



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands

WCO C-RED Project  
CUSTOMS FOR RELIEF OF EPIDEMIC DISEASES



WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION  
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DES DOUANES

## Regional Consultation and Development of Preparedness Tools and Mechanisms for Epidemic Crisis

1-4 November 2016  
Freetown, Sierra Leone

### Mission Report



## **1. Consultation Background**

The World Customs Organization (WCO) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the Netherlands entered into an agreement to support WCO Members in the West Africa Region affected by the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), namely Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Mali, Senegal and Nigeria. The overall goal of the WCO Customs for Relief of Epidemic Diseases (C-RED) project is to assist Customs Administrations in West Africa to be better prepared to minimize the effects of regional epidemic diseases and natural disasters.

Under the second component of the project, the project foresees to provide capacity building support to the beneficiary Customs Administrations to develop mechanisms, based on international best practices that guide the release of relief goods in case of the outbreak of a regional epidemic disease or a natural disaster, through national preparedness and regional cooperation.

In order to do so, the project will foster regional experience sharing based on experiences in the Ebola crisis as well as national support in the development and implementation of Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs) for the priority release of relief goods.

The first regional workshop is based on the joint regional seminar between the WCO, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) on the Role of Customs in Natural Disaster Response. The regional seminar which took place from 09 – 10 March 2016 in Addis – Ababa aimed at raising awareness of Customs Administrations on how they can respond efficiently and effectively to emergency situations resulting from natural disaster and, to increase awareness among governments and the private sector of the need for national regulations in respect of international relief and assistance operations. During that seminar, the WCO, UN OCHA and IFRC presented the respective tools available to facilitate the release of relief goods. The seminar was attended by all but one of the beneficiary countries of the WCO C-RED Project.

The key objectives of this seminar are thus to:

- Create a regional platform to identify regional challenges, potential solutions and mechanisms to facilitate cooperation in the event of a disaster
- Provide information on regional and international tools/ instruments and best practices for the release of relief good
- Development of regional and national activity plans

Participants included representatives from the following groups:

- Customs Administrations (headquarters and border offices)
- Other border agencies
- Ministry of health
- Regional Organizations, including Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

The workshop was supported by experts from the WCO, UN OCHA, IFRC and World Health Organisation (WHO).

## **2. Welcome and opening remarks**

Dr. Philip Kargbo, Director for Monitoring, Research, and Planning at the Sierra Leone National Revenue Authority warmly welcomed all the participants of this workshop. He recognised that with the outbreak of Ebola in the region, governments of the affected countries have realised the importance of being prepared. National customs play a key role in this preparedness process as they are the guardians of fast and efficient movement of relief consignments. He stressed that this consultation offers an interactive forum to share and explore challenges and opportunities in national preparedness for epidemic crises and regional collaboration in the process of developing active policies and frameworks. Dr. Kargbo expressed his sincere appreciation to the World Customs Organisation and the Government of The Netherlands for their support to epidemic preparedness in the six participating countries.

Dr. Daniel Ekl, Director of Humanitarian and Social Affairs at ECOWAS observed that the Ebola outbreak caused serious destruction in the region. Due to this experience, governments in the region as well as ECOWAS became aware of a particular aspect that is lacking in the preparedness in the region: the establishment of mechanisms that will facilitate cooperation in case of disasters and epidemic outbreaks. The sharing of best practices and the establishment of regional action plans, connected to national action plans, will enable the Community to ensure that the missing aspect will fall into place. He encouraged participants to investigate the causes of the several blockages experienced, be they in form of tariffs or of health and security. Meanwhile, ECOWAS will look beyond the classic instruments and think ahead to effectively work on regional preparedness.

Virginie Bohl, Emergency Relief Project Manager at UN OCHA, expressed her appreciation to be working with national authorities, who are key members of the big humanitarian family that saves lives. In particular customs officers, even if their first priority is to protect the countrys' borders, are in a position to influence how quickly relief items reach the people affected by disasters. She reminded the participants that without an appropriate regulatory framework for emergencies, bottlenecks at customs are inevitable. Challenges and difficulties that countries affected by Ebola have been confronted which should be clearly identified, solutions should be explored, bearing in mind that many frameworks and mechanisms are already in place, such as the ECOWAS framework, the Kyoto Convention's Annex and the WCO instruments and the IDRL Guidelines. Ms. Bohl wished the participants a fruitful week and indicated OCHA's willingness and on on-going efforts to strengthen disaster preparedness all over the globe.

Simone Berk, Project Coordinator of the WCO C-RED Project at WCO, welcomed the participants and stressed the importance of the project for the WCO as it does not only support the implementation of the Revised Kyoto Convention, but further complements the existing WCO support in the region. In her introduction to the project, she outlined that the given project was based on the 2011 WCO Council resolution which outlines the role of Customs in natural disaster relief, including the implementation existing WCO tools as well as close cooperation with UN OCHA and IFRC. Under this project, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands has entrusted the WCO to implement a project to support countries that were affected by the Ebola virus disease to be better prepared to react to natural disasters and regional epidemic diseases. Therefore, the objectives of this first regional workshop were

stated including regional experience sharing, awareness of regional and international best practices and the development of national action plans.

The Commissioner General of the Sierra Leone National Revenue Authority made herself available to visit the workshop. In her remarks, she welcomed all the participants to Sierra Leone. She thanked the WCO for the possibility to host the workshop as well as the government of the Netherlands who have made it possible to realize the project. In her remarks, she valued the project as important and stressed that even in the case of emergency, not all rules for the import of goods can be abandoned. Therefore, she highlighted the importance of fast procedures that do not compromise the security of the country.

### **3. Regional Challenges and possible solutions in the import and transit of relief goods across borders**

The participants engaged in group discussions, chaired by representatives from WCO, UN OCHA, IFRC and WHO to identify challenges experienced with the transit of relief goods through the region. The discussions largely revolved around regional responsibilities, bilateral cooperation between countries and the awareness and utilization of existing frameworks. In a plenary session, which was chaired by Ms. Sanne Boswijk, Disaster Law Coordinator for the IFRC, the participants formulated several recommendations:

- a) Clearly establish Regional roles and responsibilities
  - 1. ECOWAS is requested to support preparing customs cooperation during epidemic crises, especially to develop a Regional Action Plan for disasters and epidemic crises and Standard Operating Procedures;
  - 2. ECOWAS is requested to ensure the inclusion of customs authorities in capacity building and training for disaster preparedness;
  - 3. ECOWAS requested to take the lead in organising region wide simulation exercises for epidemic crises, including participation of customs authorities
  
- b) Communication between countries
  - 1. Countries should better cooperate to facilitate intra regional movement of humanitarian goods, especially to address non-tariff blockages;
  - 2. Countries should consider implementation of Coordinated Border Management and a cross-sectorial One Stop Shop in emergencies;
  - 3. Customs authorities should have a translator in place at entry points to overcome linguistic barriers;
  - 4. Customs authorities should continue to engage in peer-to-peer information exchange as in the current Consultation;
  
- c) Making better use of existing frameworks
  - 1. ECOWAS is requested to further build on joint customs initiatives and continue its work in harmonising international norms and standards for the region;
  - 2. ECOWAS is requested to add a common customs tariff line for humanitarian consignments;
  - 3. ECOWAS is encouraged to establish a permanent Disaster Fund to ensure consistent availability of emergency funds for sudden onset disasters;

4. Member States are encouraged to accede and ratify the Kyoto Convention Annex J, the Bali Accord, Johannesburg Convention and other relevant conventions.

#### **4. Business Process Mapping (BPM) of the import of relief goods.**

After an introduction by Mr. Peter Willemse, accredited WCO expert, into the technical setup of a BPM for customs procedures, the participants proceeded in working groups per country to map their own stakeholders, process and documentation as applied during the Ebola crisis. They focussed on the priority procedures that apply during a disaster or emergency and the tasks of each stakeholder involved in the process.

In the plenary, the Business Process maps were presented, allowing for direct information exchange. The presentations allowed for *ad hoc* exchange of analysis and comparison of results. While some countries have general emergency procedures in place, others developed a solution during the Ebola crisis. Some countries are advanced in the use of digital and paperless procedures, which significantly speeds up the clearance process, seen as it often involves several stakeholders both in the port and at the ministry. One example of good practice that was mentioned repeatedly is pre-existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with eligible actors and the availability and use of pre-arrival clearance. Participants agreed that the role of the brokers is not to be underestimated, and the importance of an accredited broker. In some countries it is obligatory the make use of a broker even during an emergency.

A recurring challenge is that relief items are redirected to the normal duty free procedure which can be lengthy. Another point of concern is abuse of the expedited clearance and taxation exemptions during procedures. A particular item that caused problems at import were incinerators for the destruction of dead bodies, which caused a safety concern. In general it was concluded that almost every country has special procedures in place for emergency relief consignments, which were developed as a reaction to the Ebola crisis. When asked, delegations stated that if the developed mechanisms are followed correctly, release of relief items can be processed potentially in hours. The challenges mainly exist when the existing procedures are not followed and non-recognised NGOs import goods without prior announcement to the respective country.

Most delegations stated that the requirements for importing relief goods during an emergency are clearly stated on the respective websites. While the procedures for the priority clearance of relief goods differ from country to country, most of the beneficiary counties have rules in place which guide the procedure. For example: several customs administrations have the mandate to clear relief goods immediately and deal with the administrative requirements later. However, these procedures are often only applicable for transport organized by recognised international organisation.

Overall it was agreed in the end of all the presentations that it is very important to keep the momentum in responding to disasters. In order to remain alert and vigilant, emergency procedures should be formalised to ensue continuum and simulations (national and regional) should be held periodically.

## **5. National Challenges and possible solutions in the import and transit of relief goods across borders**

Based on the results of the Business Process Map and the consecutive discussions as well as keeping in mind the recommendations which were found on the regional level, the participants discussed by country the national challenges as well as possible solutions.

In a plenary session, which was chaired by Mr. Antoine Delaitre, WHO representative responsible for OSL emergency operations, the participants presented their results. Whereas the national challenges are specific to each country, common challenges included:

- Coordination and cooperation between the border agencies with clear roles of each border agency to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Knowledge of front line officers which goods have priority in the case of an emergency, especially regarding the classification of medicines.
- Incomplete/ incorrect documentation by traders which does not allow for the facilitated procedures, especially difficulties with smaller NGOs.
- Bureaucracy in overall procedure, including the relevant ministries.

Possible opportunities and solutions that participants mentioned in this regard are the following. These are based on the national experiences as well as regional and international best practices:

- MOUs with relevant other agencies
- Coordinated Border Management
- Single Window/ One stop shop solutions
- Pre- arrival systems
- Training for front line officers on established rules

With regards to possible solutions, the representative of ECOWAS also mentioned that they are currently piloting a project between Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire to transit goods with only search at the final destination. The goal is implement this procedure for all ECOWAS member states. While this is currently conducted for common goods, it will be considered on how this procedure could also apply for the clearance of relief goods in the times of crisis.

## **6. Stakeholder mapping**

As most of the challenges that were raised by the participants and also with regards to experiences that were shared prior to the workshop, the workshop included a section in stakeholder mapping. Mr. Willemse introduced the technique of stakeholder mapping. The overall theme was to determine which stakeholders exist in the priority clearance of release goods in the times of crisis, which interests they have and which influence they have on the overall process.

Shortly into the exercise, it became clear to all the participants that the stakeholders in the import of relief goods are plentiful and that their interests can vary. Overall, the exercise contributed to the overall understanding that the goal of "improved cooperation" in the case of facilitated import procedures in the time of crisis is a difficult undertaking since there are many stakeholders to consider, especially on a national and public level, who all have high influence in the process.

In the plenary session, each country group presented the most important stakeholders who will have the most influence on the process. Again, while the stakeholders that need to be considered can vary from country to country, almost all countries identified the following as their most important stakeholders:

- Ministry of trade
- Other border agencies
- Ministry of health
- International organisations

## **7. Development of National and Regional action plans**

To conclude the workshop, the outlook of the project was reiterated. While this workshop was set out for regional experience sharing and the joint discussions of solutions on national as well as regional level, the next phase of the project includes support on the national level as based on the outcomes of the regional workshop. Therefore, participants were asked to develop a national action plan based on the discussions of the past week. Participants were asked to identify on a customs administration level the three most important results that need to be achieved in order to ensure the facilitated import and transit of relief goods. Additionally, each country group was asked to address one result that needs to be achieved on a national level. The participants determined activities which need to be implemented in order to achieve the set results.

While the action plans are specific to each country, on a customs administration level, the action plans of almost all countries revolved around the following themes:

- Improvement of existing facilitation procedures/ development of Standard operating procedures in the time of an emergency
- Improved CBM
- Capacity building and technical assistance

On a national level, all countries agreed that communication with other government agencies would need to be addressed. Additionally the set- up of an emergency fund in each country was discussed.

The ECOWAS secretariat acknowledged all the issues that were raised during the workshop by the member countries. The workshop has helped the Secretariat better acknowledge the importance to include the clearance of relief goods in their humanitarian agenda. This is possible since the ECOWAS secretariat has a humanitarian as well as a customs unit which can work closely together in order to support all its member countries.

Subsequent to this workshop and based on the discussion, the ECOWAS secretariat has committed to:

- Share a list of all humanitarian activities and humanitarian organizations operating in the system
- In the second quarter of 2017, a meeting with all the member states will take place to discuss the development of a road map to support the implementation of procedures that were discussed.
- Review how to integrate the clearance of relief items in the community code. Member administrations will be asked to present their respective challenges and ECOWAS is open to provide support in case it is needed
- Support on training and awareness raising and sensitization on the national level upon request from the member states. This support can

- include the training of customs officers as well as forwarding agencies in the development of one stop shops,
- Develop a handbook for all member states on humanitarian response.

Upon the finalization of the action plans, the WCO committed to:

- Share all contact information with the participants
- Prepare full report, translate and share with participants
- To evaluate the output of the workshop and plan for national support.

## **8. Evaluation of meeting and closing**

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to complete an evaluation form concerning the content and administrative planning of the workshop and rate various aspects of the workshop from 4- Very Good to 1- Poor.

From the 28 evaluation forms collected, participants rated on average 3.4 for the achievement of the course objective, 3.2 for the content of the different topics and 3.5 for the participant participation in the course.

Overall, participants were pleased with the level of discussion of the work. Suggestions in the evaluation form included to have meetings for the exchange of best practices on a more regular basis. It will be considered to have follow up events at the premises of ECOWAS, as suggested by the representatives from ECOWAS.

The WCO would like to thank the experts from UN OCHA, IFRC and the WHO for their excellent support in the preparation and conduct of the workshop.



### Annex 1: Participant List

	Country/ Pays	Name/ Nom	Work title / titre du travail
1	Sierra Leone	Sahr Philip Lahai	Manager, Customs Outstations
2	Sierra Leone	Joseph Musa Momoh	Senior Economist Monitoring and Planning
3	Sierra Leone	Ishmael Kamara	Supervisor Gbalamuya Customs Post
4	Sierra Leone	Mr. Alfred Turay	Senior Economist, Monitoring and Planning
5	Sierra Leone	Mr. Paul Juana-Kamara	Anti-Smuggling Unit
6	Sierra Leone	Abdul Akim Bangura	Chairman, Ass. Of Clearing & Forwarding Agencies
7	Sierra Leone	Mohamed Bangare	Manager Border Agency
8	Guinée Conakry	Peve Toure	Inspecteur des Douanes
9	Guinée Conakry	Sekou Ahmed Bah	Chef de visites au bureau des douanes de l'aéroport.
10	Guinée Conakry	Lancel Camara	Chef comptable bureau Douanes
11	Guinée Conakry	Nifaly Mansare	Commissariat spécial de police de frontières de Pamelap
12	Guinée Conakry	Sekou Doukoure	Commissariat spécial de l'aéroport international
13	Guinée Conakry	Dougo Georges Goepogui	Ministère de la santé
14	Guinée Conakry	Aboubacar Sidiki Sidibe	Siege de la Direction Générale des Douanes
15	Liberia	Wounpay Doe	Senor Customs Collector
16	Liberia	Benedict Larblah	External Officer
17	Liberia	D. Woloblah selmah	Senior Customs Collector Land
18	Liberia	Theresa Sia Thomas	Representative Ministry of Health
19	Mali	Abdel Sangho	Chef de la Division Relations Internationales;
20	Mali	Abdoulaye SOUMARE	chargé de la Facilitation des procédures;
21	Mali	Malick Sangare	chef de visite du Bureau chargé du dédouanement des envois de secours.
22	Mali	Samake Arouna	Représentative Police
23	Mali	Salif Keita	Représentative Gendarmerie
24	Mali	Coulibaly Nene	Représentative ministère de la santé
25	Nigeria	H.J. Swomen	Deputy comptroller of customs
26	Nigeria	L. Olomuh	Customs assistant comptroller Airport
27	Nigeria	U.S. Abubakar	Customs assistant comptroller Land border
28	Senegal	Ousmane KANE	Inspecteur des Douanes
29	Senegal	Souleymane Sane	Inspecteur des Douanes
30	Senegal	Ibrahima Thiam	Inspecteur des Douanes
31	ECOWAS	Aissata Koffi	ECOWAS Commission
32	ECOWAS	Daniel Eklu	Director Humanitarian Affairs, ECOWAS Commission

## Annex 2: Agenda

**Regional Workshop: Regional Consultation and Development of Preparedness tools and mechanisms for epidemic crisis**  
**01 – 04 November 2016**  
**Freetown – Sierra Leone**

### **AGENDA** **DAY ONE – 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016**

#### **Regional Experience Sharing**

<b>09:00</b>	<b>Registration</b>
<b>09:30</b> – <b>10:20</b>	Welcome and opening remarks
<b>10:20</b> – <b>10:30</b>	Introduction to project background and workshop objective
<b>11:00</b> – <b>12:00</b>	Table discussion: Regional Challenges in the import and transit of relief goods across borders and expectation of the workshop
<b>12:00</b> – <b>12:30</b>	Plenary session: Presentation of regional challenges in the import and transit of relief goods
<b>13:30</b> – <b>15:00</b>	Table discussion: Regional solutions to facilitate the import and transit of relief goods across borders
<b>15:30</b> – <b>17:00</b>	Plenary session: Presentation of regional solutions of the import and transit of relief goods <b><u>DAY TWO – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2016</u></b>

#### **DAY RWO – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2016**

#### **National Experience Sharing**

<b>09:00</b> – <b>09:30</b>	Welcome and summary of day 1
<b>09:30</b> – <b>11:00</b>	Group Work – Business Process Mapping (BPM) of the import of relief goods
<b>11:30</b> – <b>12:30</b>	Table discussion: National challenges in the clearance and release of relief goods
<b>13:30</b> – <b>15:00</b>	Plenary session: Presentation of the clearance and release of relief goods
<b>15:30</b> – <b>17:00</b>	Table discussion: National solutions to facilitate the clearance and release of relief goods

**DAY THREE – 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2016**

**Requirements for successful implementation (Capacity Building)**

<b>09:00</b> - <b>09:10</b>	Welcome and summary of day 2
<b>09:10</b> - <b>10:30</b>	Plenary session: Presentation of national solutions in the clearance and release of relief goods
<b>11:00</b> - <b>12:30</b>	Group Work – Stakeholder Mapping
<b>13:30</b> - <b>15:00</b>	Plenary session: Presentation of results
<b>15:30</b> - <b>17:00</b>	Group Work – Development of action plan

**DAY FOUR – 4<sup>th</sup> November**

**Regional and National activity plans and workshop evaluation**

<b>09:00</b> – <b>09:10</b>	Welcome and summary of day 3
<b>9:10</b> – <b>10:40</b>	Plenary session: Presentation of activity plans
<b>11:00</b> – <b>12:30</b>	Plenary session: Evaluation of workshop and closing Concluding remarks – End of Regional Seminar