

SECO-WCO Global Trade Facilitation Programme



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENSURING SUSTAINABLE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRADE FACILITATION MEASURES

Based on the outcomes of the
GTFP Peer-to-Peer collaboration workshop

26-28 September 2023



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Introduction

This document details the conclusions of the GTFP Peer-to-Peer collaboration workshop held on 26 to 28 September 2023, at the WCO Headquarters, and sets out specific recommendations for ensuring sustainable implementation of trade facilitation measures.

The event brought together fourteen participants from the Customs services of Bangladesh, Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Moldova, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Serbia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, representing three different WCO regions, the Americas and Caribbean region, Asia Pacific region, and Europe region.

This three-day workshop enabled a platform for an interregional exchange of experiences regarding best practices, challenges, and lessons learnt throughout the journey and collaboration within the GTFP assistance.

Furthermore, this workshop reinforced the participants' knowledge of the WCO tools, instruments, resources, vision of the future, cross-cutting trade facilitation enablers and emerging topics, with a view to equip the Customs Administrations for sustainable implementation and continuous improvement of trade facilitation measures.

Throughout the workshop, the participants engaged in fruitful panel discussions regarding their national experiences and collaborated in breakout groups to formulate recommendations for actions to tackle shared challenges. The outcome of these valuable discussions served as the basis of the recommendations set forth in this document.

Set of Recommendations

For sustainable implementation of
trade facilitation measures

1. Plan & Prioritize



- Planning is a critical process in achieving objectives. Customs Administrations should integrate a long-term vision, prioritize results, and incorporate timeline, milestones, and metrics during the planning stage to ensure that the set objectives are efficiently attained. Additionally, the strategic planning should encompass the development of robust contingency plans for proactively addressing potential risks and allowing for timely mitigation or response to unexpected circumstances and developments.
- A Customs-specific strategic plan is crucial for optimizing border management, facilitating trade, and ensuring effective risk management. Formally adopted Customs multi-year strategic and policy framework aligned to the national and regional priorities can be leveraged to clearly portray the priorities of the country and can serve as a tool to ensure commitment and continuity during challenging transitional periods.
- Customs Administrations are encouraged to nurture flexibility and agility by implementing adaptive leadership, robust change management strategies, fostering a culture of innovation, and prioritizing continuous skills development to effectively respond to changing business environments and emerging trade technologies.
- Latest trends indicate that Customs Administrations should proactively embrace and integrate disruptive technologies into their operations. Given the rising demand, it is recommended to establish regulations and standards for the responsible and effective use of artificial intelligence and to cultivate a data culture within the organization, recognizing the inevitability of technology use. This proactive approach will contribute to the modernization and efficiency of Customs operations in the rapidly evolving technological landscape. [The WCO/WTO Study Report on Disruptive Technologies](#) is a valuable tool for Customs Administrations, providing crucial insights to enhance awareness, knowledge, and informed decision-making regarding the application of disruptive technologies in international trade and border management.

- The WCO Member Administrations have highlighted the Customs' needs for a good concrete strategy to have a say in geopolitics, to promote the real value of Customs that is to protect the society, and to contribute to the stability of the economic volatility through reduction of trade costs and simplification of processes and procedures and upgrading of staff skills.
- Customs must also play a key role in achieving inclusivity for women in trade, as well as for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and other minorities by using trade as a tool for inclusion. Customs Administrations are encouraged to use the [Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool](#) to guide their efforts in implementing sustainable gender-responsive reforms, to ensure a working environment that promotes diversity, innovation, and equal opportunities.
- In accordance with the WCO long term vision under the [Green Customs Action Plan](#) to make Green Customs the common practice, Customs Administrations should green themselves by reducing their own environmental footprints and contribute to greening trade by aiding in implementation of policies that promote environmentally friendly products and practices.



2. Build Internal Capacity, Resources & Commitment

- Commitment is a driving force in reform and change management. It empowers organizations and individuals to navigate the challenges, sustain momentum, and realize the benefits of change. Customs Administration should advocate for collaboration with higher government authorities and the active involvement of stakeholders to secure essential political buy-in and budgetary support.
- The trade facilitation initiatives implemented by Customs Administrations must be complemented by concurrent development of the hard infrastructure (i.e., IT system, inspection tools, green lanes, and facilities etc.), internal procedures, and investment in human capital as the comprehensive ecosystem maximizes the benefits of facilitation measures and initiatives.

- Identifying and allocating the necessary resources is essential for effective implementation of the planned activities. This includes financial resources, human resources, equipment, materials, and technology. As such, Customs Administrations should effectively mobilize the available resources to maximize their potential and identify key people who can deliver the results.
- The complex nature of Customs operations, evolving regulations, and the dynamic international trade landscape require a workforce equipped with specialized expertise. For addressing challenges stemming from the frequent rotation of staff, as well as to ensure the consistent development of specialized knowledge, Customs Administrations should develop standard operating procedures and comprehensive training framework. The [WCO CLiKC platform](#) offers hundreds of different e-learning modules covering numerous areas under the Customs responsibility and encourages its Members to integrate these courses into their training plans.
- For promoting people-centric organization, Customs Administrations should invest equally in the skills of the top-level management. The WCO Leadership and Management Development (LMD) Programme aims to contribute to the modernization of the management culture in the whole organization and [an online course](#) is available for all Members on the WCO CLiKC platform in English, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic languages which includes [Middle Management Development](#) (MMD) as a core element.
- Customs Succession planning must ensure institutional knowledge and expertise, withstanding the impact of environmental changes such as rotation, attrition, and retirement. Customs work encompasses responsibilities beyond the collection of revenue. Customs officers are the first line of defence and agent for trade facilitation. Customs Administrations are encouraged to leverage the competitive advantage and real value of the Customs profession in their career path policy and to nurture Customs identity and sense of pride among its employees emphasizing their contribution to the dual spectrum of economic growth and security of the country. The WCO [Guide to Implementing Competency-Based HRM in a Customs Administration Environment](#) is a useful tool intended to support Members' efforts in the area of HRM modernization with practical guidance.
- For knowledge transfer within the organization, internal resources should be effectively mobilized. Customs Administrations are recommended to promote a culture of continuous learning and to regularly update their knowledge of the relevant policies, tools, and instruments. The WCO offers a wide range of resources, including such tools, instruments, guidelines, and handbooks covering all areas within the Customs mandate, including facilitation, compliance, enforcement, and organizational development. These materials are available free of charge to Member Administrations, under the [Index of Topics, Instruments, and Tools](#) on the official WCO website. Customs Administrations are encouraged to regularly visit this page for the latest updates on the available tools.

3. Communicate & Collaborate

- Active cooperation with all stakeholders, should be a priority in advancing trade facilitation initiatives. Customs Administrations should identify and engage with all relevant stakeholders, including public agencies, trade community, logistics operators, Customs brokers, banks, government agencies, donors, and population as a whole.

- The engagement should include periodic meetings and regular consultations to build trust between Customs authorities and the private sector. Customs Administrations should create feedback mechanisms for them to report issues or make suggestions for process improvement, gather input, address concerns, and share information. The WCO [Customs-Business Partnership Guidance](#) offers essential guidelines for establishing a sustained and effective process of regular consultation and collaboration with the private sector, with a focus on continuous improvement.



- Customs Administrations should develop a clear communication strategy, outlining the objectives of the communication, the target stakeholders, key messaging for trade facilitation efforts, actions required, if any, and the appropriate communication channels, to ensure that stakeholders understand the Customs procedures and requirements, including changes in regulations.
- Collaboration between public agencies and Customs authorities streamlines resource allocation and eliminates redundancy. Public institutions are urged to harmonize their standards, reduce business compliance costs, and formally adopt standardized joint procedures to generate uniform implementation.
- Customs Administrations are encouraged to establish a designated unit for coordinating donors and technical assistance to ensure efficient channelling of the available support and prevent duplication of efforts. The role of this unit should include maintaining open and transparent communication with donors, delivering on the promises, and showing measurable results by highlighting how the support contributes to the economic development and trade growth.
- Despite the social and cultural, economic, and geographical differences, the Customs Administrations have common goals and tackle the same challenges. Interregional

exchange of experience sheds a new light and perspective to regional challenges and priorities, strengths, and weaknesses. It is important to continue holding dialogues with peers, fostering Customs-to-Customs cooperation, creating a conducive environment for collaboration, information sharing, and the development of common standards, contributing to a more secure, efficient, and compliant global trading system. In accordance with the WCO regionalization strategy, Members are encouraged to actively participate and get involved in the activities by the different [regional structures](#). There are currently 6 Regional Offices for Capacity Building (ROCBs), 32 Regional Training Centres (RTCs), 12 Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices (RILOs), 18 Regional Dog Training Centres (RDTCs), and 10 Regional Customs Laboratories (RCLs).

- The WCO tools and initiatives play a crucial role in promoting Customs-to-Customs cooperation, enhance information exchange, leading to more informed decision-making and efficient security measures, improving facilitation for compliant trade. To highlight a few, the [WCO Data Model](#) provides a standardized framework for exchanging Customs data, [the SAFE Framework](#) sets out international standards and provides guidelines for Customs-to-Customs cooperation to enhance security while facilitating the smooth flow of goods, and the [CEN](#) is a secure communication platform that facilitates the exchange of operational information between Customs Administrations.

4. Monitor & Follow-up



- Monitoring and follow-up are necessary to ensure that individuals or organizations are making progress, identifying, and addressing issues, making informed decisions, increasing efficiency and effectiveness, and optimizing resource allocation. Customs Administrations should adopt a result-based management approach and regularly review and evaluate performance against the objectives and indicators clearly defined in the strategic plan. The specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives and the related metrics provide a structured framework that enable

systematic tracking, creating a baseline for measurement and monitoring to assess progress.

- Follow-up holds parties accountable, promotes open and effective communication, helps prevent oversights, and ensures that crucial issues are not inadvertently neglected. Follow-up involves checking or revisiting tasks, responsibilities, or issues, and obtaining feedback about performance, outcomes, or processes to ensure that they are progressing as planned. Customs Administrations are recommended to formalize these actions to foster a culture of accountability, enhance operational efficiency, and optimize the utilization of resources for sustainable success in trade facilitation efforts.
- Assessing and incorporating lessons learned into the ongoing monitoring metrics and feedback loops are important for enhancing organizational effectiveness and fostering continuous improvement. Customs Administrations should document and analyse the insights, challenges, and successes throughout the project execution, categorizing and prioritizing them based on relevance and impact.
- Furthermore, it is recommended to establish a culture of organizational learning by sharing the lessons across teams and using them as a foundation for adaptive planning in future projects to ensure that valuable insights from past experiences are not only identified but also actively used to contribute to informed decision-making, optimization of processes, and sustained growth.
- The [WCO Performance Measurement Mechanism](#) (PMM) is a valuable new tool for assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of all Customs competences. The PMM has defined four common dimensions for Customs performance and the related expected outcomes: Trade Facilitation and Economic Competitiveness; Revenue Collection; Enforcement, Security and Protection of Society; and Organizational Development. The PMM v.1 comprise of fifty-one key performance indicators (KPIs) measuring twenty-three expected outcomes.
- The PMM Data Collection Platform (DCP) is a website application to collect data from WCO Members and provide tools to summarize and visualize the data. It has the capability to securely store collected data, conduct in-depth result analysis, and generate comprehensive reports. This holistic PMM system facilitates international benchmarking, positioning itself as the primary reference for evaluating Customs' performance, underpinned by evidence collected through a standardized approach. It will contribute to aligning with international best practices and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.
- The WCO encourages implementing the comprehensive PMM and benefitting from the capabilities offered by the PMM DCP, which will lead to improved decision-making, enhanced efficiency, and accurate benchmarking.