



## Case Study

### National Committee on Trade Facilitation

### Sri Lanka

**Article 23.2 of the WTO TFA: “Each Member shall establish and/or maintain a national committee on trade facilitation or designate an existing mechanism to facilitate both domestic coordination and implementation of the provisions of this Agreement.”**

#### 1. Introduction

The National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF) in Sri Lanka was established on 3 June 2014 and was formalized by the Ministers of Cabinet of the Government of Sri Lanka on 26 April 2016, as required by Article 23.2 of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). The NCTF enables the facilitation and coordination of interagency activities associated with the implementation of the provisions of the TFA and other trade facilitation initiatives in Sri Lanka.

#### 2. Structure of the Committee

The Director General of Sri Lanka Customs has been appointed as Chairperson of the NCTF, while the Director General of the Department of Commerce has been appointed as Co-Chair.

NCTF membership in Sri Lanka (*Annex 1*) comprises the heads of 12 government agencies that play a key role in cross-border trade and trade facilitation, and seven (7) members from chambers of commerce and industries representing the private sector (*in accordance with UN/CEFACT Recommendation 4, the NCTF should ensure balanced private and public sector participation*). In addition to the members, each agency has nominated technical focal persons to coordinate with the NCTF on technical matters. The other relevant agencies, media and interest groups may be invited to attend meetings as observers as and when the Committee deems it necessary.

A Secretariat to support the NCTF has been established. It is located in Sri Lanka Customs Head Office. The key functions of the Secretariat are to maintain, record and supply information (*reports, official orders, meeting minutes, policy documents, project documents, trade or related quantitative data, etc.*) generated through the NCTF process and its meetings, working groups or any other *ad hoc* activities of the NCTF. The Secretariat will also, under the direction of the NCTF, ensure that project progress is coordinated, managed, monitored and reported. The Secretariat consists of staff from Sri Lanka Customs, the Department of Commerce (DoC) and consultants from the World Bank Group (WBG).

The NCTF meets at least quarterly or at shorter intervals, as required. The frequency of the meetings is to be decided by the Committee depending on the tasks to be performed. As per agreed meeting protocols, the agenda item proposals are sent by the members to the Secretariat three (3) weeks prior to the meeting. The Secretariat then works on a draft agenda based on the proposals. The invitation letters are sent to members, along with the draft agenda, 10 working days prior to the meeting.



Draft minutes are circulated no later than five (5) working days after conducting the meeting. The meeting minutes are considered as agreed and approved by NCTF members within 10 working days of dissemination, unless any written response is received from the participating agencies. Once all comments (if any) have been addressed, the finalized minutes are signed by the Chair and Co-Chair, and are circulated with the invitation letter for the next meeting.

### 3. Role of Customs and Level of Participants

The Director General of Customs chairs NCTF meetings and the Additional Director General of Customs serves as the Head of the Secretariat to the NCTF, providing guidance to the Secretariat staff and overseeing the day-to-day work of the Secretariat.

In addition, Sri Lanka Customs has established a dedicated working group for TFA implementation measures related to Customs. This working group coordinates and monitors the TFA implementation work within the organization.

### 4. Challenges and Solutions

One of the main challenges faced by the NCTF relates to the varied levels of commitment by members. Although there are a few members who demonstrate a high-level of commitment and engagement, the rest seem to be less active and are disconnected. This is reflected in their meeting attendance, responses to e-mails/letters and other requests for support/feedback by the Secretariat. However, with continued dialogue, closer collaboration and follow-up, it is envisaged this situation could be improved.

Another challenge for the NCTF has been frequent changes in terms of the representatives attending the committee meetings. This is affecting the continuity and effectiveness of the NCTF's information sharing and decision-making processes. This issue has been already brought to the attention of members during committee meetings and requests have been made to the member agencies to ensure that the same member(s)/representative(s) attend the meetings.

Furthermore, there are noteworthy gaps in members' level of understanding of their expected roles and functions in terms of TFA implementation measures. This hinders effective meeting proceedings as well as follow-up actions by members. One to one meetings, training and participation in working groups would help to tackle this issue to a greater extent.

### 5. Relevant Documentation such as Terms of Reference

Annex 2: Proposed ToR of the NCTF



#### 6. Contact person for the NCTF

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