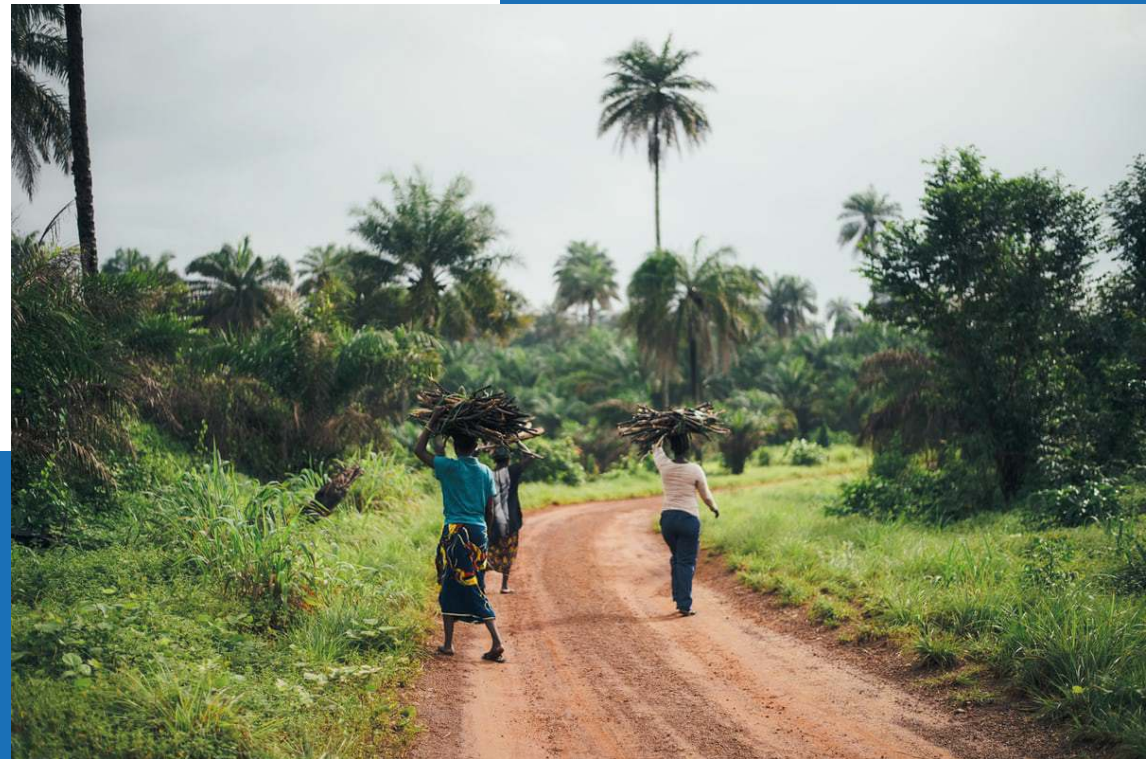


# REPORT OF THE SURVEY ON THE PRIORITIES OF CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATIONS OF THE WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA REGION (WCA) ON THE TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### A. Introduction

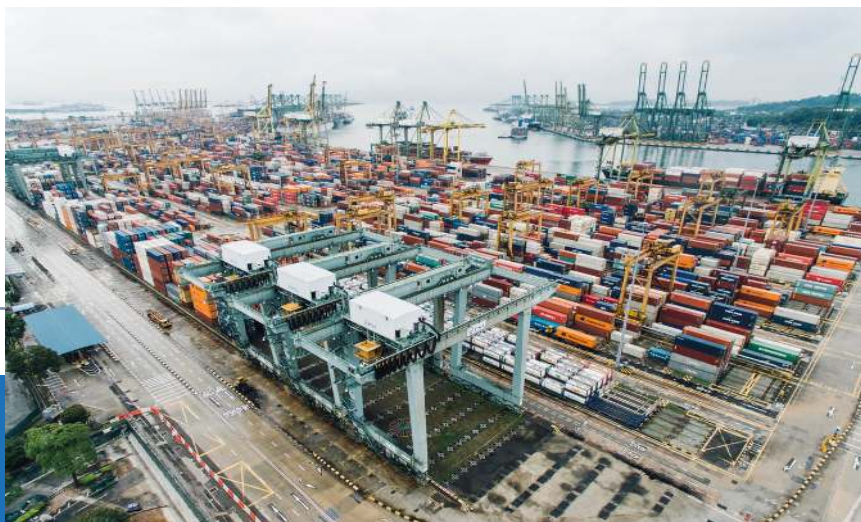
As part of its capacity building and assistance mission to members of the West and Central Africa (WCA) Region of the WCO, the Regional Office for Capacity Building (ROCB) has been deploying a regional strategy since 2009 through successive strategic plans, with the current plan covering the period 2018-2022.

The ROCB-WCA develops an annual report on the implementation of the regional strategic plan on the basis of the results of the self-assessments of member administrations. It also proceeds, under the supervision of the Directors General of Customs of the region, to update the regional strategy whenever this is rendered necessary by changes in the Customs environment.

Characterized by upheavals at the national and international levels, the COVID-19 global health crisis has had direct repercussions on the activities of Customs administrations in the region. As a result, a review of the regional strategy has become necessary in order to enable Customs administrations to deal with the crisis and to be better prepared to manage future crises.

In this light, the ROCB carried out a survey, with support from Expertise France, on the twenty-three Customs administrations of the WCA Region in order to identify their capacity building needs and priorities in the management of the COVID-19 crisis.

This report presents the background that necessitated the survey, the conduct of the survey, the results obtained as well as the cross-referencing of said results with other relevant analyses on the needs and priorities of Customs administrations in the WCA Region. The report finally highlights short and medium-term actions that would enable the Customs administrations to better manage the crisis and its effects.



## B. Background and Justification

The global COVID-19 pandemic has affected all countries in West and Central Africa. At the outbreak of the crisis in the region, the various governments quickly put in place public health, social and economic response measures. In line with these State measures, Customs administrations have taken crisis management measures, prominent among which are the protection of Customs staff and customers by the strict application of barrier measures, the reorganization of service to guarantee continuity, expedited customs clearance of essential goods especially those used in the response effort to the pandemic, and strengthening controls in the area of illicit trade.

Emerging analyses of the economic impact of the pandemic have predicted that economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa will drop from 2.4% in 2019 to a range between -2.1% and -5.1% in 2020, which will be the first recession in the region in 25 years (Pulse Africa, World Bank, April 2020).

This projected negative impact on the growth rate is explained by the macroeconomic risks linked to the sharp fall in the GDP growth of the main trading partners of the region, particularly China and the euro zone, the fall in prices of raw materials, the reduction of tourist activity in many countries and the effects of measures to control the global COVID-19 pandemic.

As our governments take measures to progressively ease social and economic confinement, Customs administrations must learn the main lessons from the management of the crisis and envisage appropriate policies and strategies to curb the negative effects of the crisis and strengthen their resilience in the event of similar crises.

As major players in the international trade chain, Customs administrations are called upon to play a non-negligible role in mitigating these negative effects and contributing to the economic recovery of our countries, through the quest for greater effectiveness in discharging their three missions of trade facilitation, revenue collection and protection of society.

This effectiveness can only be achieved through capacity building activities based on the challenges that the Customs administrations have experienced in managing the crisis and the needs and priorities that they themselves will have identified.

It is in this light that the ROCB conducted a survey of the twenty-three Customs administrations of the West and Central Africa region in order to identify their needs and priorities in the management of the present and future crises.

The ultimate goal is to develop a regional short and medium term emergency plan that will better express the priorities and needs of the Region to the WCO Secretariat and technical and financial partners of the Region. The approach will also make it possible to provide tailor-made assistance to each of the administrations of the Region.

## II. CONDUCT OF THE SURVEY

### A. Methodology

The survey was designed and carried out online using the Survey Monkey software.

The ROCB sent an official letter on Tuesday August 4, 2020 to all the Directors General of Customs in the WCA region requesting them to complete within two (2) weeks the online questionnaire developed for this purpose with support from Expertise France. An additional period of one week was later granted to administrations who did not meet the deadline.

The questionnaire included seven (7) questions to which administrations had to respond taking into consideration their national realities.

The questions were as follows:

Codes	Questions
Q1	Please select your country
Q2	How would you generally assess your administration's "response" to the Covid-19 crisis/situation?
Q3	What are/were the main challenges faced by your administration in managing the Covid-19 crisis/situation?
Q4	In which areas would your administration would require financial assistance to better manage the Covid-19 crisis and the post-Covid-19 situation?
Q5	In which areas would your administration require technical assistance to better manage the Covid-19 crisis and the post-Covid-19 situation?
Q6	If you ticked more than 5 boxes in total in response to questions 3 and 4, please list below the 5 priority areas that would require technical and / or financial assistance.
Q7	In which areas could your administration act as a "coach" for the administrations of the region?

## B. Participation

Eighteen (18) Customs administrations out of 23 in the region took part in the survey. These are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal and Togo. This gives a participation rate of 78.26%.

The Republic of Congo, Ghana, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone and Chad did not participate in the survey, representing around 21.73% of the region's members.

This participation rate is sufficiently representative both at the regional level and at the level of linguistic blocks.

## III. RESULTS

The centralization and consolidation of the responses made it possible to identify regional and country trends for the various questions and to identify priorities.

Analysis of this information made it possible to draw interesting conclusions in terms of capacity building needs and priorities at the regional level, by country and by language block. The regional trends are presented below, for each of the survey questions.

### A. Assessment of the response of administrations to Covid-19 (Q.2)

Question: How would you generally assess your administration's "response" to the Covid-19 crisis/situation?

The consolidation of the answers of the participating countries produced the trends presented in the table below:

	General level of satisfaction	Number of countries	Percentage
1	Very satisfactory	1	5.56 %
2	Satisfactory	12	66.67 %
3	Average	5	27.78 %

## B. Main challenges faced by the administrations in managing the Covid-19 crisis (Q.3)

Question: What are/were the main challenges faced by your administration in managing the Covid-19 crisis/situation?

The table below presents the consolidated results of the answers from all participating countries by identified challenge:

No	Challenge	Number of countries	%
1	Challenges related to personal protective equipment	15	83.33 %
2	Challenges related to teleworking (management, ability for staff to connect to the internet/office server etc)	14	77.78 %
3	Challenges in managing e-commerce	11	61.11 %
4	Challenges related to the work areas' infrastructure (inadequate offices, customs clearance zones etc), which did not permit business continuity in a secure environment for staff, customers and partners	11	61.11 %
5	Challenges linked to the coordinated management of the crisis with other agencies operating at the border	9	50 %
6	Challenges linked to the absence or limitations related to the automation/digitalization of work procedures, in particular those associated with the customs clearance process	8	44.44 %
7	Challenges linked to legal and / or administrative burdens preventing the development and/or rapid application of exceptional measures during the crisis period	6	33.33 %
8	Challenges related to the absence or non-application of business continuity plans	5	27.77 %
9	Challenges in terms of providing "customer services" such as helpdesks	5	27.77 %
10	Human resource management challenges, including the ability of the HR department to act as a strategic partner during the crisis	4	22.22 %
11	Challenges related to the absence or non-application of expedited customs clearance procedures for humanitarian / emergency consignments / convoys	1	5.55 %
12	Challenges associated with the absence or non-application of disaster	1	5.55 %

## C. Needs of administrations in terms of financial assistance (Q.4)

Question: In which areas would your administration would require financial assistance to better manage the Covid-19 crisis and the post-Covid-19 situation?

The table below shows the consolidated results of the answers from all participating countries by need expressed for financial assistance to face challenges in the management of the crisis.

No	Needs of administrations in terms of financial assistance	Number of countries	%
1	IT equipment necessary for teleworking and digital/paperless procedures	16	88.89 %
2	Improvement / Modernization of work infrastructure (Headquarters, customs offices / customs clearance areas, training center, etc.)	14	77.78 %
3	Acquisition of personal protection equipment	14	77.78 %

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## D. D. Needs of administrations in technical assistance (Q.5)

Question: In which areas would your administration require technical assistance to better manage the Covid-19 crisis and the post-Covid-19 situation?

The table below shows the consolidated results of responses from all participating countries by need expressed for technical assistance to face challenges in the management of the crisis.

No	Needs of administrations in technical assistance	Number of countries	%
1	Assistance for the development/upgrade and / or implementation of programs such as authorized (economic) operator programmes	14	77.78 %
2	Assistance with e-commerce management	12	66.67 %
3	Assistance in human resource management, in particular to strengthen the capacities of the human resources department	11	61.1 %
4	Assistance for the development and / or implementation of support programmes / measures for the private sector (including the informal sector)	11	61.1 %
5	Assistance for the development and / or improvement of the digitalization of the customs clearance procedures (single window, specific lane for humanitarian shipments in the customs management system, etc.)	11	61.1 %
6	Assistance with coordinated border management / coordinated crisis management	11	61.1 %
7	Assistance for the development of a business continuity plan (including teleworking, etc.) and / or disaster recovery plans	9	50 %
8	Assistance in facilitating voluntary compliance with customs requirements (publication of HS codes for emergency medical equipment/medication/protective equipment, integrated tariff, advance rulings, trade information portal, helpdesk etc.)	8	44.44 %
9	Assistance for the development and / or application of exceptional facilitation procedures / measures in times of crisis (acceptance of copies, deferred submission of documents annexed to the declaration, etc.)	5	27.78
10	Assistance for the development and / or application of a legal framework and / or simplified customs clearance procedures for humanitarian/relief consignments and/or emergency situations	3	16.67 %

## E. Five (5) priority areas requiring technical assistance (Q.6)

Question: If you ticked more than 5 boxes in total in response to questions 3 and 4, please list below the 5 priority areas that would require technical and / or financial assistance.

The table below shows the consolidated results of responses from all participating countries by priority need expressed for technical assistance to face challenges in the management of the crisis.

No	Priorities of administrations in the area of technical assistance	Number of countries	%
1	Assistance for the development/upgrade and / or implementation of programs such as authorized (economic) operator programmes	14	77.78 %
2	Assistance with e-commerce management	12	66.67 %
3	Assistance for the development and / or implementation of support programs / measures for the private sector (including the informal sector)	11	61.10 %
4	Assistance in human resource management, in particular to strengthen the capacities of the human resources department	10	55.55 %
5	Assistance for the development and / or improvement of the digitalization of the customs clearance procedures (single window, specific lane for humanitarian shipments in the customs management system, etc.)	9	50 %

## F. Areas identified for sharing experiences between administrations (Q.7)

Question: In which areas could your administration act as a "coach" for the administrations of the region?

The table below shows the replies of the participating countries who are ready to share their experiences on certain topics in the context of crisis management.

Potential coach	Experiences to share
Cameroon	Assistance for the development and / or application of exceptional facilitation procedures / measures in times of crisis (acceptance of copies, deferred submission of documents annexed to the declaration, etc.)
Benin	Authorized Economic Operators (AEO)
Guinea	Management of relief goods and equipment imported for humanitarian purposes (Application of the Standard Operating Procedure Guide for relief goods imported for humanitarian purposes)
Central African Republic	Assistance in coordinated border management

Côte d'Ivoire	Measures adopted to guarantee the regular supply of goods to the market, including those contributing to the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.
Mali	Expedited procedures for humanitarian / relief shipments
DRC	Modernization of work infrastructures / Electronic monitoring of cargo
Gambia	Human Resource Acting as Strategic Partner in times of crisis
Liberia	Challenges related to the absence or/non-application of expedited Customs clearance procedures for humanitarian/emergency consignments/convoys.
Cape Verde	Risk management
Nigeria	Single window/ Cross border management

## IV. COMPARATIVE ANALYSES WITH OTHER DIAGNOSTICS/ ASSESSMENTS

It would be interesting to compare the main results of the survey with the results of other diagnostics or assessments at the regional level. To this end, we consolidated the information from the various category C notifications of countries in the region as part of the implementation of the TFA. Next we considered the 2019 consolidated results of the self-assessment exercise carried out by the countries of the region as part of the implementation of the Regional Strategic Plan 2018-2022.

This cross-analysis, which is presented in the table below, confirms the relevance of the regional needs and priorities obtained from the survey.



No	Priority needs of administrations in terms of technical assistance at the regional level as obtained from the survey	Notifications of corresponding AFE measures in Category C (regional %)	2019 assessment of the implementation of the corresponding actions of the regional strategic plan
1	<p>Assistance for the development/upgrade and / or implementation of programs such as authorized (economic) operator programmes</p> <p>(77.78 %)</p>	<p>Article 7.7: Trade Facilitation Measures for Authorized Operators</p> <p>(16 members / 21, or 76.19 %)</p>	<p>Develop and implement a national Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) programme for the benefit of the private sector. (Action V.4.4)</p> <p>Regional implementation average : 1.47 / 5</p>
2	<p>Assistance with e-commerce management</p> <p>(66.67 %)</p>	<p>7.8 Expedited Shipments</p> <p>(09 members / 21, or 42.86 %)</p>	<p>Develop a legal framework and procedures for proper Customs control and effective clearance of cross-border e-Commerce goods. (Action V.1.7)</p> <p>Regional implementation average : 1.76 / 5</p>
3	<p>Assistance for the development and / or implementation of support programs / measures for the private sector (including the informal sector)</p> <p>(61.10 %)</p>	<p>Article 1.2: Information Available Through Internet</p> <p>(15 members / 21, or 71.42 %)</p>	<p>Promote voluntary compliance. (Operational goal 3 of the Customs Procedures Focus Area)</p> <p>Regional implementation average : 2.35 / 5</p>

No	Priority needs of administrations in terms of technical assistance at the regional level as obtained from the survey	Notifications of corresponding AFE measures in Category C (regional %)	2019 assessment of the implementation of the corresponding actions of the regional strategic plan
	<p>Assistance in human resource management, in particular to strengthen the capacities of the human resources department</p> <p>(55-55 %)</p>	<p>Cross-cutting enabler not included in the TFA</p>	<p>Periodically build the capacities of the staff of the HR department in their area of expertise. (Action III.2.9)</p> <p>Regional implementation average: 2.59 / 5</p>
	<p>Assistance for the development and /or improvement of the digitalization of the customs clearance procedures (single window, specific lane for humanitarian shipments in the customs management system, etc.)</p> <p>(50%)</p>	<p>Article 10.4: Single Window</p> <p>(16 members / 21, or 76.19 %)</p>	<p>Establish internal strategies, mechanisms or procedures for users to present the documents and / or data required for the import, ex-port or transit of goods at a single point (Single Window). (Action V.4.9)</p> <p>Regional implementation average: 2.00 / 5</p>



## V. PRIORITY CAPACITY BUILDING AREAS FOR CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATIONS OF THE WCA REGION.

On the basis of the foregoing analyses of the survey results as well as the comparative analysis, the following eight areas are considered as priority areas for capacity building for Customs administrations of the WCA region, in order to support them to better respond to Covid-19 (and / or other crises) as well as in their modernization efforts:

### Technical assistance:

1. Capacity building for the implementation of authorized (economic) operator programmes.
2. Capacity building for Customs staff responsible for human resource management.
3. Capacity building of Customs administrations in the implementation of support programmes for the private sector including the informal sector.
4. Capacity building of Customs administrations in the implementation of digitalization of procedures, including specific procedures for humanitarian consignments.
5. Assistance to Customs administrations in the development of legal framework and procedures for the management of electronic commerce

### Material assistance:

1. Improvement / Modernization of work infrastructures (HQ, customs offices / customs clearance areas, training center, etc.).
2. Computer equipment necessary for teleworking and paperless procedures.
3. Acquisition of protective equipment for employees.

## VI. NEXT STEPS

1. Circulation of survey results to members of the region.
2. Presentation of the survey results to technical and financial partners (TFPs).
3. Organization of a virtual round table of TFPs to decide on the possibilities of supporting the region / countries in the areas identified.
4. Organization of a series of regional awareness-raising workshops on priority topics that, a priori, are not currently receiving support from TFPs:
  - a. Support to the private sector, especially the informal sector, in times of crisis
  - b. Legal and procedural standards for "electronic commerce management"
  - c. HR management in times of crisis
  - d. Modernization of work infrastructures to respond to pandemics