

The Role of Trade Information Services Centres in Tanzania

By

Elinaja Mmbaga

TCCIA Library

THE ROLE OF TRADE INFORMATION SERVICE CENTRES

Abstract: The paper therefore, discusses, in brief on the following topics:- Definition of Trade Information Services centers, Important Sources of trade Information centres, classification at the TCCIA Library, problems facing the TCCIA Trade Information center and concludes that TCCIA should prepare a basic guide for some one who has not exported before and a need to conduct market surveys in various countries abroad one has to know where the market is and what does it requires.

At the end of the paper there is a summary and conclusion.

1.1 Introduction

The trade information center is a link between exporters, importer, suppliers, manufacturers and foreign markets. Briefly trade information services main tasks are together, process, store, retrieve and disseminate Trade Information, creation of business awareness to all interested parties. It provides vital information resources, facilities extensive and analytical markets and investigations.

1.2 IMPORTANT SOURCES OF TRADE INFORMATION CENTRES

- Specialized Agencies, importers and exporters
- International and Regional Organization (such as International trade center ITC) United Nations Conference on Trade and Development/UNCTAD; The Common Markets for Eastern and Southern Africa COMESA; Southern Africa Development Cooperation SADC; The World Trade Organization WTO.
- The East African Economic Cooperation Trade Association.
- Banks / Finance companies.
- Embassies (such as foreign embassies accredited to Tanzania and Tanzania embassies abroad.
- Chambers of Commerce Trade promotion organization and Associations such as import promotion houses.
- Libraries and information centers
- Through research papers and studies publications by Universities.

- Internet (such as online databases individual's company reports and product literature.
- Trade Fairs/Exhibitions organizers & Agencies

3.0 **TCCIA'S TRADE INFORMATION SERVICES CENTRE**

- 3.1 **Collection** TCCIA's Trade Information center has wide collections of reading material such Directories, Year books, Specialized books, Journals, Newsletters, Annual Reports e.t.c from various sources worldwide, some of the information is available in hard copy format, CD – Rom, online databases and through the internet. Acquisition of reading materials such as Directories, yearbooks, Hand books etc from various source, worldwide some of the information is available in hardcopy format, CD –Rom, online databases and through the internet acquisition of reading materials is by exchange gifts, by purchase and others are obtained free of charge.
- 3.2 **Processing-** it processes these materials using international trade classification ITC – SITC for their proper classification, storage and retrieval.
- 3.3 **Classification-** All incoming inquires related to international business – opportunities are reviewed by the information officer on a daily basis for relevance to the Tanzania market relevant inquiries are given a reference number and included in the TCCIA Business Opportunities Bulletin.
- 3.4 **Dissemination-** Trade information is disseminated through
- a) Telephone, Fax, E – mail, Website, surface mail
 - b) Across the desk inquiries for trade visitors calling at the Trade information library, about 2000 visitors mainly exporters came to the TCCIA Trade information center last year (about 8 to 10 people a day) their main information needs include the size of the potential markets, names and address of importers, supplies, manufactures, price information and tariff rates.
 - c) Publications – TCCIA Publishes Business opportunities bulletin which provides markets information and coming events such as trade exhibitors, seminars, conference, TCCIA Newsletter is also published.
 - d) TCCIA trade journals disseminates vital trade information on market potential quality and specification requirements, development and within Tanzania. This has not yet started at TCCIA.
 - e) Public media – Through Newspapers such as financial Times, Business Times, The Express etc.

- f) Mail inquiries – it is not always possible for traders to visit the TCCIA library especially those from outside Dar Es Salaam. In this case traders resort to inquiries by mail, fax, E-mail and telephone. Most of these inquiries relate to business contacts prices and access to target markets.
- g) Selective dissemination through:-
 - Regional TCCIA offices
 - Chambers of commerce in the country and abroad
 - Foreign Trade Promotion Organizations and
 - Import Promotion Organizations

WAYS ON HOW INFORMATION CAN BE OBTAINED

Information at TCCIA can be obtained through telephone, fax – e-mail, website surface mail and visits to the center.

Sources of information is from:-

- i) Subscriptions.
- ii) Exchange method (sharing the information from other stakeholders.
- iii) Direct purchase
- iv) Visit other information centers and government institution such as TRA, Ministries, National Statistical Bureau, TTB, United Nations Information center and many others.
- v) Chambers of commerce abroad
- vi) Commercial attaches are another sources of getting trade information other information is obtained through the Internet.

3.6 CLASSIFICATION AT THE LIBRARY

1. Periodicals section: Trade, Journals/Newsletters and popular magazine

2. Reference section; Trade Directories specialized books and bibliographies
3. Product section
4. Country information section
5. Function section
6. Statistical section
7. Tariff section
8. Trade Agreement section
9. General information section and notice board .

4.0 PROCEDURES FOR AVAILING SERVICES FROM THE LIBRARY.

- a) Each client to the center fills information inquiry form at the library
- b) Most of the information required is available in hardcopy and Internet source

4.1 TYPES OF INFORMATION SOURCES AT THE CENTRE

- Bank reports
- Market survey and investigations
- Product profiles
- Price information
- CD – Rom
- The center website
- Printed materials for general reference like journals, directories, catalogues.

All the materials at TCCIA library are catalogued in library catalogue system; we receive a lot of information on books, Directories etc and we convert the information and keep in our reference if we find it useful.

4.2 WHAT THE TRADE INFORMATION SERVICE CAN OFFER TO THE EXPORTER IMPORTERS.

There are two categories, of exporter

- An exporter who has already done a research on the availability and the market the market potential of the product. The export of this category would come to the trade information center for address of potential buyers etc.
- The second category is an exporter who would like to know to be advised on what product to export and all other information such as the availability of the product market potential etc. the trade information services center can assist the exporter by providing the following information.

5.0 **Statistics Data**

- i) Production statistics
- ii) Export statistics
- iii) Demand and supply patterns

These will assist an exporter to know the product availability, markets, import volume trends, volume supplied (competitors) etc.

5.1 **Market Data**

After having selected the market the center will advise the exporter about:-

- Country information
- Trade regulations, such as quotas, import regulations etc
- Consumer preference
- Product development
- i) Supply and demand studies
- ii) Product design manufacturing
- iii) Storage and packages
- iv) Product standards
- v) Export promotion eg. Photosentary
- vi) And any other development services to enlarge and diversity the export base and others.
- vii) Quality and packaging requirements
- Competition (other supply)
- Transport and communication

- Distribution channels
- Advertising media

Exporters are advised to conduct a thorough product/market research to avoid embarrassment because it is common trend for an exporter to come at the trade information library to collect the addresses of importers abroad and communicate to them that they can offer certain products without success, this definitely tarnish the image of the exporter himself and Tanzania as a whole.

5.2 SERVICES OFFERED TO THE IMPORTERS MANUFACTURES AND AGENTS

Importers are assisted to find potential suppliers, manufacturers of different products within COMESA, SADC worldwide – manufactures have access to information on product, technology and its sources how to start small manufacturing business, quality and standards & procedures on the product etc. TCCIA library center forward inquiries to the international chambers Network of members of the business community aimed at finding joint ventures partners.

5.3 FOREIGN TRADE TECHNOLOGIES

- i) Marketing and Management techniques
- ii) How to conduct marketing research
- iii) Export financing etc

After taking into consideration the above factors the exporter or should identify and plan for the following.

- a) The accepted minimum quantity of the product to be exported e. g beeswax, beans etc.
- b) The cost of transportation from the production area to the nearest port/air port.
- c) Export processing documentation and costs involved.
- d) The identity financial sources and minimum investment required.

5.4 PROBLEMS FACING THE TCCIA TRADE INFORMATION CENTRE.

While the center is trying very hard in its efforts to disseminate information a number of problems arise both from inside and outside organization.

- a) Due to the rising costs of publications for subscriptions, range of information coverage is an adequate.
- b) Poor cooperation from, local companies in giving out information on their activities especially the performance of their production capacity and their turnover.
- c) Unavailability of trade statistics
- d) Unavailability of information especially from information sector and products traded in small quantities.
- e) Sustainability; the center like other information centers in the world has not been sustainable, the cost sharing fee is not enough to run the center.
- f) The center doesn't have funds to conduct training for its clients and those who are starting business.
- g) Lack of computer knowledge most of business people are not literate in computer knowledge.
- h) Most people are not ready to share the cost from the services, obtained.
- i) Shortage of staff TCCIA Trade information department has 3 staff only.
- j) Subscription fees to useful information materials and publications in the library has not been included in the TCCIA budget.
- k) Documentation and Databank services
- l) The center has not been promoted outside/publicity

5.5 PROPOSED MEANS OF OVERCOMING THE ABOVE PROBLEMS IN SHORT AND LONG TERMS.

- Networking under SIDA technical assistance all TCCIA Regional Chambers were connected to the Internet. The coming third phase of SIDA support will connect another 11 district chambers.
- The chamber has managed to employ 3 chamber development officers
- TCCIA management has planned to open Internet chambers at Head quarters this year.

5.6 PROBLEMS WHICH NEED FINANCIAL DONOR SUPPORT

- Establishment of Audio – Visio section and conference room facilities

- TCCIA printing press for TCCIA publications.
- Funds for training and workshops

Despite of these problems, TCCIA has been designated a National Centre for receiving trade information from SADC countries.

The chamber is also a reference center for AGOA, WTO – JITAP, EAC, SACU/MMTZ.

TCCIA is a member of common wealth Business Network (COMBINET) and world chambers Network (WCN).

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION.

This paper concludes that in order for the Trade Information Services Centers to survive in the Information market for the 21st century there is a need to strive for innovative and sustainable services like design training programme for the businesswomen especially on SME'S and farmers in collaboration with other stakeholders we have a good number of women who are in the informal sectors such as handcraft business who need training in the area of product design and development and export market for their products.

TCCIA to prepare a basic guide for the exporters. Trade attaché's from our High Commission abroad are in better place to seek markets for the Tanzanian products TCCIA to advise the Government to seek funds for conducting market research for Traditional and non traditional products.

Thank You!