

Namibia's Customs modernization drive and nCEN experience

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As part of its Customs modernization drive, Namibia Customs is gradually introducing the concept of risk management across the entire organization. In November 2013, an important milestone was achieved with the launch of the nCEN designed by the WCO.

AS PART OF its Customs modernization drive, Namibia Customs and Excise (NCE) is gradually introducing the concept of risk management across the entire organization, while developing staff capacity in this domain with the aim of making risk management a key component of Customs operations. In addition, NCE has recently established a Risk Management Unit within its organizational structure.

The adoption of a risk management approach entails the collection of quality and consistent data which may be used to undertake relevant analysis, gather intelligence, create selectivity rules, and monitor and evaluate shipments. All these actions will enable officers to provide the NCE Commissioner with accurate analysis, thereby enabling him to deploy resources where they are most needed and to enhance controls without hindering the free flow of trade.

In November 2013 an important milestone was achieved by NCE with the launch of a National Customs Enforcement Network (nCEN) designed by the WCO. This project was financially supported by the Government of Finland through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although risk management may still be in a developing stage at NCE, Namibia believes that being able to rely on a resourceful enforcement tool such as nCEN will make a difference in its operations.

Current challenges

As a transit route and gateway to the Atlantic Ocean for many landlocked countries, Namibia has experienced a rapid increase in trade volumes, which has resulted in the country now being targeted by crime syndicates. As a result of these developments, and being a developing country, NCE faces the following challenges:

- facilitating regional integration and interconnectivity by the timely sharing of information with other neighbouring Customs administrations;
- effectively combating illicit trade, such as the smuggling of cigarettes;
- promoting legitimate trade by reducing clearance dwell times.

Although NCE has an automated information system in place – ASYCUDA ++ – which will soon be upgraded to ASYCUDAWorld, the features offered by the current system are not being utilized to the full, and the use of available Customs data for analysis purposes, especially the enhancement of risk management, is not satisfactory. This situation is attributed to the minimal data-mining capabilities of the current system. Although trade and enforcement data are being captured, the data lacks structure and consistency.

The nCEN application was developed to remedy this situation by giving Customs the ability to collect, store, analyse and disseminate law enforcement data effectively at the national level, in order to establish

robust intelligence capabilities, enhance profiling at a strategic, tactical and operational level – including risk mapping of commodities, routes and traders most prone to Customs tax evasion – and boost information-sharing between Customs administrations.

With nCEN, NCE is now equipped with four independent databases (Seizures, Suspects, Companies and Pictures) and a communication tool (Interface Communication Manager, or Icomm), which enables Customs administrations using nCEN to exchange information swiftly – provided the legal basis exists – and to transfer non-nominal data to the WCO's global Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) at the touch of a button.

The installation of nCEN will undoubtedly position NCE at the forefront of combating fraud and crime by providing it with a means of improving its operational techniques and addressing the challenges mentioned above as follows:

• *Enhancing regional integration and interconnectivity*

Icomm will allow NCE officers to share enforcement information with neighbouring Customs administrations in a secure environment, thereby enabling effective interconnectivity among Customs services in the region. This interconnectivity will promote regional integration and contribute to the implementation of the WCO's Globally Networked Customs (GNC) concept.

• *Combating smuggling effectively*

The nCEN databases will provide the basis for the systematic capture and storage of enforcement data – for example, information on seizures or suspicious consignments/passengers, while the application's powerful analytical tools will allow NCE to effectively analyse data, develop valuable intelligence on different crime areas, and identify trends and patterns in Namibia's trading environment. These valuable out-

puts can then be fed into ASYCUDA's risk management engine.

• **Promoting legitimate trade**

The use of nCEN will enable NCE to enhance its information-gathering capabilities, including the quality of the information. With better information to hand, the filtering of Customs declarations will be more reliable and effective, thereby reducing the overall average clearance time of legitimate consignments. This will impact positively on NCE's revenue collection mandate and enhance Namibia's economic competitiveness.

Way forward

After the installation of the nCEN software in November 2013, 10 officials were swiftly trained by the WCO on how to operate

the application. At present, data related to detentions, seizures, people of interest and companies involved in illicit activities, as well as pictures of contraband and conveyances, are being recorded in nCEN where they will be analysed to build risk profiles and indicators.

To ensure the timely capture of data and the quality of reported information, a training programme is currently being developed. Its objective is to ensure that all NCE officials are trained in the use of nCEN. This will enable them to promote the WCO tool throughout the region.

Besides the deployment of nCEN and the adoption of a risk management approach, Namibia's Customs modernization efforts also include:

- the implementation of non-intrusive inspection technology;
- the deployment of ASYCUDAWorld and its risk management engine;
- the establishment of one-stop border posts;
- the current review of the Namibian Customs Act No. 20 of 1998.

All these initiatives are testimony to NCE's commitment to its Customs reform and modernization programme, and are driven by the desire to move the country to the forefront in the WCO East and Southern Africa region, as well as globally.

More information

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