



Brussels, April 2018.

**WCO SECRETARIAT ACTIVITY REPORT  
WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA**

**January 2017 - April 2018**

**20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committee of Experts - West and Central Africa  
(WCA)**

**and**

**23<sup>rd</sup> Conference of Directors General of Customs  
of the WCA region**

**23 to 27 April 2018**

**Conakry, Guinea**

## Overall capacity building delivery

1. WCO capacity building delivery for the period from January 2017 to April 2018 was again based on the **annual Needs Assessment** carried out by the Secretariat together with Member administrations and supported by the Regional Offices for Capacity Building (ROCBs).
2. In addition to the traditional capacity building support requested by WCO Members for reforming and modernizing their Customs services in line with the Organization's standards, there is now the entry into force of the **World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)**, almost all the provisions of which involve Customs administrations. Following accession by two-thirds of WTO Members to the TFA, the Agreement entered into force on 22 February 2017. The Agreement is binding on all WTO Members and has great bearing on the WCO's capacity building activities in West and Central Africa (WCA), especially as all the WCA countries apart from Sao Tome and Principe (Observer) are WTO Members.

Developed countries will have to implement all the provisions of the TFA. Developing and least-developed countries (LDCs) will be required to meet their "Category A" commitments, but will enjoy special and differential treatment for their "Category B and C" commitments.

3. **Security:** In recent years, most of the WCO regions have witnessed security challenges requiring effective solutions to be found at the national and sometimes bilateral and regional levels. Armed groups operate across borders; some of them settle in remote borderlands and sometimes administer these areas. Many of these groups claim their affiliation to supranational organizations based on growing religious or political ideologies, which affects the international community. These activities impact negatively on national economies, security and development as well as international trade and relations. The nature of the insecurity of these borderlands requires an alternative paradigm for the role of Customs in managing security and contributing to economic development at borders.

To address this issue in greater depth, the WCO embarked on a new strategic orientation that will complement and strengthen the current Security Programme which primarily promotes enforcement elements. The new approach intends to delineate and promote the specificities of Customs, as compared to security and defence forces, elevate the role of Customs within national border security policies and propose solutions that combine security and the economic dimension of the border. To some extent, this initiative addresses the facilitation of trade not only from a quantitative perspective (reducing delays) but also from a political perspective (the impact of trade governance on the security of populations). The objective is to make national and regional security policies more inclusive by developing the economic dimension of State responses to insecurity and embedding trade, taxation and Customs matters into them. This approach has been launched through a research programme and cooperation by some Members. At national level, missions have been conducted over this period and particularly in the WCA region (Central African Republic, Chad and Mali).

At regional level, Nigerian Customs, in cooperation with the WCO, convened the first meeting of the Technical Committee on the Security Project (SPC++) in Abuja in December 2016 with a view to proposing a new framework to tackle security issues in WCA from a trade and Customs perspective. Five countries from the region

participated in the meeting (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Niger and Nigeria) and adopted concrete recommendations to enhance regional coordination and jointly implement activities in order to provide field analysis which will subsequently serve as the basis for solutions that are specially adapted to the needs and circumstances of Members in the WCA region. In March and September 2017, the WCO conducted two missions in northern Nigeria to explore the fiscal and commercial governance implemented by the insurgents and the current impacts of the crisis on trade and Customs.

A new security project for the WCA region will be presented and launched on the fringes of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Conference of DGs of the WCA region. This project, financed by Japan, focuses on five priority areas:

- Controlling substances and products that may be used to manufacture Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), within the framework of Programme Global Shield;
- Combating the trafficking in and illicit use of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), under the SALW Project;
- Carrying out passenger checks/combating the phenomenon, of Foreign Terrorist Fighters using Advance Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR);
- Controlling the trade in strategic goods, through a programme comprising a 'capacity building' component and an 'operational activities' component;
- Combating terrorist financing, which targets illicit trade and money laundering activities, including cash courier and laundering systems under the guise of business operations;
- From May 2018 onwards, a series of activities will also be held on the role of Customs in the protection of cultural heritage. These activities will additionally provide opportunities for Customs to tackle the problem of smuggling of cultural heritage and address their national practices and policies on security, terrorism and protection of cultural heritage, thus enabling them to take stock of their specific role in managing border security in regions plagued by or in proximity to conflicts.

4. During this period, a significant number of **WCO capacity building missions** have taken place in WCA. They have focused on providing support for Customs reform and modernization efforts, and more specifically on strategic management, management assistance, modern Human Resource Management (HRM), Customs intelligence, holistic risk management, measurement of the time required for the release of goods (Time Release Study - TRS) and performance measurement. Other initiatives have focused more heavily on the harmonization and simplification of procedures, especially through computerization, interconnection and Single Windows. The latter are increasingly being provided under the Mercator Programme to support Members with TFA implementation.

5. At its last four sessions, the **Policy Commission (PC)** focused, inter alia, on the following six (6) main topics:

- **Security issues in the wake of recent terrorist attacks in many parts of the world:** The "Punta Cana Resolution" was adopted by the PC, accompanied by a commitment to supporting Customs in enhancing border security capabilities. This support includes developing new tools and guidelines such as the Border Security Initiative relating to passengers and freight and Cross-Border Mutual

Administrative Assistance, including tools and guidelines to make high-risk commodity identification more effective.

In 2017, the WCO highlighted its other security-related initiatives, such as the WCO Information & Intelligence Centre (I2C), the fight against illicit trafficking in cultural goods and further research work to identify innovative ways of enabling Customs administrations to identify terrorist activities and security risks in a proactive manner. The PC endorsed the development of a Customs-Financial Intelligence Units (FIU) Cooperation Handbook and acknowledged the need to further prioritize the ongoing initiatives.

- **Digital Customs/E-Commerce:** With the development of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the challenges relating to security and facilitation of trade, Customs will have to continually tailor its activities to keep pace with these changes. This topic is a priority for the WCO in terms of supporting its Members to move forward with making Customs procedures and information sharing more automatic and transparent.

In 2017, the WCO Working Group on E-Commerce developed a Resolution on Cross-Border E-Commerce and a Communication from the International Customs Community on Cross-Border E-Commerce to the Eleventh WTO Ministerial Conference. The First Global Cross-Border E-Commerce Conference was held in Beijing in February 2018.

- **The TFA:** The PC adopted the Communication from the international Customs community regarding the implementation of the TFA, which was presented by the Secretary General to the Tenth WTO Ministerial Conference held in Nairobi (Kenya). In terms of capacity building, this Communication reaffirms that the WCO has the capacity to engage even further in the implementation of the TFA by providing tailor-made assistance to meet Members' identified and specified needs. It recognizes that successful implementation of the TFA requires political commitment, technical expertise and a renewed focus on capacity building. Members are invited to take advantage of the Mercator Programme and to make full use of the many instruments and tools already available.
- **Performance measurement:** Following the discussions in the WCO PC and Council, the Secretariat has introduced an "Achieving Excellence in Customs (AEC)" Framework with the support of the WCO's different technical Committees. This AEC framework will be used for self-assessment only, and not for the purposes of ranking administrations. It is strongly focused on first-level indicators to measure Members' progress in implementing WCO tools and instruments. The Secretariat sent all Members a questionnaire on this topic.
- **Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs):** It has been widely recognized that Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) hamper sustainable development and present a direct threat to global political and economic security. The loss of capital from corruption, organized crime, illegal exploitation of natural resources, fraud in international trade and tax evasion deprives countries of vital revenue that could be used to develop infrastructure, provide basic social services and invest in projects to create jobs.

A WCO Action Plan has been developed and a G20 Africa Partnership Conference in Berlin gave the Secretary General the opportunity to exchange

views on the role of the WCO in this area. This plan encompasses all current and future WCO initiatives to better assist its Members in the fight against IFFs, and defines a strategy that centres on various strands of action, namely:

- Research;
  - The development or enhancement of instruments and tools;
  - Cooperation/coordination between and among Customs administrations and their strategic partners;
  - Development of essential capacities and core competences within Customs, and operational activities.
- **Customs-Tax cooperation**, which is a highly topical issue in an environment marked by a growing tendency to merge Customs and fiscal authorities (largely taxation) into a single tax revenue administration, or to bring them together under the banner of the Ministry of Finance. In this context, while not underestimating the contribution of Customs to the vital task of revenue collection, it should be stressed that the responsibilities of Customs go far beyond the fiscal mission and that they include, in particular, trade facilitation, security and protection of society.

The WCO has examined concrete forms of Customs-Tax cooperation, published guidelines for strengthening cooperation and the exchange of information between Customs and tax authorities, carried out case studies on tax revenue administrations, called for adequate resourcing of Customs administrations, and drafted a concept paper on the role of Customs in collecting indirect taxes on goods.

In 2017, the PC decided to support the ongoing work on the development of the "Guidance on Customs' Role in the Collection of Indirect Taxes" and agreed that the June 2018 PC session would take a decision, without any further deferment, on the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the WCO and the IMF on the collection of Customs data via the Revenue Administration Fiscal Information Tool (RA-FIT).

6. **International Customs Day:** The theme for 2018 is "A secure business environment for economic development". Under this banner, Members of the WCO are encouraged to look at how they can create an economic environment that will foster international trade by improving the opportunities for businesses and, in particular, MSMEs (micro, small and medium-sized enterprises).

For the WCO, the idea of a "secure business environment" is one that is fundamentally enabling, safe, fair and sustainable:

- enabling: by streamlining procedures, enhancing integrity or tackling corruption to enable greater fluidity of cross-border movement of goods and people;
- safe: by guaranteeing a secure supply chain through the combating of trafficking and cross-border crime, including the funding of terrorism;
- fair and sustainable: by combating the importation of illegal goods that infringe IPRs or contraband, Customs helps create a favourable environment for governance, the economy, development and human security.

The WCO will continue to promote tools, instruments and initiatives to meet the challenges associated with protecting the business environment – the source of economic development.

## WCA region

### Recommendations by the 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of Directors General (DGs) (Senegal, 2017)

7. **The 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of DGs of Customs of the WCO's WCA region** took place in Dakar (Senegal), from 27 to 29 April 2017. This important gathering attracted record participation, with 21 of the region's 23 Member administrations attending, together with the WCO Secretariat, the ROCB, the Regional Training Centres (RTCs) of Ouagadougou, Brazzaville and Abuja, the Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices (RILOs) for Western Africa and Central Africa, and continental and regional organizations including, in particular, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

At the end of the Conference, the DGs did not put forward any recommendations for the Secretariat to consider.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> WCA Donor Conference (Lomé, Togo, 2017)

8. **The Second WCA Donor Conference** took place in Lomé (Togo) on 1 and 2 June 2017. It was prepared jointly by the WCO Secretariat, the Vice-Chair for the WCA region and the Togolese authorities. It was attended by 19 out of the region's 23 Member administrations (absent: Chad, Ghana, Sao Tome and Principe, and Sierra Leone), the ROCB for the Western and Central Africa region, the three RTCs for WCA and the two West and Central Africa RILOs, the Chinese, Japanese and Togolese Customs Administrations, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the African Union Commission, the ECOWAS Commission, the African Development Bank (local representative), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ - local representative), the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Its goals were to:

- Consolidate the donor network working in synergy and working towards an integrated approach to Customs reform and modernization in the region;
- Strengthen mutual understanding between donors and Customs in the region;
- Raise political and donor interest in Customs reforms within the region;
- Present priority regional projects that have reached maturity;
- Present national projects to be submitted to donors;
- Establish a lasting partnership between donors and the region's Customs administrations.

It achieved the following goals:

- Priority regional and national projects were presented to the partners present;
- The WCO presented the Leadership and Management Development project;



- The WCO and OCHA presented the C-RED Project and a proposal to extend this initiative to Africa as a whole;
- The WCO reiterated its commitment to supporting regional projects in particular;
- The understanding that potential contracts for regional projects could be signed directly between the donor and the Secretariat was confirmed. The WCO-WCA regional structures do not have a legal status allowing them to sign contracts with donors;
- The documentation on the projects presented was published on the WCA region's web site (omdaoc.org) and is now available online to both development partners and donors.

It is regrettable that some major donors invited were not present, notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF - AFRITAC), the World Bank and the European Union.

## Recommendations by the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of WCA Contact Points

9. **The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of Capacity Building Contact Points** and Customs Reform Managers for the WCA region was held in Brazzaville (Republic of the Congo) from 25 to 27 October 2017.

The following recommendations were endorsed for the attention of the WCO Secretariat:

- Pursue efforts to hold expert accreditation workshops to build up a regional pool ensuring the sustainability of capacity building programmes and projects initiated by the WCO in the WCA region:

Developing pools of experts supplied by Members is a Secretariat priority. Paragraph 26 of this document describes the action carried out to that end. It is worth remembering that the accreditation process only exists for certain subject areas and that almost all accreditation workshops are organized at global level and for candidates speaking a particular language. The WCA administrations and regional structures all receive invitations and are asked to put forward their candidates.

In September 2017 the WCO Secretariat sent a letter to the African Union accompanied by a Business Case proposing the funding of certain accreditation workshops and training activities to enhance the pool of African experts who can then support Customs reform on the African continent. This proposal is based on the MOU signed by the two Organizations and on the success of the Accreditation Workshop for Mercator Programme Advisors funded and jointly organized by the WCO in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

- Pursue the strategy to increase involvement by DGs in the Customs modernization process.
- The Secretariat believes that the mechanisms it adopts enable DGs to remain apprised of and be involved in the WCO's Customs reform and modernization initiatives.

- All DGs are invited to attend the Council Sessions held once a year in Brussels, as well as the Conference of DGs of the WCA region which also takes place once a year.
- Topical issues are presented by the WCO to the Sub-Committee of DGs of Customs of the African Union and to the Conference of DGs of *La Francophonie*.
- The Secretary General of the WCO conducts a number of activities in the region and many bilateral meetings with the region's DGs are held each year.
- Every year, the WCO Secretary General sends DGs a letter asking them to notify the Secretariat of their capacity building requirements for the coming year, with a focus on Customs reform and modernization.
- The WCO requires all requests for assistance to be signed by the relevant administration's DG.
- Experts conducting missions for the WCO customarily pay a courtesy visit at the start of the mission and hold a meeting at the end of the mission to present the results to the DG.
- The WCO's activities related to leadership and strategic management are also aimed at Customs DGs.
- The WCA region has developed and made available a regional website, a Regional Guide and e-mail addresses to facilitate communication and the involvement of DGs and administrations as a whole.
- For some years now, each administration has had an Expert and a Contact Point. These individuals maintain operational contact with the Secretariat and regional structures and are responsible for informing their DG of any major initiative.
- Some countries have Attachés who work in the WCO Secretariat or in the Embassy of their country in Brussels (Belgium) and who support communication between the WCO and the DGs of Customs.
- Pursue initiatives to extend the West African Customs Administrations Modernization (WACAM) Project to the entire WCA region.

Activities have already been carried out under this Project for Central African countries, specifically Gabon and Cameroon. Negotiations are ongoing with the donor to extend the Project to other countries of the WCA region.

- Continue the study into the phenomenon taking place in the region and involving the shift from traditional Customs offices to blended structures (Customs-Tax), with Revenue Office status. The aim of the study is to provide relevant information in order to share experiences.
  - In September 2017, the WCO participated in the National Forum on Tax Reform in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This allowed the Customs Administration and the WCO to convince the DRC Government of the need to carry out a feasibility study before going ahead with any



decision to merge Customs with the other two tax administrations in the form of a revenue agency.

- Also in 2017, the WCO was informed of the decision by the Government of Gabon to create a revenue agency. According to the information provided, this new structure is set to become operational from 2019.
- A WCA regional workshop will be organized by the WCO in Gabon, no later than July 2018, to bring together Customs in this region, discuss the issue and prepare appropriate strategies.
- Pursue capacity building activities in the region in collaboration with the regional structures, especially by making them more involved in the preparation, implementation and evaluation phases of activities conducted in the WCA region.
  - Improvements are ongoing in this area and will be made through communication with the National Development Coordinators (NDCs) in the ROCB-WCA.
  - In 2017, the WCO was able to convince some donors to fund the participation of certain regional structures in relevant activities. This enabled the ROCB-WCA and the RILOs for Western Africa and Central Africa to be involved in a number of missions. However, it should be recalled that these arrangements are exceptions and that some donors do not agree to proposals of this kind.
  - In principle, WCA regional activities are held in the RTCs and with the latter's full involvement. This rule does not cover activities for which the RTCs are not available and those assigned to other countries by the Conference of DGs of the WCA region.
  - Experts accredited or recognized by the WCO and working within a regional structure are increasingly called upon to help run national and regional workshops.
  - Some activities and initiatives are now being developed and coordinated with the support of regional structures (examples: ECOWAS and GIZ project).
- Improve coordination with the ROCB-WCA for processing and assessing capacity building requests made by WCA region Customs administrations.
  - The ROCB-WCA and all the region's Members were formally invited by the WCO Secretary General to submit their needs to the Secretariat, and the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Capacity Building Committee (CBC) provided pointers for active involvement by the regional structures in this process.
  - The WCO Secretariat has developed country profiles and invited the administrations concerned to help it to supplement and update them. These profiles also specify the missions already carried out and those to come, the initiatives and projects already underway, and the activity of the other partners in the country concerned. The NDCs have access to these profiles and have been invited to contribute to their periodic updating. This too will allow the Secretariat and the ROCB to coordinate their activities more effectively.

- The WCO Secretariat and the ROCB have jointly drawn up the list of WCA regional activities proposed for the coming financial year.

## Overall situation

10. Security and revenue collection remain the priority objectives of WCA region Customs, even though trade facilitation boosted by the WTO TFA is also a topical issue. Socio-political crises and attacks by terrorist groups continue to pose major challenges to development, including the implementation of Customs reforms, in the majority of the region's countries.

In oil-producing countries, the drop in the price of that resource is increasing government-driven revenue-collection pressure on Customs. For some governments (Gabon, for instance), the creation of a revenue agency appears to be an important and timely element to tackle this crisis more effectively and increase revenue.

Many WCA countries are suffering depletion of their heritage and natural and cultural resources and extinction of their flora and fauna. The WCO has developed a number of initiatives to enable WCA Customs to take more effective measures to protect a country's heritage, resources and species and thus to protect its society, economy and environment. Unfortunately, some WCA Customs do not appear yet to be committing themselves to meeting these objectives.

Some WCA countries have confirmed the need for Customs to continue, or even step up, their efforts to simplify and expedite Customs clearance for relief consignments and train and protect the stakeholders involved. This support continues to be provided by the WCO, and also by other organizations.

The illicit trade in and consumption of drugs and fake medicines in WCA are increasing. It is imperative that Customs become more involved in combatting these ills. It can be observed that Customs administrations are actively participating in operations organized by the WCO to combat fraud, but that their activities and seizures outside those activities generally remain low.

Many markets in WCA are flooded with goods which do not conform to intellectual property rights (IPRs), including goods which pose a hazard to human health and the environment. The specific initiatives and actions of many WCA Customs remain limited.

E-commerce is also developing in WCA, and Customs must take measures to address this new reality. Customs is being asked to develop or improve its Customs clearance procedures and mechanism, above all with regard to goods ordered on the Internet and transported by post or express delivery service.

## Activities in the WCA region

11. The **following meetings of the WCA region** were held: 2017 Conference of WCA DGs of Customs (Dakar), the two 2017 biannual Meetings of the Committee of Experts for the WCA Region (Abidjan and Conakry), the 2017 Meeting of Human Resource and Training Managers (Brazzaville) and two Meetings of the Regional Working Group (RWG) on IT Development (Abidjan).

12. **The Second Donor Conference** was held in Lomé (Togo) from 29 May to 2 June 2017. It was combined with a regional workshop on developments with the TFA and the Mercator Programme in WCA since the last workshop of this kind held in November 2015 at the same location. The content and results of this Conference are documented in paragraph 8 of this Report.
13. Most of the countless other WCO activities carried out were to assist Customs administrations with implementation of the five strategic objectives set out in the **Regional Strategic Plan for 2013-2017**. These five strategic objectives are Leadership, Strategic Management, HRM, Partnerships and Customs Procedures.
14. The **WACAM** Project, funded by the Government of Sweden, entered Phase 2 in January 2015.

The components of the Project have evolved since Phase 1, and it now covers the following three (3) areas: Strategic Management, HRM and Stakeholder Engagement. This does not mean that resource mobilization has been abandoned, as it has been included in the "Stakeholder Engagement" component, given that dialogue with donors remains essential for the countries of the region.

Since the beginning of 2016 the Project has, in particular:

➤ **Strategic Management:**

- Intensified its cooperation with ECOWAS in the areas of Human Resources (HR) (draft Regional Training Strategy) and interconnection (financing of training on the WCO Data Model and the **GEFEG tools**).
- Funded the Columbus Phase 3 mission conducted in Togo.
- Finalized the preparation of new training material on project management which was adopted by the CBC in March 2017.

➤ **HRM:**

- Continued to support the region with the development of a pool of HR experts.
- Fostered regional cooperation in the field of HRM by using experts from the region for national support missions to Ghana, Liberia, Mali and Togo, in particular.
- Provided national support to Benin, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Senegal and Togo.
- Begun preparations to support Nigeria.
- Supported five (5) countries with the development and finalization of HR tools for implementation of the competency-based approach (HR strategy, general training policy, benchmarks for jobs, competency framework, competency dictionary and job descriptions).
- Continued preparations for the development of a Guide to implementation of the competency-based approach in the Customs context.
- Evaluated Burkina Faso's progress with the HR reform launched in 2014.

➤ **Stakeholder Engagement:**

- Provided support to Cape Verde for the conduct and completion of a Time Release Study (TRS).

- Developed an 18-month work plan for supporting Guinea on Stakeholder Engagement in the areas of enforcement (installation of the nCEN, Compendium of Customs Operational Practices for Enforcement and Seizures (COPEs) training and multi-agency operation) and trade facilitation.
- Evaluated Ghana's progress with the Stakeholder Engagement reform launched in 2014.

Since July 2017, the Project has carried out numerous support missions in the field of HRM using regional experts, in order to create a viable pool of regional HRM experts in West and Central Africa. This support notably enabled Mali to finalize its competency-based HRM tools and Liberia to conduct its competency assessment in key pilot sites. Also, the HRM support to Gabon and Gambia concluded with a Training of Trainers (ToT) session based on the new WCO ToT material developed under the Project. The Project also supported the ECOWAS region with the development of the ECOWAS Regional Customs Training Strategy and provided critical inputs to the upcoming WCO WCA Regional Strategic Plan. In the field of Stakeholder Engagement, the Project brought its support to Cape Verde to a close with the official publication of the report on the TRS and helped Guinea successfully conduct its first multi-agency enforcement operation, "Operation WACAM 1". In the area of Strategic Management, Burkina Faso developed its Mercator Plan while the Cape Verde Revenue Authority and the Gambia Revenue Authority identified a roadmap to improve their overall Strategic Plan implementation and monitoring framework thanks to the Project's support. Cape Verde and Gambia are consequently the first countries to benefit from the recently adopted WCO Project Management workshop material developed as part of the WACAM Project.

In 2018, the WACAM Project continues to lend its support to the most committed administrations. Since January, the programme has supported the development of the WCA Regional Strategic Plan (Côte d'Ivoire/February 2018). In the area of strategic management, the final steps were taken for Gambia and Burkina Faso in February, then Cape Verde in March. In the area of HR, actions were completed in Liberia in February and in Mali in March. Additionally, two missions were also carried out in Burkina Faso in January (TRS) and February (project management).

15. **The Leadership and Management Development (LMD) Programme** continues to address the needs expressed by Members.

For the past four years, eight-day LMD workshops have been incorporated in all the Fellowship Programmes, which a number of WCA Customs officers also benefit from. In October 2017, an LMD workshop was held in the Central African Republic, familiarizing 20 Customs managers with modern management methods and tools, and with leadership practices.

In order to support the LMD Programme more effectively, the WCO has launched another programme for Customs management teams, called the "Top Executive Retreat" (TER). This activity, led by WCO Secretariat experts, lasts 3.5 days and gives top management (Customs DGs and their senior managers) an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the LMD Programme and hold high-level, in-depth discussions about their administration's major challenges and initiatives. A TER was organized in August 2016 for Nigerian Customs, and in October 2016 for Burkina Faso Customs.

In March 2018, a TER and an LMD workshop were held in Gambia. Others will take place, including in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria.

16. The **PACIR (Programme d'Appui au Commerce et à l'Intégration Régionale)** contract - Customs segment - financed by the European Union for Côte d'Ivoire - expired at the end of 2015. This contract set aside a significant portion of its budget for establishing **interconnection between Customs IT systems managing transit between Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali**. In the meantime, Senegal and Togo have officially joined the initiative and Ghana has played an active role in some activities focusing on interconnection.

This project has resulted in the development of operational and technical specifications and the formulation of budgets and a working plan to set in motion and implement the solution envisaged by the said countries.

Initiatives were taken in 2016, as was the case in 2015, to promote the solution within ECOWAS and throughout the WCA region. ECOWAS has become more closely involved in the project. It has actively contributed to seeking the necessary financing for the development and implementation of the solution (called 'ALISA' by ECOWAS). In this respect, particular emphasis was placed on cooperation between the ECOWAS Commission and UNCTAD to enable the latter Organization to align the existing Transit module with the specifications adopted by the countries involved as well as by the most recent Conference of DGs of Customs of WCA held in Abidjan in 2016.

The funding mobilized thanks to the ECOWAS approach to donors will allow development of the new Transit model in the ASYCUDA system, and will also serve to ensure training of IT specialists in the Customs administrations taking part in the project. This work started in October 2017 and will enable the technical experts in the participating administrations to make greater use of the technical solution and ensure the development and maintenance of the system over the longer term. The World Bank, GIZ and JICA have indicated that they will contribute to the implementation of the project and that they will base their support on the specifications developed by the PACIR countries.

In the course of 2016 and 2017, the following activities related to interconnection were also organized under WCO auspices:

- From 8 to 12 August 2016, a workshop was held in Dakar to familiarize participants with the WCO Data Model, and to align with that Model the functional messages to be exchanged between Customs administrations as specified in the framework of the PACIR Project. The workshop was led by a Canadian expert and by the WCO Secretariat, and was attended by participants from the Customs administrations of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal. The Togolese Revenue Authority (OTR), ECOWAS, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and GIZ also participated.
- The Data Model Project Team (DMPT) met in Brussels from 12 to 16 September 2016. Technical experts from the Customs Administrations of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal and Togo, together with the WCO's Data Model experts, discussed all the technical problems associated with message modelling.

- Another workshop was held at the ECOWAS Computer Centre in Lomé, Togo, from 7 to 11 November 2016. It was led by a Data Model expert from Netherlands Customs and a German expert from the company GEFEG. The workshop was organized by the WCO in collaboration with the ECOWAS Commission, and with financial support from ECOWAS and the WACAM Project funded by Sweden.
- On the initiative of ECOWAS and the WCO, a meeting was held in Abuja in November 2016. It brought together the five countries involved in this interconnection project (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal and Togo) as well as the WCO and some development partners (World Bank, UNCTAD, GIZ, JICA, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), etc.). The aim of this meeting was to deliver a comprehensive presentation on the interconnection project to the donors and give them a greater understanding of the project and its contribution with respect to the enhancement of inter-regional transport and its positive impact on trade facilitation.
- A Global Transit Conference took place in Brussels just after the Council Sessions, in July 2017. It was attended by a number of countries from the WCA region and provided an opportunity to discuss interconnection in greater depth.
- From 18 to 22 September 2017, a meeting of the DMPT was held in Brussels. This allowed technical experts from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo Customs to finalize the alignment of messages with the WCO Data Model. This work was examined and validated on the fringes of a workshop organized jointly by ECOWAS, GIZ and the WCO in Lomé from 9 to 13 October 2017. This work, to which 20 IT experts representing the Customs Administrations of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Senegal and Togo have contributed, will provide the basis for development of the interconnection module in ASYCUDA and for the applications to be developed at national level by Ghana and Senegal, which do not use ASYCUDA.
- In November 2017, the WCO Secretariat sent a letter to the UEMOA concerning future cooperation with this Organization, focusing, among other things, on the regional IT interconnectivity project to manage transit. The WCO reminded the UEMOA that after a design phase that had begun in 2013 and in which the UEMOA Commission had been actively involved, the project work was now entering in its development phase, thanks to the contribution of all stakeholders and under the leadership of the Customs involved and ECOWAS. The need to explore options to allow the UEMOA to play a greater role and to coordinate with ECOWAS in this important initiative was underlined.

On 5 March 2018, the Steering Committee met in Abidjan and agreed on the following points:

- The functional and technical specifications as well as the messages developed under PACIR are achievements to be built on within the project to interconnect the Customs IT systems of ECOWAS countries;
- The DGs of Customs undertake to conduct actions aimed at prompting governments to make interconnection a priority project within the ECOWAS Commission;



- The Assembly is responsible for choosing a name for the project to interconnect the Customs IT systems of ECOWAS countries;
- The following scheduling has been adopted with respect to meetings that might be financed by ECOWAS: one (1) meeting of the Steering Committee per year; one (1) meeting of the Monitoring Committee every six months; one (1) meeting of the Project Committee per quarter;
- The Steering Committee has agreed to the participation of technical and financial partners in meetings of the Monitoring Committee.

17. The **WCO-INAMA Project**, in which several WCA Members are involved, is a follow-up to two previous initiatives financed by the Swedish Government (Projects GAPIN I and II). Its aim is to build the capacity of Customs administrations to fight wildlife crime through targeted capacity building initiatives and with support during enforcement operations. It is financed by the CITES Secretariat, GIZ, Sweden and the U.S. Department of State and has made it possible to carry out the following work and activities:

- An intelligence workshop in Kenya, with participation by Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria.
- Development of training material on operations planning.
- Sub-regional intelligence workshop in Cameroon for French-speaking countries – beginner's level.
- Regional workshop in the Republic of the Congo to "steer and approve" the tool for evaluating administrations' institutional capacity to implement the CITES Convention (Institutional Assessment Tool).
- Publication of the Institutional Assessment Tool.
- Development of training material on investigation techniques for countering the illicit wildlife trade.
- Workshop in Tanzania on operations planning to counter the illicit wildlife trade, with participation by Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria.
- Workshop in Zambia on complex intelligence issues, with participation by Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria.
- Workshop in Uganda on investigation techniques, with participation by Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria.
- Workshop in Burkina Faso on complex intelligence issues for countering the illegal wildlife trade, with participation by Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo (Rep. of), Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Gabon, Madagascar and Togo.
- Workshop in Togo on CITES investigation techniques, with participation by Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo (Rep. of), Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Gabon, Madagascar and Togo.
- Workshop in Namibia on operations planning, with participation by Ghana and Nigeria.

- Workshop in Gabon on operations planning, with participation by the Customs Administrations of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo (Rep. of), Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Gabon and Togo
- Workshop in Cameroon on controlled delivery in collaboration with INTERPOL, with participation by the Customs Administrations, Gendarmerie, Police and Environmental Authorities of the four countries in Central Africa, namely Cameroon, Congo (Republic of) Gabon and DRC, and the RILO for Central Africa.
- International exercise (Operation Save REP) as follow-up to training on operational planning, with participation by the above-mentioned countries.
- Participation of Ghana and Nigeria in the international exercise (Operation Save REP).
- Diagnostic studies on the capacities of the Customs administrations of the countries of Western Africa to implement the CITES Convention. These studies are based on a self-assessment conducted with the help of the tool for evaluating institutional capacity to implement the CITES Convention (Institutional Assessment Tool).
- Institutional assessment mission in the field of enforcement of the CITES Convention and drawing up of an action plan for more in-depth support as part of the INAMA Project in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Togo.

From January to June 2018, the INAMA Project will be given over to customized programming and detailed organization of activities. Implementation commences in April with a ToT and accreditation session in Zambia followed by other activities. Furthermore, depending on the availability of financial resources, Operation Save REP follow-up missions will take place and action plans will be implemented for the countries having received the institutional assessment mission.

18. **The C-RED Project** (Customs for Relief of Epidemic Diseases) aimed at countries affected by the Ebola crisis: Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

In May 2016, the WCO and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed a grant agreement to implement the **C-RED Project**, which supports Customs administrations in West Africa affected by the Ebola virus epidemic. This Project is based on the WCO 2011 Resolution on the role of Customs in natural disaster and regional epidemic relief.

19. The project is now set to continue until 5 October 2018 and is divided into two components:
- providing the front-line officers of three beneficiary administrations with self-protection equipment (Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone),
  - providing capacity building to react effectively to regional epidemics and natural disasters (all the countries selected as part of the Project are eligible: Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone).

As regards the first component, the self-protection equipment was provided by the WCO's partner, the UN Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD). This equipment was delivered to, and stored at, the UNHRD hub in Accra. The three beneficiary countries should be in possession of their equipment in early 2018.

As regards the second component, on the basis of the underlying data and an initial regional consultation, the WCO is offering national support involving:

- development of capacity building material to support and guide Customs administrations so that they respond effectively to disasters;
- support for Member administrations selected in drawing up/examining standard operating procedures (SOPs) in emergencies and their respective capacity to implement them;
- support for implementing SOPs, including in-situ support and remote support;
- help preparing simulation exercises for the Member administrations selected to test the SOPs;
- organization of regional workshops to share experience and develop areas of improvement.

In **Nigeria**, two missions were carried out which made it possible to identify faults in the Customs clearance of relief supplies and draw up SOPs and recommendations on Customs clearance procedures for relief supplies.

In **Guinea**, two similar missions took place in July and October 2017 and were given over to drafting national SOPs, which will provide guidance for the humanitarian community and the various government agencies involved.

In **Mali**, an exploratory mission took place in September 2017. The Mali Customs authorities are leading the work of all the stakeholders as regards the draft SOPs for the Customs clearance of relief supplies.

In **Sierra Leone**, a similar initial mission took place in late October 2017. Draft SOPs have been drawn up, as well as recommendations to improve national procedures in place for the Customs clearance of relief supplies.

The WCO is monitoring the completion of the SOPs, their adoption and the implementation of the recommendations drawn up.

In **Liberia**, an exploratory mission will take place in 2018.

20. In 2016, the "**UNODC-WCO Global Container Control Programme**", developed and implemented in partnership between the WCO and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), organized the following activities in WCA:

Training or follow-up workshops in Senegal (6 workshops), Liberia (1 workshop), Benin (1 workshop) and Togo (3 workshops). In 2017, training and follow-up workshops were organized for the following countries: Senegal (2 workshops), Mali (3 workshops), Benin (1 workshop), Ghana (1 workshop), Togo (1 workshop). In the first quarter of 2018, a workshop was held in Benin in February.

21. In 2015, the WCO concluded a partnership with the United Kingdom's Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and UNCTAD to support the substantive implementation of the TFA in certain countries, including three countries in the WCA region, namely Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The **HMRC-WCO-UNCTAD Programme** is designed to provide capacity building support targeting selected developing countries, enabling them to implement the TFA in an effective manner using the available WCO tools and instruments, as well as UNCTAD's expertise in the establishment and development of NCTFs.

Following a needs assessment mission carried out in cooperation with the World Bank in May 2016, the HMRC-WCO-UNCTAD Programme developed a made-to-measure plan to implement the Mercator Programme for Sierra Leone.

In 2017, implementation of this plan continued, and many activities were carried out. In the field of audit and post-clearance audit (PCA), a needs assessment was conducted (March 2017) followed by training to improve the knowledge of the National Revenue Authority (NRA) in that area (September 2017). In order to provide the NRA with greater support in developing the new Strategic Plan for 2018-2022 and continue the work initiated in 2016, a supplementary workshop was organized (August 2017). As part of overall support for risk management, a workshop was organized to help implement and use the nCEN system (February 2017), which was installed in June 2017. Finally, in order to upgrade skills and enable the NRA to take over the activities relating to valuation, classification and controls on origin – Revenue Package, two sets of training were provided (during the February mission and then in October 2017). Finally, to ensure proper coordination with other development partners engaged in the country, this multi-component and multi-year programme continues the dialogue and collaboration with other stakeholders, such as the World Bank and private-sector consultants.

The HMRC-WCO-UNCTAD programme also participated in the organization of an International Forum to support NCTFs. This Forum was organized jointly by the WCO, UNCTAD and the World Bank, amongst others, in Geneva with over 300 delegates from 70 countries.

In the first quarter of 2018, two countries in the WCA area have already received support from this project:

- Sierra Leone in January and February, as regards a monitoring mission/Mercator Programme evaluation mission and also on TRS and PCA;
- Liberia where, in January, UNCTAD delivered module 4 of the programme to establish Committees on Trade Facilitation.

22. **Operation ACIM (Action against Counterfeit and Illicit Medicines)** was organized jointly by the WCO and the International Institute for Research Against Counterfeit Medicines (IRACM).

Operation ACIM mobilized 16 African Customs administrations, including 10 from the WCA region (Benin, Cameroon, Congo (Republic of), Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo). This Operation lasted 10 days, from 5 to 14 September 2016, in order to inspect simultaneously, in the main ports on the continent, cargoes identified as likely to contain illicit or counterfeit pharmaceutical products posing a dangerous threat to local populations. Some 113 million illicit and potentially dangerous medicines, with a total estimated value of 52 million euro, were seized as a result. The biggest interceptions were in Benin, Kenya, Nigeria and Togo.

The second Operation (ACIM 2) took place from 12 to 21 June 2017. Some 18 African countries participated in the operation, nine (9) of which were from the WCA region (Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo).

The Operation was organized and coordinated by the WCO in partnership with IRACM. The operational phase was preceded by a three-day training session (7 to 9 June 2017). This was followed by analyses (22 to 30 June 2017). This Operation (ACIM 2) led to the interception of 258,933,104 units of different types of products recorded in 840 cases. Since 1 July 2017, 187,262,514 units of different types of products have been seized or stopped (561 cases). During the Operation, 130 containers were intercepted, in addition to consignments by air, post or accompanied luggage.

There are currently no plans to schedule an Operation ACIM 3 in the first half of 2018.

23. The first operation to combat pharmaceutical crime in WCA, called **CRIPHARM** (Douala and Dakar RILOs), took place from 27 January to 16 February 2016. It was organized by the RILO Western Africa and the RILO Central Africa under the supervision of the Vice-Chair for the WCA region and with technical support from the WCO Secretariat. This Operation recorded 78 seizures of pharmaceuticals and other products (drugs, pharmacopoeia products, CITES goods, etc.).

Operation **CRIPHARM II** ran from 29 January to 21 February 2017 and covered all the countries in the WCA region. The Operational Coordination Unit (OCU) was set up in Kinshasa (DRC) and, in addition to the two RILOs for the WCA region, brought together eight WCA countries. Several seizures of prohibited and restricted goods were made in the region. They covered the following goods: drugs, medicines and pharmaceutical products, cigarettes, CITES goods, arms and ammunition, etc. A total of 81 seizures were made, compared with 78 during Operation CRIPHARM I.

Operation CRIPHARM III will be held in the first quarter of 2018.

24. Operation **TRIGGER** against illicit firearms trafficking and terrorism, organized jointly by the WCO, INTERPOL and UNODC was launched in September 2017. It involves, more particularly, the Customs services and national Police services in 10 WCA region countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria). Operation TRIGGER is being carried out in three stages. The first was the leadership training workshop held in Algiers from 4 to 8 September 2017.

The operational briefing was given in Abidjan in October 2017 and the operational phase ran from 20/11 to 02/12/2017, followed by a debriefing in Abidjan in late January 2018. An Operation TRIGGER-MENA will take place in the summer of 2018.

25. The operational phase of **COCAIR VI** ran from 9 to 17 December 2017, with participation by 37 airports from 33 countries in Africa, Latin America/Caribbean and Europe, including 16 countries in the WCA region. An OCU, set up at WCO Headquarters and comprising experts from some of the participating countries, managed the exchange of information through CENcomm. The WCA was represented within the OCU by Mali and the two RILOs (CA and WA).

The objective was to establish operational cooperation and information sharing between airports in order to intercept shipments of cocaine and other illicit products bound for Europe. This Operation, in keeping with previous instalments, was conducted by the WCO under the auspices of Project AIRCOP, with financing by the European Commission and in collaboration with UNODC and INTERPOL. The Project



AIRCOP Joint Airport Interdiction Task Forces (JAITFs) were also directly involved in the Operation.

Outstanding results were achieved during this Operation, both in terms of the volume of information shared between airport units and the quantities of drugs seized. The quantities of cocaine seized have more than doubled. Accordingly, some 98 seizures were input into the CENcomm, covering a total of 1,469 kg of drugs including over one (1) tonne of cocaine and 150 kg of khat. The following seizures were recorded for the WCA zone: 144 kg of drugs, 95 kg of medication, 8,030 pieces of cigarettes and CITES goods, and USD 98,000 of currency.

26. The **CLiKC! (Customs Learning and Knowledge Community) platform** has been updated for ease of consultation and also to facilitate the work of national coordinators. It now has more than 18,000 registered users. Over 100 new users are signed up every month, and around 300 are connected on a daily basis.

An e-learning course on the WTO TFA has been issued. The Training Manual for the TFA course, now available in French, also complements the WCO Training Kits Catalogue for trainers. This enables Member administrations to organize their own face-to-face or blended training sessions. An information module on the MERCATOR Programme is now also available. Courses on the Single Window and Rules of Origin are currently under development.

The WCO Framework of Principles and Practices on Customs Professionalism, available on the CLiCK! platform, provides Members of the WCA region with a chapter on Customs Competency-Based Training Guidelines.

Despite the installation of local e-learning platforms in 11 WCA administrations, access to and use of this tool remains too limited and poorly integrated in the training strategies of WCA Customs. Progress has been made in Côte d'Ivoire which benefited, in October 2017, from a WCO assistance mission to install the CLiCK! platform and to train managers and users of this tool within that Administration. Senegal Customs has also initiated a national implementation project which is expected to come to fruition in the course of 2018.

27. Since September 2016, the WCO has held the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Sessions of the **Virtual Customs Orientation Academy (VCOA)**. Comprising four compulsory modules accompanied by online coaching and two optional modules, and designed based on WCO Members' best practices, the primary aim of the VCOA is to provide newly-recruited Customs officials (recruited less than four years ago) with general Customs knowledge and skills. It describes to these new recruits the typical roles and functions of Customs administrations, concepts of Customs clearance procedures and practices, international conventions and agreements, and the principles of capacity building. It can be accessed from the WCO CLiKC! platform.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Session of the VCOA was held from 5 September to 9 December 2016. It brought together 38 English-speaking participants, including four (4) from the WCA region (1 from Nigeria, 2 from Gabon and 1 from Liberia). The candidates from Gabon and Nigeria successfully completed this training. The representative of Gabon received a Certificate of Merit with Honours.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the VCOA took place from 6 March to 9 June 2017. Some 23 representatives from different Member Customs administrations participated in this



session, including four (4) from the WCA region, from Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea and Liberia respectively. Nineteen (19) candidates, including the representatives of the above WCA countries, successfully completed the training. The representative of Ghana received his Certificate of Merit with Honours. Two Ghanaian experts also participated in this VCOA session as virtual tutors.

A letter was sent to DGs in October 2017 announcing the next session for English-speaking Customs officers. This session began on 5 March and will run until 8 June 2018.

There are still plans to hold sessions in the future for French-speaking Customs officers, subject to securing financing to translate the Academy modules.

28. Since 2015, the annual **Fellowship Programme** organized by the WCO has seen participation by Fellows from some WCA region countries, namely:
- 65<sup>th</sup> Session (French-speaking): 5 WCA beneficiaries out of 14 participants worldwide. They were Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Senegal and Togo.
  - 67<sup>th</sup> Session (English-speaking): 2 WCA beneficiaries out of 17 participants worldwide. They were Ghana and Liberia.
  - 68<sup>th</sup> Session (French-speaking): 7 WCA participants: 1 from Burkina Faso, 1 from Cameroon, 2 from Central African Republic, 1 from Côte d'Ivoire, 1 from DRC and 1 from Togo.
  - 70<sup>th</sup> Session (English-speaking): 1 WCA participant from Ghana.
  - 71<sup>st</sup> Session (French-speaking): 7 WCA participants out of 15 worldwide, from Benin, Cameroon, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo.
  - 72<sup>nd</sup> Session (Spanish-speaking): No participants from the WCA region.
  - 73<sup>rd</sup> Session (English-speaking): No participants from the WCA region.
  - 74<sup>th</sup> Session (French-speaking): 6 WCA participants out of 14 (Benin, Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, Senegal and Togo).
29. **Professional Associates:** The WCO Career Development Programme, financed by Japan, has existed for a number of years and lasts 10 months. It gives rigorously selected beneficiaries an opportunity to undertake work at the WCO Secretariat and acquire knowledge, skills and international work experience. Many countries in the WCA region have already benefited from this Programme. For the 2016-2017 Programme, the WCO selected 10 Professional Associates, three of whom are from WCA (Benin, Guinea and Senegal). For the 2017-2018 Programme, two experts from WCA (Burkina Faso and Nigeria) have been lucky enough to be among the 10 experts selected.
30. Since 2016, the WCO has organized **accreditation workshops**, attended by WCA region Customs experts.
- Two accreditation workshops focusing on Customs Modernization and the TFA for English-speaking experts were held in South Africa from 1 to 5 and then 8 to 12 February 2016. One expert from Gambia and two experts from Liberia were able to take part; the workshops enabled the WCO to pre-accredit 15 candidates, including the one from Liberia.
  - The workshop to accredit French-speaking experts as Customs Modernization Advisors (CMAs) and Mercator Programme Advisors (MPAs) was held in Yaoundé,

Cameroon, from 20 to 24 June 2016. This workshop, funded by the African Union and the WCO, was attended by 13 candidates carefully preselected by the WCO and hailing from African Customs administrations. At the end of this highly demanding workshop, seven (7) candidates were short-listed and will be invited to take part in a mission, in a Co-Facilitator capacity, in order to complete their accreditation process. These candidates are from Burkina Faso (2 participants), Cameroon (1), Madagascar (1), Mali (1), Togo (1) and Tunisia (1). Through the accreditation of these experts, the WCO will be able to provide French-speaking Members with greater support for reform planning and, more specifically, for implementing the TFA by means of the WCO Mercator Programme.

- Three (3) experts hailing respectively from Mali, Burkina Faso and Togo completed their accreditation process following their participation in missions, specifically in the Central African Republic for the first (diagnostic and strategic planning mission), in Gabon for the second (progress evaluation mission: Columbus Phase 3) and Cameroon for the third (progress evaluation mission: Columbus Phase 3). These three experts have just received their WCO accreditation certificates. The other pre-accredited experts from the WCA region will be invited to take part in missions to complete their accreditation process.
- The workshop to accredit Transit experts was held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 27 June to 1 July 2016. It was attended by 44 candidates preselected by the WCO and coming from Customs administrations of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (2), WCA (24) and other regions and international organizations. At the end of this highly demanding workshop two (2) candidates, from the Czech Republic and Peru, were short-listed. None of the 26 candidates from the WCA and MENA Customs administrations were short-listed.
- The workshop to accredit Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) experts was held in Brussels from 12 to 16 September 2016. It brought together participants from various WCO regions. In all, seven (7) participants were pre-accredited, including one (1) from Gabon.
- From 15 to 19 May 2017, an accreditation workshop on PCA was held for French-speaking experts at the WCO Secretariat. Candidates from WCA region countries were invited to take part. Four (4) candidates from Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Togo were selected as pre-accredited experts.
- An accreditation workshop on Origin will be held in Burkina Faso in April 2018.

31. **Development and financing programmes:** The Secretariat has set up a new link on the WCO website, providing access to ongoing development and financing programmes administered by the Organization. The link is as follows:

<http://www.wcoomd.org/fr/topics/capacity-building/activities-and-programmes/cooperation-programmes.aspx>

## Pre-shipment inspection/Destination inspection

32. In June 2014, the WCO Council empowered the Secretariat to continue with the initiatives already taken, develop guidelines and best practices on this topic and prepare guidance for rendering Customs procurement more transparent. Some

WCO Members which have been able to successfully take over from inspection companies have pledged to assist the WCO Secretariat in this respect.

Boosted by the successful termination of inspection contracts and the takeover of the main outsourced functions by Customs in Kenya, Mauritania and Nigeria, other WCA countries have committed to developing similar initiatives. This trend has been further accelerated by Article 10.5 of the WTO TFA which stipulates that Members shall not require the use of pre-shipment inspections in relation to tariff classification and customs valuation and encourages Members not to introduce or apply new requirements regarding their use.

In 2015, the WCO actively supported Ghana and DRC. The Governments of these two countries expressed their wish not to renew the existing contracts and asked for WCO support to build Customs' capacities in order to regain their powers gradually, with no loss of revenue. The support offered to Customs enabled these two Governments not to renew their contracts and for Customs to regain its powers.

Nevertheless, the Government of Ghana signed a fresh five-year contract with a private-sector company to support the organization of the new process recently developed in the area of valuation and advance tariff classification, with the development of a Single Window and with other relevant initiatives.

In 2013, Niger announced that it did not intend to renew its existing pre-shipment inspection (PSI) contract. Additional support for Niger will be provided once new organizational structures for valuation and tariff classification, adopted by the Government in 2015, have been implemented and the relevant staff appointed.

In 2016 and 2017, the WCO assisted Guinea Customs in this respect. In 2017, the Government chose not to renew its contract with the inspection company that had been in place for several years. Guinean Customs is currently assuming responsibility for the valuation and tariff classification of goods entering the country.

WCO support is ongoing to assist the Customs of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone take back control of their valuation and tariff classification missions.

Support for Gabon Customs will commence shortly.

There is a noticeable trend of inspection companies shifting from PSI to destination inspection and offering other services (especially a Single Window and cargo tracking via GPS).

## **Visit to the WCO by African trainees from the Belgian Customs School**

33. At the request of the Belgian Customs School, and as part of their nine months' training in Belgium, groups of 20 or so trainees, almost all of whom are from various French-speaking African countries in the WCA region, regularly pay visits to WCO Headquarters. The most recent visits of this kind took place on 4/5 April 2017 and 27/28 November 2017.

In addition to a guided tour of WCO premises, the trainees enjoy a number of presentations given by Secretariat officials. The presentations focus on several themes of possible interest to future senior managers of the beneficiary administrations.

## Accessions to WCO standards

34. The following **accessions** by WCA countries to the main WCO Conventions have been recorded since 2016 (to be updated by new accessions):

- **HS:** No further accessions since January 2016
- **RKC:** Benin (5 January 2017); Burkina Faso (July 2017); Congo (Republic of the) (December 2017)

## WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)

35. Fourteen (14) countries in the WCA region have ratified the **WTO TFA** to date: Benin, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Republic of the), Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

Bearing in mind that the TFA covers a wide range of topics, the majority of WCO activities can be carried out within this framework.

To prepare its Members for implementation of the TFA, and support them in this process, the WCO organized a second workshop for WCA countries in Lomé (Togo), from 29 to 31 May 2017. This followed on from the first workshop of this kind, also held in Lomé from 17 to 19 November 2015. In addition to Customs administrations from WCA region countries, it was attended by representatives of these countries' Ministries of Trade, representatives of regional economic communities and representatives of other government structures and the private sector.

## Conclusions

36. The WCO Secretariat's **main conclusions** for the period are as follows:

- A. Fiscal and security missions remain predominant in the majority of WCA countries.
- B. Cooperation within the WCA region on the security/safety aspect is improving dramatically, especially through the SPC++ Project launched by Nigeria and through ongoing research. In addition, regional workshops have been held to launch the development of a regional risk management and intelligence strategy. A virtual group has been created under the leadership of Ghana, and has undertaken to continue work on the regional risk management strategy. These activities will be followed by other events in 2018 to support this initiative. New security initiatives for the WCA region are currently being launched and will enhance the existing mechanism.
- C. The entry into force of the TFA requires countries which have ratified it to implement it within the prescribed timeframe. This intensifies the pressure on the WCA Customs administrations in question and requires greater focus on the trade facilitation aspect. However, it has been established that only 14 of the 23 WCA countries have ratified this Agreement and that many national Strategic Plans still do not contain strategies to ensure compliant implementation of the necessary reforms.

WCA countries are on the list of developing countries and least-developed countries and benefit from TFA special and differential treatment. They need to operationalize their NTFC, categorize A, B and C measures, and notify the results of the categorization to the WTO. The missions conducted make it possible to note the progress made but also underscore the need for many countries to improve relations between Customs and the Ministry of Trade to ensure better collaboration in this field and to more fully involve other structures in the work.

- D. Many WCA countries are suffering depletion of their heritage and natural and cultural resources and extinction of their flora and fauna. The WCO has developed a number of initiatives to enable WCA Customs to take more effective measures to protect a country's heritage, resources and species and thus to protect its society, economy and environment. Unfortunately, some WCA Customs do not yet appear to be committing themselves to meeting these objectives.
- E. The illicit trade in and consumption of drugs and fake medicines in WCA are increasing. It is imperative that Customs become more involved in combatting these ills. It can be observed that Customs administrations are actively participating in operations organized by the WCO to combat fraud, but that their activities and seizures outside those activities generally remain low.
- F. Many markets in WCA are flooded with goods which do not conform to intellectual property rights (IPRs), including goods which pose a hazard to human health and the environment. The specific initiatives and actions of many WCA Customs remain limited.
- G. E-commerce is also developing in WCA, and Customs must take measures to address this new reality. Customs is being asked to develop or improve its Customs clearance procedures and mechanism, above all with regard to goods ordered on the Internet and transported by post or express delivery service.
- H. Some WCA governments are evaluating the need to create revenue agencies (DRC) or have recently decided on this solution (Gabon). Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo already have revenue agencies. The new WCO tools for Customs-Tax cooperation could be useful for Customs when advising their governments on this matter.
- I. The WCO Secretariat's Activity Report reveals that, overall, the Secretariat's operations had a positive impact on the capacity building of WCA Customs administrations, in particular regarding certain priority themes for these administrations such as the Revenue Package (HS, Valuation, Origin), Trade Facilitation, *Holistic* Risk Management, Customs Intelligence, HRM, Performance Measurement, and Inspection Companies. In other areas, ownership and knowledge of WCO tools, transferred knowledge and the impact of assistance are small and difficult to observe, in particular PCA, Authorized Economic Operator (AEO), internal audit, and the use of e-learning.
- J. The support of the WACAM Project enables beneficiary administrations to greatly enhance HRM.

Following the various workshops organized by the WCO at both national and regional levels, some WCA region Customs administrations are beginning to

attach great importance to the human factor as the main element in the conduct of change and are showing increased interest in the implementation of WCO tools on organizational development (LMD, competency-based approach, HR strategy, training strategy, etc.). Some of them have adopted the approach recommended by the WCO and are making tangible moves towards trialling this concept (Gabon) or even fully applying it (Gambia).

WACAM support has also made it possible to establish a pool of WCA experts. These experts are now able to assist other administrations in this respect and have already been involved in leading missions organized by the WCO. However, frequent changes in heads of Customs administrations and shortfalls in terms of recruitment, training and rotation of staff remain, for many WCA region Customs administrations, major obstacles to reform and sustainable modernization.

- K. Regarding the Revenue Package, the WCO has organized several training sessions on technical subjects such as the HS, Customs Valuation, Origin and Enforcement in general. This support begins with a diagnostic and is primarily aimed at structures, experts and trainers in these domains. This approach helps to empower trainees and contributes to long-term institutional development. This support has made a considerable contribution in terms of assisting certain Customs administrations to reclaim sovereign powers outsourced to various inspection companies.

It has, however, been noted that several countries in the WCA region are still not applying the HS 2017 and are consequently not delivering on their international commitments. Some of these countries expect that their competent Regional Economic Community with a Common External Tariff (particular CEMAC) will provide them with the necessary elements to migrate to the HS 2017 version.



- L. The support provided to some countries for stakeholder engagement and partnerships has greatly enhanced communication and collaboration between Customs, other government departments and the private sector. The WCA region now has the expertise enabling it to assist other countries in this field and some Customs officers in the WCA region have already been involved in leading missions organized by the WCO.
- M. As regards the use of inspection companies, through the TFA and WCO support a positive development can be observed in terms of the high-level commitment by some countries to terminate the contracts that bind them to such companies. The fact that the Customs Administrations of DRC, Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania and Nigeria have been successful in reclaiming outsourced tasks motivates other countries to follow suit. The WCO is willing to further strengthen its assistance in this matter and is currently expanding its support to Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire Liberia and Sierra Leone. Support to Gabon and to Togo is in the preparation stage.
- N. The Regional Workshop on Coordinated Border Management (CBM), organized by the WCO in February 2018 in Abuja, revealed that there is no operational Single Window (SW) in WCA corresponding to the definition of a SW in UN/CEFACT Recommendation 33 and to the WCO's understanding of this concept. Nor are there any operational Juxtaposed Control Offices in WCA.

Many WCA countries have ongoing SW initiatives. However, they are all limited in terms of their scope and the services provided (limited functions and/or limited number of stakeholders connected) or in terms of their geographical focus (most often restricted to port operations). Some countries have more than one SW initiative.

There is a range of infrastructures for Juxtaposed Control Offices in WCA. However, none of these is currently operational, despite support from and significant investment by development partners and donors. In this respect, WCA is lagging far behind East and Southern Africa.

- O. It is worth noting the active participation, using their own resources, of many Customs administrations in the region's various conferences, committees, meetings and activities, in the RWG on IT Development and in some other regional activities. Unfortunately, some countries participate very rarely, presumably for budgetary reasons, and this has been the case for a number of years now.
- P. The region currently has a certain number of tools that will enable it to communicate more easily and inform and involve regional structures and persons acting within the framework of the WCO and for the development of WCA Customs (e.g. regional website, regional e-mail addresses, Regional Guide, Vice-Chair's Newsletter). The WCO Secretariat notes the frequent use of regional e-mail addresses by the regional structures and certain countries with an active contact point. Others do not appear to use this tool efficiently.
- Q. It was not/is not possible to conduct missions in certain countries because of the inactive status of some Members in the WCA region (currently: Chad, Guinea-Bissau).

- R. Many development partners have pledged to support Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone to revitalize their reform process after the Ebola crisis. Thanks to this support and cooperation with these institutions, the WCO has been able to carry out a range of activities in these countries and multi-year support programmes are being implemented.
- S. It can be seen that WCA Customs are increasingly participating in various training programmes provided by the WCO Secretariat, and particularly in the Fellowship Programme, Scholarship Programme, Career Development Programme and the VCOA. The Fellowship Programme also enables a large number of Customs officers to be trained in LMD.
- T. For the past three years, African Customs officers taking part in internships and training provided by the Customs Schools in Tourcoing (France) and Brussels (Belgium) have been visiting the WCO Secretariat. These visits help promote WCO standards and tools and raise the awareness of a greater number of WCA Customs officers about these topics.
- U. A great deal of effort is now being made to add to the pool of experts who can support the WCO in conducting its many assistance missions. Several accreditation workshops have been held to this end and will still continue in the near future (for instance, Origin). These workshops are also aimed at candidates from WCA Customs. WCA Members are encouraged to respond more frequently to invitations and to put forward qualified and available candidates.
- V. Certain active Members in the WCA region seek hardly any support from the WCO (for instance Mauritania and Niger).

## WCA capacity building activities

37. During this period, the following missions were organized by the Secretariat in the WCA region:

Regional workshops		Previous period (January 2016 - March 2017)	Current period
	Regional	9	11
	Sub-regional/several Members	15	11
	Accreditation	5	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>22</b>
National workshops			
	Benin	2	1
	Burkina Faso	7	6
	Cameroon	3	6
	Cape Verde	2	2
	Central African Republic	2	2
	Chad	0	0
	Congo (Republic of the)	3	4
	Côte d'Ivoire	1	2
	DRC	2	1
	Gabon	3	1
	Gambia	1	5
	Ghana	5	3
	Guinea	2	10
	Guinea-Bissau	0	0
	Liberia	4	4
	Mali	5	5
	Mauritania	0	1
	Niger	0	2
	Nigeria	5	10
	Sao Tome and Principe	0	0
	Senegal	2	3
	Sierra Leone	8	10
	Togo	3	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		<b>89</b>	<b>104</b>

## Planning of WCA activities

The WCO Secretariat's Regional Development Manager periodically sends a list of all delivered and upcoming activities to WCA regional structures and Contact Points and to some development partners.

\*\*\* END\*\*\*