), implementer name(s) and award number(s), if applicable)</i>	Evaluation of the USAID Regional Trade Facilitation and Border Management Activity
I have real or potential conflicts of interest to disclose.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts: <i>Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Close family member who is an employee of the USAID operating unit managing the activity(s) being evaluated or the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated. 2. Financial interest that is direct, or is significant though indirect, in the implementing organization(s) whose activities are being evaluated or in the outcome of the evaluation. 3. Current or previous direct or significant though indirect experience with the activity(s) being evaluated, including involvement in the activity design or previous iterations of the activity. 	

DISCLOSURE OF REAL OR POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

<p>CONTINUED</p> <p>If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts:</p> <p><i>Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Current or previous work experience or seeking employment with the USAID operating unit managing the evaluation or the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated.5. Current or previous work experience with an organization that may be seen as an industry competitor with the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated.6. Preconceived ideas toward individuals, groups, organizations, or objectives of the particular activities and organizations being evaluated that could bias the evaluation.	
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I certify (1) that I have completed this disclosure form fully and to the best of my ability and (2) that I will update this disclosure form promptly if relevant circumstances change. If I gain access to proprietary information of other companies, then I agree to protect their information from unauthorized use or disclosure for as long as it remains proprietary and refrain from using the information for any purpose other than that for which it was furnished.

Date	October 17, 2022
Signature	

ACTIVITY COORDINATOR: PENELOPE NORTON

DISCLOSURE OF REAL OR POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

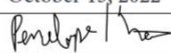
USAID Disclosure of Real or Potential Conflict of Interest for External Evaluation Team Members

Name	Penelope Norton
Title	Activity Coordinator
Organization	Integra LLC
Evaluation Position	<input type="checkbox"/> Team Leader <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Team member
Evaluation Award Number <i>(contract or other instrument)</i>	Contract: GS-10F-083CA / 7200AA18M0004 Activity Number: 1009.1079
USAID Activity(s) Evaluated <i>(Include activity name(s), implementer name(s) and award number(s), if applicable)</i>	Evaluation of the USAID Regional Trade Facilitation and Border Management Activity
I have real or potential conflicts of interest to disclose.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts: <i>Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:</i>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Close family member who is an employee of the USAID operating unit managing the activity(s) being evaluated or the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated. 2. Financial interest that is direct, or is significant though indirect, in the implementing organization(s) whose activities are being evaluated or in the outcome of the evaluation. 3. Current or previous direct or significant though indirect experience with the activity(s) being evaluated, including involvement in the activity design or previous iterations of the activity. 	

DISCLOSURE OF REAL OR POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

<p>CONTINUED</p> <p>If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts:</p> <p><i>Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Current or previous work experience or seeking employment with the USAID operating unit managing the evaluation or the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated. 5. Current or previous work experience with an organization that may be seen as an industry competitor with the implementing organization(s) whose activity(s) are being evaluated. 6. Preconceived ideas toward individuals, groups, organizations, or objectives of the particular activities and organizations being evaluated that could bias the evaluation. 	
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I certify (1) that I have completed this disclosure form fully and to the best of my ability and (2) that I will update this disclosure form promptly if relevant circumstances change. If I gain access to proprietary information of other companies, then I agree to protect their information from unauthorized use or disclosure for as long as it remains proprietary and refrain from using the information for any purpose other than that for which it was furnished.

Date	October 13, 2022
Signature	

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