WCO promotes modern and digital Customs for efficient disaster relief operations

Foreword by the Secretary General

The timely and lawful facilitation of goods has always been at the core of Customs administrations’ mandate and, in order to avoid the negative impact of burdensome requirements on international trade, over time WCO Members have taken important steps forward in streamlining and simplifying their technical and legal procedures. This is particularly true in the case of relief supplies, a category of goods needing specific and rapid treatment as confirmed by the difficulties arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters which have struck different parts of the world.

The latest pandemic-related supply chain disruption and the urgent need to facilitate high volumes of critical goods have led the Customs community to come together and reflect deeply on its role in the humanitarian supply chain. Building on the spirit of cooperation and solidarity which has been a key feature of the WCO since its foundation, the Organization’s Members have never retreated in the face of difficulties. Instead, they have stepped up to play an active role in different types of relief operations, whether resulting from man-made or natural disasters, by quickly adapting to new, unprecedented situations.

The use of technology has been extremely helpful in this respect, inasmuch as the digitalization of Customs procedures can significantly speed up the facilitation of relief supplies, improve coordination and communication with the actors in the humanitarian supply chain and, in general, help border authorities play an efficient role in international relief assistance, responding both to immediate and long-term reconstruction needs. Customs services have transformed challenges into opportunities, investing in the latest digital tools to become more modern and respond more promptly and flexibly, reducing the burden of red tape and outdated procedures and contributing to getting through the worst of the global health crisis. The WCO has supported Customs services throughout this modernization process.

This third edition of the WCO COVID-19 Project Newsletter provides readers with an overview of the latest activities carried out by the Secretariat across the different WCO regions as part of the COVID-19 Action Plan. It also describes the efforts made to improve Members’ ability to tackle emergency situations, including by helping them mitigate the impact of disasters on their national and regional territories and by making the most appropriate and up-to-date instruments and tools available to them.

The WCO will continue to work in close cooperation with all stakeholders in international humanitarian aid provision, while ensuring that Members make the most of the lessons learnt from the pandemic, so as to be adequately prepared and equipped to meet the important responsibility of ensuring the facilitation of relief supplies when the next major disaster strikes.

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The WCO COVID-19 Project

As part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in June 2020 the WCO launched the COVID-19 Project with the financial support of the Government of Japan. The Project aims to support Members (especially least developed and developing countries) in dealing with the impact of COVID-19 and to enhance their response to the pandemic. The overall purpose is to ensure the security, stability and continuity of global supply chains, while facilitating and expediting the supply of emergency relief goods.

Additional information on the Project is available here: http://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programs/natural-disaster/coronavirus.aspx
Providing tailored support to Customs administrations for greater preparedness

Mitigating the socio-economic, health and environmental consequences of unexpected disruptive events such as natural disasters and infectious diseases can be particularly challenging for stakeholders involved in disaster management if they cannot rely on an established, transparent and up-to-date legal framework to regulate the different phases of intervention and clarify their respective duties and responsibilities. Amongst other things, information on the procedures ensuring the effective and lawful movement of relief goods and equipment, issued by the government agencies of the affected country and applying to the humanitarian community, should be timely and unambiguous, thus ensuring the smooth movement of relief consignments.

Clearance bottlenecks may result from, for example, an absent or incomplete list of the critical goods needed by the government in case of calls for international assistance, a lack of standards applicable to emergencies, ineffective interinstitutional cooperation or non-compliant and uncooperative non-governmental organizations.

This may mean that Customs administrations, which are responsible for cross-border operations, have to deal with a number of problems ranging from incomplete documents presented by humanitarian actors to the arrival of large supplies of non-essential or unlawful goods.

Customs administrations are at the forefront of disaster operations and, in the light of the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, several WCO Members expressed their desire for additional support to improve their preparedness and overcome the operational hurdles that can negatively affect their work when disasters strike, generating supply delays. Over the past few months, the COVID-19 Project has therefore been providing capacity-building support tailored to the national situation in and requirements of Comoros, Angola, Dominican Republic and Madagascar.

Activities run by the Project have included a series of ad-hoc preparatory meetings during which experts from the WCO and partner organizations worked closely with the beneficiary countries’ Customs representatives to carry out a “health check” of the Customs legislation and of the existing procedures for the facilitation of relief consignments, identifying the legislative gaps to be filled.
Training workshops enabled participants to familiarize themselves with the WCO and international instruments and tools and to review the national legal regime and Customs clearance procedures for the import, transit and export of humanitarian goods. The core sessions of the workshops focused on the drafting of a Guide for collecting standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the clearance of medical goods and equipment, reviewing and updating existing requirements and improving coordination between public and private entities. Customs legal facilities were also discussed extensively, such as tax breaks for importers of goods and services aimed at fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and the direct unloading of imports by international organizations.

WCO beneficiary Members warmly welcomed the support provided by the COVID-19 Project and highlighted the practical benefits of the newly drafted procedures, which will help avoid supply delays, speed up the delivery of perishable goods, including medical ones, improve operational expense management and increase the smooth flow and effectiveness of emergency operations. Several WCO Members, including Comoros and Angola, expressed their interest in receiving additional support from the Organization for simulation exercises to test and fine-tune the newly drafted Guide on the ground and overcome any potential remaining bottlenecks that could negatively affect the humanitarian supply chain. The COVID-19 Project, in cooperation with the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation (Alliance) and the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) of Columbia University, already held similar training for Madagascar in February 2022, assisting Customs and other stakeholders in enhancing their preparedness for facing the cyclone season, fostering interoperability between emergency response organizations and allowing future relief efforts to be scaled up in a coordinated manner.

**Digitalizing Customs procedures for disaster relief operations**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the fact that the simplification and digitalization of Customs procedures is critical to effectively and safely operating in disaster situations. Several WCO Members have been working to this end. The provision and exchange of information in a digital format allows Customs administrations to better communicate with trade facilitation stakeholders (including customers, suppliers, intermediaries and authorities), ensure increased compliance, rapidly identify the goods needed by the government to help affected communities and implement the Customs procedures applicable to emergency operations. These may relate to legal facilities (e.g. tax exemptions for eligible organizations and types of goods and equipment), real-time cross-border tracking, inspections and risk management, priority clearance and facilitation.
• The WCO COVID-19 Project supports Comoros Customs in fostering its preparedness to tackle disruptive events:

• WCO, Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation and the National Center for Disaster Preparedness joint efforts to support Madagascar in preparing its response to the tropical cyclone season:

• The WCO COVID-19 Project supports Angola’s Revenue Administration in tackling COVID-19 and strengthening its emergency-response procedures:

• The Dominican Republic Customs establishes an Action plan for humanitarian aid clearance with the assistance of the WCO COVID-19 Project:

“Thank you to the Customs administration for sharing its expertise and for its social role, in addition to the economic one, in ensuring the safety of people. Thank you also to partner organizations. We hope that this workshop will help other countries facing similar scenarios”.

M. Ernest Zafivanona Lainkana, Director General, Madagascar Customs

Photo showing participants at the debriefing session organized on 11 February 2022 by the WCO COVID-19 Project in cooperation with the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation (Alliance) and the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) of Columbia University to evaluate the functioning of the Standard Operating Procedures during Cyclone Batsirai in Madagascar.
Fostering contactless passengers declaration: the procurement and use of IT solutions

Considering the health challenges brought about by COVID-19, the WCO encourages the use of contactless procedures to maintain social distancing. Minimizing physical contact between Customs officers and inbound air passengers at the border is, in fact, one of the most effective methods to prevent the spread of the virus while ensuring supply chain continuity and the safe resumption of international travel. It also facilitates Customs procedures for passengers, eliminating time-consuming paper forms while significantly reducing waiting times.

During the pandemic, a number of Customs administrations such as Japan Customs and the Canada Border Services Agency implemented contactless procedures in the form of an app for the passenger Customs e-declaration. This good practice produced successful results, improving the safety and efficiency of border operations. Under the COVID-19 Project, a mobile app and related equipment for the passenger declaration have been provided to three countries: Benin, Cameroon and Madagascar.

The Customs e-declaration smartphone application will be used by passengers for completing their data and submitting the e-declaration to Customs via a QR code. Customs staff will use the hardware provided (tablets and QR scanners) to retrieve the data required for processing the declarations submitted in this way.
Update on the WCO Guidelines on disaster management and supply chain continuity

To overcome the numerous hurdles stemming from the COVID-19 crisis, WCO Members have worked hard to simplify and digitalize existing Customs procedures, thereby supporting humanitarian interventions and providing economic relief to supply chain actors relying on trade facilitation to keep their business operations going.

In order to help Customs administrations improve their capacity to address the challenges stemming from disruptive events, the COVID-19 Project developed the “WCO Guidelines on disaster management and supply chain continuity”, the latest version of which was endorsed by the WCO Permanent Technical Committee (PTC) at its 233rd/234th Sessions in October 2021. The Guidelines were built upon existing WCO instruments and tools, such as Chapter 5 of Specific Annex J to the Revised Kyoto Convention and the WCO Council Resolution of 2011, WCO initiatives in the area of natural disaster relief, other guidance material developed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and best practices collected from Members and stakeholders.

To assist Customs administrations in evaluating their conformity with the “WCO Guidelines on disaster management and supply chain continuity”, the WCO COVID-19 Project recently produced an ad-hoc Self-Assessment Checklist, annexed to the main document, that was presented to the 235e/236e PTC sessions in April 2022 and endorsed. The objective of this new tool is for WCO Members to better evaluate:

- their capacity to ensure the expedited movement of relief consignments in case of natural disasters and similar events;
- their preparedness and ability to ensure the continuity of their operations in the aftermath of a disaster;
- potential needs and gaps to be filled in relation to the existing legal framework, capacity building, use of technology, modernization of procedures and processes, etc.; and
- needs in terms of capacity building and technical assistance to be requested from the WCO.

The Checklist covers elements relating to several areas including the role of Customs administrations and other national organizations, the national legal framework, available Customs resources such as a single window, staff training, cooperation with other government agencies and stakeholders, and Customs procedures.

The COVID-19 Project has provided support to interested Members with this analytical exercise and helped them identify the gaps between the measures in place to address emergency situations and those still to be implemented. Through a thorough examination of national preparedness, Customs services will be able to identify their needs and further improve their ability to efficiently tackle and recover from future disruptive events.

The Guidelines in English, French, Spanish and Russian are available here:
COVID-19 and digitalization: the WCO Compliance and Facilitation Directorate is working for paperless, secure and connected Customs

By Pranab Kumar Das, Director of the WCO Compliance and Facilitation Directorate

When the WCO Secretariat launched its COVID-19 Action Plan in January 2021, the global health crisis was proving to be particularly challenging and the elaboration of health and socioeconomic policy solutions was a priority for the international community, with a view to avoiding potential supply chain disruptions that could negatively affect infection trends and the delivery of vaccines.

Since then, the strategic actions contained in the Plan have been used as a hands-on tool to provide additional guidance to Customs administrations, helping them in carrying out their mission of ensuring the speedy facilitation of critical items while tackling increasing flows of unlawful medical goods and vaccines released onto the market by criminal organizations taking advantage of the situation to make a profit. The rise of COVID-19 and the need to maintain social distancing also triggered a significant push towards the digital transformation of trade-related procedures, urgently replacing paper-format Customs systems by electronic ones to reduce supply chain bottlenecks and red tape while guaranteeing safe and efficient security checks.

The WCO Procedures and Facilitation Sub-Directorate has been planning and implementing a number of important actions to foster the shift towards a fully electronic and interoperable environment, prioritizing its activities in line with the COVID-19 Action Plan. These include the periodic revision of the Framework of Standards on Cross-Border E-Commerce to adapt to evolving business models and emerging issues across the global e-commerce supply chain, as established by the Permanent Technical Committee in June 2020, and the periodic revision of the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) concept, digitalizing the AEO criteria template and fostering its adoption by cross-border e-commerce stakeholders.

The Procedures and Facilitation Sub-Directorate has also strengthened its engagement with a number of key actors, such as with the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the e-commerce private sector, by boosting their use of the WCO Data Model, facilitating data collection and streamlining standards for the automation of border processes. It has also fed into the Digital Standards Initiative of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), seeking greater recognition of existing standards and creating new frameworks to unify digital trade processes.

In parallel, the WCO Compliance and Enforcement Sub-Directorate has also been developing joint initiatives with a number of partner organizations, including FRONTEX, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), fostering Customs-to-Customs cooperation and synergies with other law enforcement authorities to tackle the challenges stemming from supply chain disruption linked to COVID-19. The achievements of Operation STOP II, the largest-ever Customs-led global operation involving 146 WCO Member Customs administrations and primarily focused on the illicit trade in medicines, vaccines and medical devices related to COVID-19, are particularly noteworthy in this respect. For the purposes of the Operation, further improvements were made to IPR CENcomm 3, the web-based communication system allowing Customs officers to exchange intelligence information, messages and alerts via secure channels. The Compliance and Enforcement Sub-Directorate also plans to start developing a data-based observatory on Customs commercial and excise fraud, including fraudulent activities related to e-commerce and free trade zones.

The pandemic has necessitated a “health check” of the ability of Customs authorities to manage supply chains during disruptive events. The facilitation of emergency relief goods to support populations in need, in accordance with the new health and safety conditions, has forced Customs authorities to undertake the digital transformation of their systems within strict time constraints. Nevertheless, WCO Members were quickly able to identify the gaps to be filled to adapt their Customs clearance mechanisms to the post-pandemic digital age and to take advantage of the opportunities offered by technology, thus making their respective administrations more innovative and transparent. The Compliance and Facilitation Directorate and the WCO Secretariat as a whole supported them in this ambitious task and, by keeping the implementation of the COVID-19 Action Plan at the core of their activities, Member administrations have been playing an active role in the fight against COVID-19 without compromising on the dedication and competence that makes Customs a key actor in global supply chains.
Operation STOP II and the role of digitalization in tackling the trafficking of counterfeit vaccines and other medical goods related to COVID-19

By Operation STOP Project team, WCO Compliance Sub-Directorate

Operation STOP II is part of the Action Plan established by the WCO in response to the December 2020 Resolution of the Customs Co-operation Council on the Role of Customs in Facilitating the Cross-Border Movement of Situationally Critical Medicines and Vaccines. Phases 1 and 2 of Operation STOP II proved extremely successful, with Members reporting 2,360 cases of illicit medicines and medical devices, as reflected in 3,434 seizure cases.

IPR CENcomm application

The Operation STOP II Team and the WCO Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), Health and Safety Programme have been proactive in further developing the Customs Enforcement Network Communication Platform (CENcomm) to target counterfeit COVID-19-related goods. CENcomm is a web-based communication system allowing Customs officers to exchange messages and information securely and in real time. Japan Customs has contributed financially to the development of CENcomm, thus ensuring increased support to WCO Members via this tool.

Right Holders’ Corner

One of the keys to the success of Operation STOP II has been the information on counterfeit goods shared by right holders. A “Right Holders’ Corner” has been developed to facilitate seamless communication between Customs and right holders on this topic. A roadmap for communication with right holders has been drawn up, comprising two phases. During the first phase, the WCO will invite right holders to help create a new communication channel between them and the WCO, allowing them to save information to be shared with Customs on the platform. Subject to successful completion of the first phase, the communication channel will be further modified to provide access to WCO Members and enable direct information exchange, with the aim of simplifying communication between right holders and Customs and bolstering Customs’ efforts to combat counterfeit goods.

COVID-19 pre-arrival template

In addition to strengthening controls to detect counterfeit goods, another important mission of Operation STOP II is to promote the distribution of lawful COVID-19 vaccines. To this end, a “COVID-19 pre-arrival template” has been developed to provide advance information to transit and importing countries. As demonstrated during phases 1 and 2 of Operation STOP II, countries can use the template to confirm the export of COVID-19 vaccines, thereby facilitating their distribution in the countries of arrival. The WCO will provide support to Members to foster the use of the template during phase 3 of Operation STOP II, thus further expediting the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.
Assisting Pacific Islands in the clearance and regularization of relief goods in the event of natural disasters and other disruptive events.

On 15 January 2022, Tonga was hit by a violent eruption of the underwater Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano, sending shockwaves and tsunamis across the region that dramatically impacted people, services and infrastructures. The incident was closely followed by the media and reminded decision-makers that, as Tonga is particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change and natural disasters, like other islands in the Pacific, it is critical to have a preparedness plan in place to make sure that border authorities and other government agencies involved in disaster relief are adequately prepared to tackle such emergency situations.

Customs administrations have an important role to play in humanitarian operations, making sure that critical goods are provided in a timely manner while ensuring the implementation of COVID-19 protocols at borders. In Tonga the solidarity of the international community has led to the delivery of large volumes of relief supplies, such as mobile homes, tractors, generators, pumps, water purifiers, emergency food, and medical and epidemic prevention equipment. One of the main challenges faced has been clearing these consignments as fast as possible, thus avoiding delays or bottlenecks that could prevent aid reaching populations in need or result in the spoilage of perishable goods.

The digitalization of Customs clearance can greatly help Customs with prioritizing and rapidly processing relief consignments during similar disruptive events, especially in disaster-prone countries that regularly undergo preparation and training exercises so as to be able to react quickly to similar emergencies.

Certain Pacific Islands are characterized by small populations, remote locations, high telecommunication and transportation costs and poor infrastructure. Considering the engagement of the WCO in providing them with the support they need, including through its Small Island Economies Initiative launched in June 2018 with the aim of providing the Customs administrations of such economies with tailor-made capacity-building and technical assistance, the WCO COVID-19 Project organized a “WCO online sub-regional workshop to assist Pacific Islands in improving their capacity in the clearance and regularization of relief goods in case of natural disasters and other disruptive events”. The workshop was held from 19 to 21 October and on 26 October 2021, in cooperation with the Oceania Customs Organisation Secretariat (OCO). The initiative allowed for current procedures implemented in the event of emergencies for certain categories of imported goods, such as medicines and telecommunication equipment, to be analysed and for practical recommendations to be formulated. This also extended to the use of computerized Customs management systems.

Following the recent volcanic eruption in Tonga, the Project will provide additional support to that country by organizing a capacity-building activity in May 2022 bringing together Customs officers and other stakeholders involved in humanitarian operations. The initiative will make it possible to assess the response mechanisms implemented by the Customs authorities during the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai eruption, to identify potential gaps to be filled and to review Customs procedures with a view to promoting swift reconstruction during the recovery phase.
The importance of technologies and interoperability in managing emergency situations such as COVID-19

By Milena Budimirovic, Senior Technical Officer, WCO Facilitation Sub-Directorate

Responses to COVID-19 have sped up the adoption of digital technology by several years. It has proven to be a highly transformative period and a number of lessons learnt will help shape the future.

KEEPING OFFICERS AND CLIENTS SAFE

The pandemic has called for solutions to ensure that officers unable to work remotely and the people they come into contact with, such as drivers and declarants, do not spread the virus. These solutions include the use of infrared fever measuring equipment, protective shields and safe passage booths.

Some administrations have devised a regional driver tracking system, allowing for the results of COVID-19 tests performed on lorry drivers to be sent in advance of the drivers’ arrival in neighbouring countries. Others have turned to remote monitoring tools, such as drones, cameras and other devices, to reduce their officers’ physical movements and contacts.

ADVANCE ELECTRONIC INFORMATION

Systems enabling the reception and sharing of pre-arrival information are considered to be the main tools enabling Customs and other agencies to speed up clearance and provide priority passage for critical consignments. For many administrations, receiving advance electronic information is nothing new. However, in many instances, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) do not provide Customs with advance electronic information. In some countries, it may be necessary to help SMEs identify ways of submitting information in advance in order to benefit from faster clearance.

TECHNOLOGY AS AN INTERAGENCY COOPERATION ENABLER

Single window solutions play a critical role in facilitating interagency cooperation during the clearance process. There are many benefits to be gained from centralizing and sharing inspection data on a single platform.

ACCEPTING ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS

Many administrations decided to allow the submission of electronic certificates and permits during the pandemic, instead of paper documents. Accordingly, there is a need to build a proper legal framework and develop international standards allowing for acceptance of electronic documents. It is, however, important to note that scanned copies could be challenging to process, as optical character recognition (OCR) or artificial intelligence technology is required to extract digital data.
MANAGING CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE TRANSACTIONS
The biggest challenges encountered during the pandemic have been data availability and quality, especially with the tremendous growth of e-commerce transactions requiring a higher level of sophistication and accuracy of data analytics techniques for improved risk management.

IMPORTANCE OF DATA STANDARDS
Commercial operators should not be asked to use specific data formats and meet specific requirements every time they interact with a public body, as this generates additional compliance costs. The WCO Data Model (DM) was developed as a compilation of clearly structured, harmonized, standardized and reusable sets of data definitions and electronic messages. It is intended to meet the operational and legal requirements of cross-border regulatory agencies, including Customs. Devised jointly by Customs and the private sector, the WCO DM is critical for successful data exchange at the national, bilateral and multilateral levels.

INTERCONNECTIVITY
The information collected from various IT systems takes different digital formats. As a result, regulatory bodies such as Customs authorities could theoretically have access to data-rich ecosystems managed by public and private entities, and be able to record the journey of a shipment along the supply chain. However, this goldmine of information is less valuable if there is no standardized and up-to-date means for Customs to collect and interpret this data.

TELEWORKING
Most administrations adapted quickly to the new circumstances brought about by the pandemic, allowing their staff to start working from home. Clear benefits such as reduced commuting time, greater efficiency in many cases and more possibilities for participation in online training and events have been observed. However, the inability of inspection staff to work remotely, potential security breaches, poor internet connections and a lack of opportunities for informal discussions and networking are clear disadvantages of teleworking, especially for newly-recruited officers.
Using simulation approaches to build preparedness and evaluate real-world disasters
By Jeffrey Schlegelmilch, Director, National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP), Columbia University

In a world of uncertainty, we need to be prepared for a wide range of disruptions. With growing reliance on global supply chains amidst increasing disasters, the consequences of disruptions can amplify impacts from disasters.

But disasters are also dynamic events that can happen with little warning and affect a number of different stakeholders in unexpected ways. It is not possible to plan for every contingency that could impact our supply chains and global trade, but it is possible to build planning processes that are adaptive and more resilient in the face of disasters. The key to this is integrating simulations into the planning process.

Recently, the WCO, with support from the Government of Japan, assisted the Government of Madagascar in the development of a practical guide to support the rapid clearance of humanitarian supplies in the aftermath of a major disaster. The result is an important resource to help importers and government agencies alike understand and navigate Customs clearance processes in a disaster situation. However, how the guide would hold up in a complex emergency would be the ultimate test. Rather than wait for a disaster, the team working on the guide expanded its collaboration with the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, which contracted with the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University to build out a simulation to test the practical guide.

The exercise designed was a discussion-based simulation, called a tabletop exercise. The planning team and targeted participants included government agencies, as well as non-profit organizations and private sector partners. The goal was to test the utility of the practical guide in the context of a tropical cyclone, to generate feedback to support its improvement, and to familiarize stakeholders with its content and utility. The process of planning the simulation involved developing objectives, evaluation criteria for measuring the objectives, and a scenario with multiple facets describing the disaster and the follow-on effects. This scenario was built to drive discussions related to the Customs clearance processes that the guide was developed to support.

Ultimately, the simulation was not required. Tropical Cyclone Batsirai was heading towards Madagascar just as the exercise was scheduled to take place. But the investment in the exercise was not lost. The effort was pivoted to hold a pre-landfall workshop to familiarize stakeholders with the practical guide and to discuss how it could be used in response to the coming storm. A week later, an After Action Workshop was convened to discuss the findings and additional lessons learnt. The evaluation structure for the simulation was transitioned to support a real-world event. This evaluation generated findings used to improve the guide along with elaboration of additional recommendations to support the clearance of essential supplies in the aftermath of future disasters.

Simulations and real-world evaluation processes are an essential part of building disaster resilience. These exercises can start small, and build to more complex evaluations. In addition to the plans that simulations are designed to test, they also provide an opportunity to practice more complex responses with a wide range of stakeholders. From this, the plans become stronger and the stakeholders become more practiced in working together. And in working together, we are more prepared to meet the challenges that we can predict, and those we cannot.

Editorial note

The COVID-19 Project Newsletter is distributed free of charge in English and French and is available on the WCO website. The WCO COVID-19 Project Team wishes to express its sincere thanks to all contributors. Please note that the opinions expressed in this Newsletter are the Team’s own and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Organization. The WCO Secretariat reserves the right to publish, not to publish or edit articles to ensure they conform to the Newsletter’s editorial policy. Contributions are welcome in English and French.

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