**First African Forum on National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs)**

Linking 8 international organizations, 6 donors, 44 countries and over 250 participants to discuss trade facilitation

As a joint collaboration, UNCTAD, the World Bank Group (WBG), the International Trade Center (ITC), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the WCO, organized the First African Forum on National Trade Facilitation Committees in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on the 27 to 29 of November 2018, gathering more than 250 participants from 44 countries. The Forum provided an opportunity to bring together public and private sector NTFC representatives, to discuss common possibilities and challenges related to trade facilitation reforms, sharing experiences, promoting best practices and raise awareness on the existing support available for implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), provided by the international donor community.

“"The forum provided a platform for discussion on common issues in Trade Facilitation which underscored the importance of sharing experiences and best practice. The content was broad and very well blended, I was very excited to learn about the opportunities out there for Uganda. It was an honor for me to share what Uganda Customs is doing to facilitate Women Traders. The coordination of the various donors was remarkable and should be encouraged in all areas of Customs. Thank you WCO for the invitation and support.”

Ms. Stella Kisuze, Executive Officer, Uganda Revenue Authority (URA)"

**Enhanced knowledge of the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) in the Central American and Caribbean**

Bridging the gap between small island states, regional economic communities and the RKC

In collaboration with the Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council (CCLEC) and St Lucia Customs, the WCO organized a workshop on the RKC in St Lucia on the 26 to 30 November. The workshop gathered representatives from 14 Customs Administrations in the Central American and Caribbean region. Besides raising awareness of the importance and advantages of the RKC, the workshop also aimed at identifying accession and implementation gaps and challenges, to conduct a preliminary gap analysis of compliance with the RKC Standards, as well as exploring potential solutions for accessing to, and implementing the RKC. The workshop provided an opportunity for the participants to strengthen their knowledge on the RKC and related tools, and enhance their skills on how to effectively analyze the compatibility of the RKC with each country’s respective national/regional framework and practices. As a result of this workshop, 4 additional countries are now planning to accede to the RKC.

“"Customs Administrations worldwide are increasingly recognizing the critical importance and value of facilitating legitimate trade and balancing that exercise with the need to secure revenue and ensuring trader compliance. The RKC regional workshop in St Lucia expertly buttressed this sentiment by providing valuable insight into the core of the RKC and the obligations existing thereunder and equally affording participants an open platform for dialogue and exchange of knowledge and experiences garnered in their local administrations.”

Ms. Tracy Sosa, Legal Counsel, Belize Customs and Excise (CED)"
WCO welcomes Belize as a new Mercator beneficiary

Following a successful scoping and programme planning mission conducted in Belize City on the 22-26 of October 2018, hosted by the Customs and Excise Department of Belize (CED), a Mercator Implementation Plan outlining the key priorities for capacity building and technical assistance support in the next two years was established. The scoping exercise included extensive consultations with different CED units, along with the Ministry of Finance, the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC), the Ministry of Trade as well as private sector stakeholders including the Chamber of Commerce. The mission team also visited the cargo center at the airport in Belize City and the border post between Belize and Guatemala. In parallel with the Scoping mission, a Post Clearance Audit (PCA) (Article 7.5) diagnostic was delivered, followed by a Risk Management (Article 7.4) diagnostic completed in December 2018, two priority TFA areas where forward support will be provided. In addition to the Mercator Programme, Belize will also benefit from the UNCTAD Empowerment Programme for National Trade Facilitation Committees.

WCO welcomes Lesotho as a new Mercator beneficiary

The WCO completed an initial TFA Scoping mission in Lesotho on 19 to 23 of November hosted by the Lesotho Revenue Authority (LRA). The mission included extensive consultations with different directorates of the LRA, along with meetings with the Ministry of Trade & Industry, Cooperatives and Marketing, private sector stakeholders and the One-Stop Business Facilitation Center (OSBFC). The exchange aimed at identifying areas were the WCO could complement and respond to current gaps and needs related to TFA implementation through the effective application of WCO instruments and tools. The mission resulted in the identification of several areas in need for further support including Risk Management (Article 7.4), PCA (Article 7.5), Time-Release Study (Article 7.6) and Coordinated Border Management (Article 8.1), along with a number of proposed activities to support organizational development within the LRA. The findings and recommendations will be compiled in a comprehensive multi-year Mercator Implementation Plan for Lesotho.

Launch of a Time-Release Study in Tonga

Mapping port business processes and building consensus

Following the 2018 Mercator Implementation Plan for Tonga, the WCO delivered a Time Release Study introduction mission on the 10 to 14 of December. This mission aimed at concretizing the planning for conducting a TRS in Tonga, which will be implemented with continuous assistance from the WCO. Through meetings and site visits with a wide range of trade stakeholders, the mission resulted in a comprehensive mapping of businesses processes of commercial and private consignments, taking into account the unique procedures of the Port of Nuku’alofa. Furthermore, a draft data collaboration questionnaire covering 39 different points in the clearance processes was developed, allowing for a comprehensive data analysis. Participants also had the opportunity to strengthen their skills of the collaborative nature of the WCO TRS tool and its approach. As a result of the mission, the initial steps of establishing a TRS working group with participation of a broad range of stakeholders were taken. A framework for joint WCO-World Bank collaboration for the delivery of a quality TRS report was also established, including a timeframe for the roll-out of the TRS, piloting of the questionnaire and the data collection to take place first quarter of 2019.


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