Welcome

Welcome to our second 2020 newsletter. Earlier in the year, we wrote to you with a Special Edition to inform you about how our project was impacted by the international travel restrictions consequent of the COVID-19 pandemic and how we developed an Action Plan to minimize disruption in our Programme and keep our commitments with the beneficiary countries. Now, we come back with our regular edition, to let you know all we accomplished since then, as well as our in-country support missions that took place from November 2019 until February 2020.

Highlights

Leadership and Management Development Retreat in Peru

The Top Executive Retreat (TER) for the Customs Administration of Peru, SUNAT, took place from 7 to 10 November 2019 in Chincha, Peru. This activity is part of the organizational development component of the Global Trade Facilitation Programme (GTFP), aiming at strengthening top executive capacity to manage own modernization and customs reforms. During these days, SUNAT’s leaders approached several topics inherent to the organization, including current context and challenges on issues such as cooperation between tax and customs, internal and external communications, stakeholder engagement and management culture. These debates were complemented with presentations on models and theories on modern leadership and management, comprising practical management skills, clear roles and responsibilities and team building.

GTFP raises awareness for Enhanced Border Cooperation in Latin America

The first regional meeting of the National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) in Latin America took place from 25-29 November in Montevideo, Uruguay. This forum was organized by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in collaboration with the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) to promote the exchange of best practices between the members of the NTFCs and identify areas for mutual learning and possible collaboration areas. The GTFP Lead Trade Facilitation Expert, Mr. Luis Montaño, developed and participated in three panel sessions. The panels encompassed Coordinated Boarder Management (CBM), Time Release Study (TRS) and Risk Management (RM). The sessions included the role of NTFCs in these subject areas and the regional challenges identified during the implementation of the GTFP. Additionally, Mr. Montaño briefed participants on the activities conducted by the WCO in the region, along with the upcoming ones to be delivered by the GTFP in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru.
Risk Management workshop in Colombia

The WCO delivered a national workshop on risk management from 2 to 6 December 2019, in Bogota, to support the efforts of the Customs Administration of Colombia, DIAN, in enhancing its Risk Management System and on the features that the proposed new model should contemplate. This activity helped to further DIAN’s capacities on designing a Risk Management Strategy. Management and operational staff in the Risk Management Coordination Unit of DIAN were fully engaged in discussions and exchanged ideas, bearing in mind the particularities and specific needs of Colombia. This activity took place following a specific request from DIAN that emphasized the importance of WCO support in the implementation of its technological transformation plan.

WCO Mercator Diagnostic in Uzbekistan

The WCO conducted a comprehensive diagnostic support mission in Uzbekistan from 3 to 12 February 2020, led by the GTFP Trade Facilitation Lead Expert, Mr. Luis Montaño. In addition to identifying compliance with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and the main trade facilitation needs, the WCO experts also held important discussions with different units within Uzbekistan’s State Customs Committee (SCC) working on reform and modernization, covering topics such as strategic planning, project management, and human resources. Aside from effective engagement with the SCC, the GTFP Programme Manager, Mrs. Maria Ortiz, held important meetings with the private sector and donor community. Following this mission, the WCO experts, together with the SCC, developed a work plan for Uzbekistan that takes into account the main areas, in trade facilitation and organizational development, which need capacity-building and technical assistance support from the GTFP over the next three years.

Strategic Planning workshop in Colombia

A national Strategic Planning 5-day workshop was conducted in Bogota from 17-21 February 2020. This activity envisaged to support DIAN in the efforts the organization is making in the areas of strategic planning and implementation of sustainable Customs reforms. During this week, DIAN’s officials became familiarized with different methodologies for strategic planning and development of targeted strategic objectives for Customs. The presentations from WCO experts were complemented with practical group work to define a vision, strategic objectives and results, and develop key performance indicators. This activity also contributes to the assistance being provided in the improvement of risk-based Customs procedures and post-clearance audit, in line with international standards and best practices. This support meets the priorities and needs of DIAN as it moves forward in the process of procedural and technological transformation.
**GTFP develops COVID-19 Action Plan**

In light of the current travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the GTFP team developed an Action Plan that ensures the continuity of the work plans previously agreed with our beneficiary countries. This plan can be adjusted according to the circumstances and countries’ needs and optimizes the use of available technologies in the implementation of technical assistance, engagement with our counterparts and donor coordination activities. The team started by designing and conducting an online survey to assess the IT tools available in the beneficiary Customs Administrations in order to identify the feasibility of remote assistance. Subsequently, the team created a list of face-to-face technical assistance missions (based in the work plans) that could be moved online and catalogued the multiple existing online conferencing tools, accessible in the beneficiary countries, to evaluate the ones that could be best leveraged to maintain the participatory and interactive approach of GTFP activities. With the support of our GTFP National Project Managers (NPMs) in Bolivia, Colombia, Peru and Uzbekistan, we collected information relevant to specific technical areas of work, in order to design the remote assistance that will continue to be tailor-made to the needs of the CAs and to agree the terms of reference of this support.

**Light-touch intervention in Guatemala**

As part of the GTFP’s light-touch interventions, consisting of short-term assistance based on identified needs on specific trade facilitation areas, the Programme will provide technical assistance to the Customs Administration of Guatemala on the accession to the WCO Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC). This intends to contribute to the implementation of efficient and predictable Customs procedures in Guatemala, in line with international best practices and according to Guatemala’s strategic objectives and comprehensive Customs Modernization Programme.

The first technical working session took place on 19 May via videoconference, in which the WCO experts presented the working methodology that will start with an initial revision of the Customs Administration of Guatemala self-assessment work and gap-analysis. With this information, the WCO experts will issue a series of recommendations based on identified gaps and support the administration to develop and implement a roadmap on the accession to the RKC. The overall outcome of the support to be provided is that SAT completes its revision and alignment to the RKC and submits it to Congress for the approval process.

**Remote Risk Management assistance to Bolivia**

The first meeting of the technical assistance on Risk Management (RM) to be provided to the Customs Administration of Bolivia took place on 19 May via videoconference and consisted of an initial presentation of the GTFP and its background, the explanation of the methodology to be followed throughout the assistance and the adaptation that had to be done in order to provide remote support. The work to be carried out by the WCO Experts follows up on the recommendations provided by the mission from the IMF on RM and aims at strengthening Bolivia’s capacities to develop a national risk management strategy and respective risk matrixes. The assistance will carry on remotely, by means of interviews with the different areas working on RM and six theoretical sessions of 2 hours each. As soon as the state of world affairs normalizes and travel is reinstated, the WCO experts will initiate the practical part of the RM assistance.
**GTFP activities promote Sustainable Reforms**

The GTFP interventions take into account local realities and strive to create the sustainability of reforms and create capacity at national and regional levels. In this sense, the Programme will, whenever possible, create opportunities for the accreditation of experts who can ensure the continuity of support and monitoring of results, as well as for the development of training materials in the local languages. In line with these objectives, during the past months, the GTFP supported the accreditation of a Mercator Programme Advisor (MPA) from Argentina, creating capacity in the Americas region and supporting the pool of WCO experts who can deliver TF assistance in Spanish. Moreover, the GTFP funded the new WCO Leadership and Management Development (LMD) package and the translation of these materials into Spanish and Russian languages. Additionally, as part of the GTFP’s support to the WCO LMD Programme, funds were made available to enable an LMD accreditation workshop for Spanish speakers, an event that took place in Madrid from 9 to 13 March 2020, counting with participants from GTFP beneficiary countries. At the end of this workshop, 4 selected pre-accredited LMD facilitators were identified (1 from Argentina, 2 from Brazil and 1 from Spain), as well as 4 selected pre-accredited experts in Middle Management Development (MMD) (2 from Colombia, 1 from Peru and 1 from Spain) contributing to the sustainability of the GTFP activities in Latin America.

**GTFP supports WCO work on Performance Measurement**

The WCO Working Group on Performance Measurement is tasked with developing the new comprehensive mechanism that takes into account all Customs competencies for assessing and improving Customs organizational performance. The GTFP contributes to these efforts by supporting two regional workshops on performance measurement for WCO members in the Europe and Americas regions. The events will focus on local experiences in the definition and use of qualitative and quantitative indicators, including data collection and data quality. The regional event for the Europe region was scheduled to take place from 9 to 12 June 2020 in Budapest, Hungary, but had to be postponed due to the current travel restrictions. At the moment, an assessment is being made about the possibility to move the workshop to the virtual space to ensure it takes place during 2020. In addition to these regional events, the GTFP will support the organization of a Performance Measurement Global Conference and the conduction of two pilot projects in WCO member countries.

**GTFP to welcome new beneficiaries**

During the Central Programme Steering Committee held in November 2019, the WCO and SECO discussed the expansion of the GTFP, based on a methodology for potential new beneficiary countries prepared by the Programme Management Team (PMT). Initial conversations were held with the Customs Administrations of Serbia and Ukraine, who had previously shown interest in taking part in the programme. Formal presentation missions were scheduled for both countries but, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, had to be put on hold and will be reprogrammed when international travel is permitted. At that time, the PMT will visit Belgrade and Kiev to formally present the GTFP and agree dates and procedures for the diagnostic missions, finally welcoming Serbia and Ukraine as the next fully-fledged GTFP beneficiaries.