



**6th Meeting of the Regional Working Group on IT Development in the WCO
Region of West and Central Africa (WCA)**

**THEME: "CONTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN THE RESILIENCE
OF CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATIONS TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC"**

DRAFT FINAL REPORT

On September 02 and 03, 2021 in virtual meeting

I- INTRODUCTION

1. The 6th Meeting of the Regional Working Group on IT Development (RWG) of the World Customs Organization West and Central Africa Region (WCO-WCA) was held from 02 to 03 September 2021, in virtual meeting, under the following theme: *"contribution of information systems in the resilience of Customs administrations to the COVID-19 pandemic"*.
2. The meeting was attended by customs officials from nineteen (19) out of the twenty-three (23) countries in the region. These States are as follows:
 - Benin;
 - Burkina Faso;
 - Cameroon;
 - Central African Republic;
 - Capo Verde;
 - Republic of Congo;
 - Democratic Republic of the Congo;
 - Cote d'Ivoire;
 - The Gambia
 - Gabon;
 - Ghana;
 - Guinea;
 - Guinea Bissau;
 - Mali;
 - Mauritania;
 - Niger;
 - Nigeria;
 - Senegal;
 - Togo.
3. The following international organizations were also represented:
 - The Vice Presidency of the WCO-WCA Region;
 - The WCO Regional Capacity Building Office for West and Central Africa (RCBO-WCA);
 - The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

II- OPENING CEREMONY

4. The opening ceremony was punctuated by addresses by the following distinguished personalities:

- Mr. Gilles-Thierry BEUGRE, Technical Advisor to the Director General of Customs of Côte d'Ivoire, representing the Director General of Customs of Côte d'Ivoire;
 - Mr. Abdel Kader SANGHO, Director of RCBO-WCA;
 - Mr. Gomez TSEKET, representing the Vice Presidency of the WCO-WCA Region.
5. Opening the series of speeches, Mr. Gilles-Thierry BEUGRE, on behalf of the Director General of Ivorian Customs, General DA Pierre Alphonse, welcomed each of the participants and expressed the gratitude of his Administration.
 6. He then thanked the Vice Presidency of the WCO-WCA Region for conducting regional affairs with dexterity on the one hand, and the RCBO-WCA for the technical support provided to the General Directorate of Customs of Côte d'Ivoire in the organization of these meetings of the IT, on the other hand.
 7. He also welcomed the consistent support from international organizations like UNCTAD, ECOWAS and CMAC to the process of modernizing customs administrations in the region.
 8. He recalled that this 6th meeting of the RWG- IT takes place in a particular context, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic which has seriously impacted the logistic chain of global trade, imposing on the actors a new way of life and new working methods including teleworking and the increased use of technologies.
 9. It is therefore appropriate that after two (02) years of managing the COVID-19 pandemic, the RWG-IT is entitled to make an assessment of the information systems of the Customs Administrations of the region in the management of this health crisis, hence the theme of the 6th meeting of this regional working group.
 10. While specifying the importance of this meeting, he did not fail to recall the objective sought, which is to provide the conditions for a synergy of actions of the WCO-WCA region toward increasing the resilience of Customs Administrations during this crisis and also for future crises through regional cooperation.
 11. He therefore invited the participants to formulate relevant proposals and recommendations whose consideration will allow our Customs Administrations to meet the challenges they are facing.
 12. Mr. Abdel Kader SANGHO, Director of RCBO-WCA, expressed his gratitude to the different structures that contributed to the holding of this 6th meeting of the RWG-IT in this COVID-19 period.
 13. He invited the member countries to gradually engage in the digitalization of procedures through the use and implementation of automated solutions for a better efficiency in executing their tasks.

14. Recalling that technology should be the main driver of the Customs program to meet the new challenges and opportunities of the digital age, he closed his remarks by emphasizing the place of IT in the RCBO-WCA regional strategic plan 2018-2022 with a particular focus on the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area and the expectations of the region vis-à-vis the RWG-IT at this 6th meeting.
15. Closing the series of speeches, Mr. Gomez TSEKET, Chief of Staff of the Vice Presidency of the WCO-WCA Region, on behalf of the Vice President, welcomed all participants to the virtual meeting, and conveyed the thanks of his organization to the Director General of Customs of Côte d'Ivoire for his personal involvement in the holding of this activity
16. According to him, the irreversible reform and modernization projects undertaken by our region are more than ever justified, in a complex global context of economic exchanges accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
17. Recalling that the work of this 6th meeting of the RWG-IT remains in line with the WCO, he invited customs administrations and development partners to carry on their efforts toward achieving the common goal of strengthening the security of the logistic chain and efficiency based on mutual trust and transparency.

III- II- MEETING INTRODUCTION

18. After the series of introductions of the participants and the adoption of the work program of the meeting, Mr. Anzoumana SYLLA, Director Information Systems of the Customs of Côte d'Ivoire and Chairman of the RWG, gave the scoping speech.
19. In his address, he recalled that this 6th meeting whose theme is: "Contribution of information systems in the resilience of customs administrations to the pandemic of COVID-19" follows that of Dakar held in April 2019.
20. He therefore invited the participants to pay particular attention to all the topics on the agenda of this RWG.
21. For the conduct of business, the following session bureau was established:
 - Chairperson: Côte d'Ivoire;
 - Session secretariat: The Gambia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and RCBO-WCA
;
 - Moderator: RCBO-WCA.

IV- PROGRESS OF BUSINESS

22. The work took place in plenary session around the following themes:

- Mid-term evaluation of the Vice Presidency's activities related to IT development in the WCO-WCA region;
- RCBO-WCA activities, perspectives in relation to the 2021 WCO theme and its expectations from the RWG;
- Report on the activities conducted by the RWG and assessment of the implementation of its recommendations by Customs administrations;
- Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and expectations of the RWG-IT;
- National experience of Information Systems Departments in managing the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Update on the sub-regional implementation of the SIGMAT project;
- Regional market / Innovative projects;
- Review and adoption of recommendations from the 6th RWG meeting.

A- MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE VICE-PRESIDENCY'S ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF IT IN THE WCO-WCA REGION

23. The Chief of Staff of the Vice President reminded the missions of his organization which are essentially about the management of the activities of the region, which derive into four (04) axes including the promotion of the implementation of the regional strategic plan 2018-2022 and the strengthening of collaboration and regional solidarity.

24. He said that the activities in conjunction with the RWG aim to drive the implementation of the TFA and AfCFTA, promote the signing of protocols for collaboration and exchanges between customs administrations and ensure the efficient holding of meetings.

25. Therefore, an evaluation of the implementation matrix of the recommendations from the various meetings of the RWG-IT since 2012, the date of the 1st meeting held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, is necessary.

26. In the future, he recommended that the regional fund include a budget line to support the activities of the RWG and that the meetings of the RWG-IT be included in the regional guide.

B- RCBO-WCA ACTIVITIES, PERSPECTIVES IN RELATION TO WCO THEME FOR 2021 AND ITS EXPECTATIONS IN RELATION TO THE RWG

27. The Director of the Regional Capacity Building Office (RCBO) presented and reviewed the activities of the RCBO-WCA since the three strategic plans from 2009 to 2022: 2009-2013; 2013-2018; 2018-2022.

These activities, related to the last strategic plan, revolved around:

- The survey on the priorities of customs administrations in the WCO-WCA Region in terms of technical and financial assistance to respond to the COVID-19 crisis;
- The 11th (Virtual) Meeting of the Capacity Building Focal Points for Customs Administrations in the WCO-WCA Region;
- The 9th Training and Customs Human Resources Managers Workshop in the WCO-WCA region;
- The Technical Assistance mission from 25 to 27 February 2020 and from 02 to 04 March 2020;
- Publication of the Regional Information Bulletin (RIB);
- The 2020 Roadmap Self-Assessment and 2021 Roadmap Development;
- The 2018-2022 Regional Strategic Plan Update;

28. He highlighted the prospects in relation to the 2021 theme of the WCO which is broken down into three processes:

- Dunning Process:
 - pursuing the mutual administrative collaboration program with a view to strengthening strategic partnership relationships with customs administrations;
 - Raising awareness among the region's customs administrations on the importance of Coordinated Border Management;
 - Inviting customs administrations to cooperate in the implementation of preferential rules of origin;
- Renewal Process:
 - Inviting Customs administrations to build their capacity for teleworking and hosting virtual capacity building activities;
 - Organization of a regional workshop on the modernization of Workplace Infrastructure to respond to pandemics;
 - Proposing to the region, in collaboration with the RWG-IT, fully digitized and dematerialized customs clearance methods and the use of technology to apply effective controls and simplify, improve and accelerate procedures;

- Resilience Process:
 - Invite customs administrations to develop and implement a code of good conduct;
 - Organize a regional program to promote ethics and good governance;
 - Encourage administrations to put in place procedures or mechanisms for users to safely report service failures and breaches of ethics and good governance.

29. And the other perspectives are those related to:

- The implementation of the AfCFTA by the region's customs administrations;
- The implementation of the TFA by customs administrations;
- Implementation of the HR strategy based on the RCBO-WCA
- The organization of the 12th meeting of the Contact Points;
- The organization of the 10th Training and Human Resources Managers meeting;
- The development of the 2023-2027 strategic plan.

C- REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY THE RWG AND EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATIONS

30. The RWG secretariat made its activity report for the past year. This presentation focused on the missions, the working tools, the activities carried out, the implementation of the recommendations, the challenges and the next activities.

31. As working tools, in addition to the regional website, the free forum and regional addressing, the presenter recalled the creation of a WhatsApp group to facilitate communication between group members.

32. In terms of activities, the RWG participated in the following meetings:

- The 23rd expert committee meeting (Nov. 2019 Congo);
- The 11th Virtual Meeting of Focal Points (Dec. 2020);
- 26th DGD Conference (Virtual meeting in April 2021).

33. The level of implementation of recommendations to the RWG from other meetings and structures, as well as activities related to ASYCUDA ownership and progress were presented.

34. The presentation also reviewed the challenges that have hindered the RWG's activities. Some of these challenges include

- No activity since the last meeting (RWG, 3 Commissions);
- Low return on contributions (evaluation questionnaires).

35. Concerning the difficulty related to the low return of the evaluation questionnaires, two requirements were addressed to the RWG, namely "integrating performance indicators and evidence of achievement into the recommendation evaluation matrix" and "sending the recommendation evaluation matrices to all the administrations".

36. The following were announced as next activities:

- The organization of virtual meetings of the commissions;
- The organization of a benchmarking mission within the framework of a computer optimization of the management of goods with the support of the WCO Secretariat.

D- PRESENTATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AfCFTA AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE RWG

44. The Director of the RCBO presented the level of implementation of the AfCFTA and the expectations of the RWG.

45. He recalled that the agreement creating the AfCFTA came into force on January 1, 2021 after being signed by almost all countries in Africa, including all countries in our region.

46. The objectives of this agreement are:

- The creation of a single market for goods and services facilitated by the movement of people to deepen the economic integration of the African continent and in line with the Pan-African vision of an "integrated prosperous and peaceful Africa" as set out in Agenda 2063, proposing a best practice for financial management of ISDs;
- The creation of a liberalized market for goods and services through successive rounds of negotiations;
- Contributing to the movement of capital and natural persons and facilitating investment by building on initiatives and developments in the States Parties and RECs;
- Laying the foundations for the creation of a continental customs union at a later stage;
- Strengthening the competitiveness of the economies of the States Parties at the continental and global levels.

47. Specifically, AfCFTA member states commit to:

- progressively eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade in goods;
- gradually liberalize trade in services;
- Cooperate on investment, intellectual property rights and competition policy;
- cooperate in all areas related to trade;
- cooperate in the field of customs and in the implementation of trade facilitation measures;
- establish and maintain an institutional framework for the implementation and management of the AfCFTA.

48. Concerning the implementation of the Agreement, a strategic approach has been adopted and is set out in the following annexes:

- appendix 1: on Tariff Concessions;
- appendix 2: on Rules of Origin;
- appendix 3: on Customs Cooperation and Mutual Administrative Assistance;
- appendix 4: on Trade Facilitation;
- appendix 8: on the Transit.

The Director of RCBO concluded his presentation by noting some expectations of the RWG. These include:

- Establishing mechanisms for setting the parameters of the customs computer system to take into consideration the lists of tariff concessions in the context of the implementation of free trade agreements;
- Implementing IT solutions for the management of preferential rules of origin;
- Implementing an IT solution to interconnect the IT systems of the region's member administrations using standardized information and messages in the context of cross-border paperless procedures.

E- NATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF IT DEPARTMENTS IN MANAGING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

49. Under the heading of national experiences in the management of Covid-19, six countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, Senegal, Cameroon, The Gambia and Nigeria shared the initiatives taken in the management of this health crisis, but also the difficulties and prospects related to its management.

- **Ivory Coast**

- **Initiatives**

- Access to SYDAM WORLD via the Internet;
- Mobile application for authentication and consultation of the declarations in detail;

- Deployment of collaborative tools including: Teams and Zoom;
- Development of an electronic payment application for duties and taxes.
- **Difficulties**
 - User reluctance against internet access;
 - Hostility to change.
- **Perspectives**
 - Completing the digitalization plan;
 - Capacity building of users in online tools.
- **Congo**
 - **Initiatives**
 - Setting up a Ruling center of excellence;
 - Tracking of controllers by geolocation;
 - Establishment of a one-stop shop;
 - Development of an electronic payment application for duties and taxes.
 - **Difficulties**
 - Officer movement difficulties related to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions;
 - Difficulties in supplying consumables.
 - **Perspectives**
 - Finalizing the process of dematerialization of procedures;
 - Setting up a business advisory unit;
 - Providing telecommuting tools for officers;
 - Strengthening the capacity of officers in IT;
 - Expanding interconnections with partner jurisdictions;
 - Deploy the WCO-deposit and auction automation modules.
- **Senegal**
 - **Initiatives**
 - Reinforcement of digitalization tools;
 - Optimization of the online submission platform.
 - **Difficulties**
 - User ownership of tools;
 - Security Challenges;
 - Difficulties related to the internet speed.
- **Cameroon**

- **Initiatives**
 - Implementation of CAMISYS, Cameroon Information System;
 - Implementation of online meeting tools;
 - Intensification of online meetings with partners.
- **Difficulties**
 - Quality of the internet connection.
- **The Gambia**
 - **Initiatives**
 - Implementation of an electronic payment application for duties and taxes;
 - Deployment of collaborative tools including: Teams and Zoom;
 - Partnership with banks for revenue collection;
 - Installation of optical fiber in the premises to solve the bandwidth problem.
- **Nigeria**
 - **Initiatives**
 - Restriction of border movements;
 - Economic Support Measure;
 - Customs services protection measure;
 - Authorization to allow the movement of medical products;
 - Awareness campaign by a medical team;
 - Closure of land borders to passenger traffic;
 - digitalization of procedures.
 - **Difficulties**
 - Reluctance to change
 - **Perspectives**
 - Increasing awareness;
 - Upgrading computer platforms.

F- UPDATE ON THE SUB-REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SIGMAT PROJECT

50. Mr. Jailson da Luz Costa, IT Expert of ECOWAS, recalled in the presentation, that the Interconnected System of Management of Goods in Transit (SIGMAT) is a set of rules (legal text, procedures, memorandum of understanding, messages, SIGMAT software) that allow the movement of goods from one point to another.

51. SIGMAT is based on the principle of automation of the customs clearance procedure, clear description and identification of goods, trade facilitation (based on simplification of procedures, authorized operator, community guarantee). It facilitates the transport of goods, improves intra-community trade, generates statistics to manage risks, improves operational efficiency and promotes customs cooperation.
52. The SIGMAT project, which started in 2011, currently exists in Desktop and Mobile versions (in the process of validation of the prototype), covers transit by road and by rail. It is based on JMS (Java Message Service) messages coupled to the transactions available in the customs clearance system for transit operations.
53. SIGMAT is deployed in 08 (Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo) countries of the ECOWAS zone. Railroad development is deployed in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso.
54. The upgrade from ASYCUDA++ to ASYCUDA World is underway and being completed in The Gambia while talks are underway to assist Guinea Bissau.
55. In addition, the deployment of SIGMAT between Senegal and Mali is expected to go live before the end of this year. Also, Nigeria and Ghana have begun the process of implementing the SIGMAT solution.
56. The next major phase of the SIGMAT project is the development of a mobile version whose completed prototype will be presented for validation in the fourth quarter of 2021.

G- REGIONAL MARKET / INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

57. Under the regional market, two countries have presented their experience. These are Côte d'Ivoire and Mauritania, whose initiatives were presented on the automation of customs clearance procedures and data exchange with partner administrations.

- **Côte d'Ivoire**

58. Two applications were presented by Côte d'Ivoire, including Douane Mobile Côte d'Ivoire version 2.0 and the Visits Management module.

- **Douane Mobile Cote d'Ivoire version 2.0**

This application brings together information available on the business application and the website. Intended for both professionals and the general public, it provides the following features

- Services on customs clearance;

- Previous documents;
- Declaration Statistics;
- Simulation of duties and taxes;
- Management of tickets for goods to be scanned;
- Integration of taxpayer accounts.

It is based on Flutter and Dart technologies and available on App store and Play store.

- **Visits Management Module**

This module aims to digitalize the visit procedure and to reinforce the performance of the verification agents. It takes care of the whole procedure of treatment of the declaration until the Removal Voucher.

It will be available via the internet in 2022 and will help reduce document processing times, monitor visit times, ensure the effectiveness of joint visits and evaluate verification agents.

It will also offer video inspection, rating of inspectors and optimization of risk analysis through the following functions

- The digitalization of the document package;
- Online appointment booking;
- The integration of the visit report in Asycuda.

• **Mauritania**

59. The experience shared by Mauritania in the regional market section focused on three initiatives, including the Management of Exemptions and Privileges module, the registration component, and the interfaces with their partner administrations.

- **Module for managing exemptions and privileges (ASYDREP)**

This module available in ASYCUDA allows to automate the management of exemptions, temporary admissions and tax credits. It allows the follow-up of the shortfall on tax revenues and expenses.

- **Registration Voucher**

This module allows for the electronic tracking of imported vehicles and registration documents.

The registration voucher is a document issued by the customs services in cases of temporary admission of a vehicle, entry into a free zone or for direct consumption or under a suspensive regime.

- **Interfacing by web services with administrations such as**

- The General Directorate of the Treasury for electronic payment;

- The General Directorate of Tax Administration for fiscal aspects;
- The Ministry of Transport for the registration of vehicles.

H- REVIEW AND ADOPTION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 6TH RWG MEETING

RECOMMENDATIONS

UNDER ITS

- **To the Customs Administrations:**
 - Perpetuating the good practices acquired by the ISDs for the resilience of the Customs Administrations in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic, particularly in terms of mobility and digitalization.
 - Setting up an online application submission and management platform.
 - Encouraging Customs administrations to implement electronic payment solutions.
 - Encouraging the implementation of help desks to meet the challenges of digitalization;

DILIGENCES

UNDER THE ACTIVITIES OF THE RWG STRUCTURES

- **To the Secretariat of the RWG:**
 - Incorporating performance indicators and evidence of achievement into the recommendation evaluation matrix;
 - Returning the recommendation evaluation matrices to all jurisdictions;
 - Keeping on the agenda of the next RWG meeting a communication on the level of implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA);
- **To the RWG Governance Commission:**

- Proposing a strategy for change management in the face of user reluctance to adopt mobile solutions;

PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE RENEWED

- Developing a draft strategic plan on IT security, which will be submitted to all administrations for validation.
- **To the RWG Commissions**
 - Working with the RWG-IT Secretariat to ensure that all member countries respond to the questionnaires sent to them in a timely fashion;
 - Reinvigorating the Forum and the WhatsApp tool in the context of exchanges;
 - Developing the action plans of the Commissions within three months;
 - Ensuring participation in the work of the Commissions by appointing internal collaborators to carry out the activities of the said Commissions

FOR RWG SUPPORT TO REGIONAL STRUCTURES:

- **To the RCBO-WCA**
 - Developing a regional strategic dashboard model that includes all customs activities, with Cote d'Ivoire and The Gambia. Deadline for completion: 6 months;
 - Developing the functional and technical specifications of a Human Resources Management computer module for The Gambia, Mali and Niger.
- **To the RILOs:**
 - Developing specifications for the computerization of litigation, risk management and selectivity, and making them available to the RWG À-IT.

UNDER THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES

- **To the Customs Administrations of Capo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria (carrier country):**
 - Conducting a study on emerging technologies such as blockchains, Big Data, drones, cell phones, etc. that may impact the customs business, and highlight the costs in this study. Deadline for completion: 6 months.

UNDER UNCTAD TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

- **To the UNCTAD:**

- Drafting a schedule for the deployment in ASYCUDA of the module for the management of deposits and auctions. Deadline for completion: 3 months.

- **To the RCBO-WCA and RWG:**

- **Short term:**

- Capitalizing on the UNCTAD trainings that some countries benefit from, within the framework of Conventions or bilateral relations, by informing and associating other countries, with a view to building the capacities of their agents.

- **In the medium term:**

- Developing a capacity building action plan for ASYCUDA ownership, in consultation with all member states;
- Including in this plan the functional aspect and the deadlines;
- Highlighting in this plan the levels of training for the operation, development and mastery of the modules;
- Transmitting this plan to UNCTAD, which will be responsible for costing it;
- Submitting this costed plan to the Vice President to seek funding;
- Deadline for completion: 6 months.

V- CONCLUSION

60. The next activities of the RWG were presented. These are the organization of:

- Commission meetings in February 2022;
- of the RWG meeting, the date and place of which will be known at the next conference of the Directors General of Customs in our region.

61. The closing ceremony was marked by the reading of the recommendations of the sixth meeting of the RWG on IT development in the WCA region of the WCO and the closing remarks of the vice-president.

62. The Chief of Staff the vice-presidency, perceiving in this meeting punctuated by communications with a touch of clarity that have touched the finger on the major issues in terms of challenges for the modernization of our IS and this, in a context of COVID-19 pandemic, recalled in his speech, the great interest of

these meetings which is to have laid solid foundations toward providing a real roadmap to be implemented very quickly by our Administrations in partnership with all the economic actors.

63. Thus, these fruitful exchanges of these 02 days have allowed us to convince ourselves that modernization is a long process that is not only the business of the Customs Administration but rather a collective vision of all those involved in the system, namely economic operators, forwarders and users.

64. He gave reassurances to the audience on the involvement of the Vice Presidency in the follow-up of the implementation of the recommendations of these meetings within the expected timeframe.

65. His closing words are addresses of congratulations and thanks to the organizers of this workshop, in particular the Director General of the Customs of Côte d'Ivoire, the Director of RCBO-WCA, to the whole team of the RWG led by its president and to the active interventions of all.

66. The closing ceremony ended with the final photo of the participants.

Issued in Abidjan on September 03, 2021

The President
ANZOUMANA Sylla

For The Gambia

For the Democratic Republic of Congo

For Mali

For Ivory Coast

For the RCBO-WCA

