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

January 2016 - March 2017

**18th Meeting of the Committee of Experts - West and Central Africa
(WCA)**

and

**22nd Conference of Directors General of Customs of the WCO's WCA
region**

24-28 April 2017

Dakar, Senegal

Overall capacity building delivery

1. WCO capacity building delivery for the period from April 2016 to March 2017 was again based on the **annual Capacity Building 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 are WTO Members.

As of 22 February 2017, developed countries 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 that have defied effective solutions 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 religious or political ideologies and their expansion, 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 insecurity in 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 more sufficiently, the WCO embarked on a new strategic orientation that will complement and strengthen the current Security Programme that mainly promotes enforcement elements. The new approach intends to delineate and promote the specificities of Customs, compared with 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 the cooperation of some Members. At national level, seven missions were conducted during last 18 months 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 the security issues in the West and Central Africa (WCA) region from a trade and Customs

perspective. Five countries from the region participated in the meeting (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Niger and Nigeria) and agreed on 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.

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), development of relationships with stakeholders, and organization of technical workshops and training, including in areas related to the Revenue Package. In addition, accreditation workshops for Customs Modernization/Mercator Programme Advisors and experts on the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC), the Harmonized System (HS) and transit have been organized in order to enhance the pool of French-speaking experts on these topics.

4. At its 74th and 75th Sessions held respectively in December 2015 in Punta Cana (Dominican Republic) and in July 2016 in Brussels, the **Policy Commission (PC)** focused, inter alia, on the following four 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 Policy Commission, 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.
- Digital Customs (the WCO's theme for 2016): 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.
- The TFA: The Policy Commission 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 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 Policy Commission 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, which was due to be completed by early May 2016.

For its part, the PC, at its 76th Session held in Moscow (Russian Federation) in December 2016, continued the discussions on the topics mentioned above as well as on some subjects related to illicit financial flows and Customs-Tax cooperation.

International Customs Day: The theme for 2017 is "Data Analysis for Effective Border Management". WCO Members will have the opportunity to promote their efforts and activities in this sector which has, over time, become an essential component of the Customs modernization process.

WCA region

Recommendations by the 21st Conference of Directors General (DGs) (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 2016)

5. The 21st Conference of DGs of Customs of the WCO's WCA region took place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 27 to 29 April 2016. This important gathering attracted record participation, with 21 of the region's 23 Member administrations attending, together with the WCO Secretariat, the ROCBs, the Regional Training Centres (RTCs) of Ouagadougou, Brazzaville and Abuja, the Western Africa and Central Africa Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices (RILOs), and continental and regional organizations including, in particular, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

At the end of the Conference, the DGs put forward the following recommendations for the Secretariat to consider:

Continue Operation CRIPHARM

The Secretariat has made CENcomm available to the RILOs, and remains willing to support this operation in the future. The development of this initiative is described in the paragraph on Operation CRIPHARM later in this document.

Provide assistance with the establishment of the e-learning platform in administrations which have an HRM strategy and a training strategy

To date, and in the absence of any specific requests, the WCO has initiated activities to assist Gabon and Gambia under the West African Customs Administrations Modernization (WACAM) project. The ROCB-WCA recently contacted the WCO to revive the initiative already launched in 2013 to install this tool for Côte d'Ivoire Customs.

Extend the WACAM project training component to the entire region

- The WCO has not yet found donors to extend the full project to Central Africa (CA). However, the Swedish Government agreed to make available to all regions the material developed by the project, previously limited to ECOWAS, and to involve CA countries in some of the workshops and training events. Thus, some CA countries in this sub-region have already participated (at their own expense) in regional WACAM project workshops and have agreed to fund their own national support missions, primarily in the HR development domain.
- Sweden also agreed to fund the participation of some CA countries in training held in Brussels to establish a pool of WCA experts on human resource management (HRM).
- Activities have recently been conducted in Cameroon and Gabon under the WACAM project, and a proposal to support CA more consistently will be presented at the next Donor Conference.

2nd WCA Donor Conference (Lomé, Togo, 2017)

6. The 2nd WCA Donor Conference initially scheduled for 10-14 October 2016 in Cotonou (Benin) was postponed and will take place in Lomé (Togo) from 29 May to 2 June 2017. All the recommendations arising from the 1st Donor Conference and directed at the WCO Secretariat have been met. The latest initiative relates to cooperation with UNCTAD on the future of ASYCUDA. To that end, a regional workshop was organized jointly by the WCO, UNCTAD and the Togolese Revenue Authority (OTR) on 29 and 30 November 2016 in Lomé, Togo. The conclusions and recommendations of that workshop, attended by over 50 WCA Customs managers, ICT managers, ECOWAS and Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) representatives and some Customs partners were as follows:

I. For UNCTAD

- Further promote the use of existing fora, i.e. functional, technical, dedicated such as the ASYPM forum.
- Develop integrated archiving solutions to ensure the sustainability of systems performance in production.
- Evaluate the feasibility of loading integrated tariff data provided by the WCO in ASYCUDA.
- Continue to improve the technical and functional documentation of ASYCUDA modules.
- Continue the development and deployment of the module for co-loading (manifest) in the standard ASYCUDA version.
- Further develop ASYCUDA software to become an exclusively open source solution.
- Encourage the bringing together of Strategy Object and the user countries (training, representation).
- Establish a system to monitor system operation and database audit.
- Proceed with an integration of mobile tools, tablets, telephones, and similar future devices.

In order to take these recommendations forward, the WCO Secretariat sent a letter to UNCTAD in February 2017 informing it of its readiness to work closely with that Organization in this domain, as part of a joint action plan to meet the region's expectations.

II. For the countries, UNCTAD and ECOWAS/CEMAC

- Prioritize the development of the transit modules needed to implement the regional interconnection projects, namely ALISA/PACIR.
- Establish an ASYCUDA regional centre for the WCA region (training, assistance, functional evolutions, etc.).
- Increase the involvement of Customs administrations in the programming and prioritization of developments related to ASYCUDA.

III. For the countries and UNCTAD

- Require the supply of specifications that will provide the basis for developments related to ASYCUDA (use of the IEEE 29148 standard).

IV. For the WCO

- Encourage the organization of meetings and workshops for user countries and UNCTAD.

Recommendations by the 7th Meeting of WCA Contact Points

7. The 7th Annual Meeting of Capacity Building Contact Points and Customs Reform Managers for the WCA region was held in Bamako (Mali) from 24 to 28 October 2016.

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 24 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 some 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.

- 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 region 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.

- Pursue initiatives to extend the WACAM Project to the entire WCA region:

See the reaction to the same recommendation arising from the 21st Conference of DGs (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire 2016)-page 5 above.

- Carry out a 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:

The WCO has acknowledged and showcased the importance of cooperation between Customs and Tax authorities by issuing Guidelines for strengthening cooperation and exchange of information between Customs and Tax authorities. Customs-Tax cooperation was also the focus of discussions at the June and December 2016 Policy Commission sessions and in other WCO Committees and meetings dealing with this topic.

At the 8th Session of the Capacity Building Committee (CBC) in March 2017, the WCO Secretariat gave a presentation to participants on WCO initiatives to contribute to cooperation and exchange of information between Customs and Tax authorities. Doc. HC0104, prepared for that session, reports on developments and progress to date with ongoing work on the issue of Customs-Tax cooperation, including discussions held with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the importance of having Customs administrations with adequate resources. This document also aims to seek the support of the CBC and Members for future work in this field. Interested Members are invited to take part in these initiatives. Specific activities could be held in the WCA region, as required.

- Coordinate 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.

- 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 8th Session of the CBC provided pointers for active involvement by the regional structures in this process.

Overall situation

8. Although eradication of the Ebola epidemic began in 2015, enabling the WCO to resume its capacity building activities in the countries affected by the epidemic, the same is not true of the socio-political crises and attacks by terrorist groups which continue to pose major challenges to development, including the implementation of Customs reforms, in the majority of the region's countries. Security and revenue collection remain the priority objectives of WCA Customs, even though trade facilitation boosted by the WTO TFA is also a topical issue. For WCA oil-producing

countries, the drop in the price of that resource is increasing government-driven revenue-collection pressure on Customs.

Activities in the WCA region

9. The following **regular and recurring** meetings of the WCA region were held: the 2016 Conference of WCA DGs of Customs (Abidjan), the biannual Meeting of the Committee of Experts for the WCA region (Abidjan and Conakry), and the 2016 WCA Contact Point Meeting (Bamako).

The 2016 Meeting of Human Resource and Training Managers and the 2016 Meeting of the Regional Working Group (RWG) on IT Development have not yet taken place.

The second **Donor Conference** was scheduled to be held in Benin in 2016 but was postponed and will be held in Lomé (Togo) from 29 May to 2 June 2017. It will be combined with a regional workshop making it possible to monitor 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. Preparations are under way to organize these events under optimum conditions.

10. 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.
11. 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 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 HR (draft Regional Training Strategy) and interconnection (financing of the training, the WCO Data Model and the GFEC tools).
- Funded the Columbus Phase III 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 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, COPES training, multi-agency operation) and trade facilitation.
- Evaluated Ghana's progress with the Stakeholder Engagement reform launched in 2014.

Administrations seeking specific support in the area of Strategic Management, with a particular focus on the implementation and evaluation of a Strategic Plan, are invited to approach the WACAM project, if necessary, by submitting a request for support in this area.

In 2017, the WACAM project will continue to lend its support to the most committed administrations.

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

For the past three years, eight-day LMD workshops have been incorporated in all the Fellowship Programmes, which a number of WCA Customs officers also benefit from.

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.

13. 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 and to drawing up a schedule for the development and implementation of the solution. 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 two structures are currently in the process of formalizing their cooperation.

In the course of 2016, the following activities 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 the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) also participated.
- The Data Model Project Team met in Brussels from 12 to 16 September 2016. Technicians from the Customs authorities 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, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (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.

- ECOWAS and UNCTAD are in the process of formalizing their cooperation to develop the transit/interconnection module by improving the features of the ASYCUDA system with a view to boosting inter-regional transit.
- A Global Transit Conference is scheduled to take place in Brussels just after the Council Sessions, in July 2017, and will provide an opportunity to discuss interconnection in greater depth.

14. The **WCO-INAMA project** 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 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, Democratic Republic of the Congo (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.

A number of activities are scheduled for the coming months:

- Workshop (in a country yet to be designated) on operations planning, with participation by the said countries.
- Delivery of intelligence support by experts, to designated Customs administrations.

- International exercises as follow-up to training on operations planning.
- Diagnostic studies on the capacities of Customs administrations from West African countries to apply the CITES Convention. These studies will be based on a self-assessment conducted using the tool for evaluating institutional capacity to implement the CITES Convention (Institutional Assessment Tool).

15. **Operation WESTERLIES 4**, initiated and financed by Japan, took place from 18 to 27 May 2016 with the support of the Operational Coordination Unit (OCU) made up of six countries, including DRC and Gambia from the WCA region, in addition to the RILOs (Western Africa and Central Africa). Moreover, 16 of the 97 Member countries that took part in this joint operation were from the WCA region. The operation focused on drug trafficking by air passengers, with particular reference to the use of API and/or PNR for passenger profiling.

To prepare for this operation, two workshops were held, respectively, in Dakar (Senegal) from 11 to 15 April 2016 and in Brasilia (Brazil) from 25 to 29 April 2016.

There were 140 interceptions, totalling 3,000 kg of drugs, five rifles and 600 bullets, plus over 96 kg of cigarettes, among other seizures. The operation provided valuable experience in terms of the use of API/PNR for profiling and the sharing of ideas regarding data systems, in particular by Japan, Brazil and Africa.

16. The third instalment of the operation focusing on surveillance of non-commercial civil aviation, codenamed **African Wings III**, took place from 7 to 14 June 2016. In addition, a regional professional training workshop was organized in Dakar from 24 to 26 May 2016. This event, held as preparation for the operational phase, was attended by officials from the Police, Customs and Gendarmerie of 18 African countries, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Rep. of), Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo. This operation resulted in the seizure of three non-compliant aircraft, 3,441.42 kg of products (including 3,345 kg of food products) and 96.42 kg of drugs (including amphetamine (60.58 kg) and methamphetamine (25 kg)).

It is worth recalling that the African Wings operations are an initiative of the French Customs Administration, in collaboration with the WCO, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Senegalese Customs Administration, with financial support from the French State's Interministerial Mission for Combating Drugs and Addictive Behaviours (MILDECA).

17. The fourth **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, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, 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 Nigeria, Benin, Kenya and Togo.

Since 2012, the four large-scale operations conducted in the major African sea ports (ViceGrips 2, Biyela 1, Biyela 2 and ACIM) have led to the interception of nearly 869 million counterfeit or illicit medicines, with an estimated value of over 400 million euro. All these potentially dangerous medicines have been withdrawn from the market instead of being sold to people in Africa.

18. The first operation to combat pharmaceutical crime in WCA, called **CRIPHARM**, 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 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.

19. In 2016, the **UNODC-WCO Global Container Control Programme**, developed and implemented in partnership between the WCO and the 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). Activities under this Programme are planned for other countries in the WCA region, for 2017.
20. The **CLiKC! (Customs Learning and Knowledge Community) platform** has been updated to facilitate the work of national coordinators. It now has more than 23,000 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. Courses on the Single Window and Rules of Origin are currently under development.

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.

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

21. In 2016, the WCO held the 3rd and 4th 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 CLiK! platform.

The 3rd Session of the VCOA was held from 11 April to 15 July 2016. Thirty-seven representatives from various Member Customs administrations took part in this session, including three from the WCA region, belonging to the Cameroon, Gambian and Nigerian Customs Administrations. Twenty-nine candidates, including those from Cameroon and Nigeria, successfully completed the training, focused on advancing their knowledge and developing their career path, and were awarded their certificate of merit.

The 4th Session of the VCOA was held from 5 September to 9 December 2016. It brought together 38 English-speaking participants, including four from the WCA region (1 from Nigeria, 2 from Gabon and 1 from Liberia). The candidates from Nigeria and Gabon successfully completed this training.

The 5th Session of the VCOA is being prepared and will entail participation by several Customs officers from the WCA region and, for the first time, two tutors from the region as well.

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

22. In 2015, 2016 and early 2017, the annual **Fellowship Programme** organized by the WCO saw participation by Fellows from some WCA region countries, namely:
- 65th Session (French-speaking) - 5 WCA beneficiaries out of 14 participants worldwide. They were Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Senegal and Togo.
 - 67th Session (English-speaking) - 2 WCA beneficiaries out of 17 participants worldwide. They were Liberia and Ghana.
 - 68th Session (French-speaking) - 7 WCA participants: 1 from Burkina Faso, 1 from Cameroon, 1 from Togo, 1 from DRC, 1 from Côte d'Ivoire and 2 from Central African Republic.
 - 70th Session (English-speaking) - 1 WCA participant from Ghana.
 - 71st Session (French-speaking) - 7 WCA participants out of 15 worldwide, from Benin, Cameroon, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo.
23. **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 the WCA region (Benin, Guinea and Senegal).

24. In 2016, the WCO organized **accreditation workshops**, attended by WCA region Customs experts, in the areas of Transit, the Revenue Package (Phase 2), RKC, Customs modernization and the TFA.

- The workshop focusing on the Revenue Package – Phase 2, held in Ghana from 23 to 27 November 2015, brought together English-speaking experts. Fifteen officials from 12 countries in two regions (WCA and East and Southern Africa (ESA)) took part in this workshop, and seven participants successfully completed the first stage of accreditation, including one Ghanaian and one Cameroonian.
- 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 and the WCO was able to pre-accredit 15 candidates, including 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 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), Togo (1), Madagascar (1), Mali (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.
- Two (2) experts hailing respectively from Mali and Burkina Faso completed their accreditation process following their participation in missions, specifically in the Central African Republic for the former (diagnostic and strategic planning mission) and in Gabon for the latter (progress evaluation mission: Columbus Phase 3). These two 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 carefully 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 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 RKC experts was held in Brussels from 12 to 16 September 2016. It brought together participants from various WCO regions. In all, seven participants were pre-accredited, including one from Gabon.
- From 15 to 19 May 2017, an accreditation workshop on post-clearance audit (PCA) will be held for French-speaking experts at the WCO Secretariat. Candidates from WCA region countries will be invited to take part.

25. **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>

26. Interest in the **Columbus Programme**, offering assistance across three Phases (1 = diagnostic; 2 = planning and implementation; and 3 = evaluation of the reform), was relatively low. The only missions conducted during the period under consideration were the following:

- Ghana and Burkina Faso - Phase 2 mission (2016)
- Togo - Phase 3 mission (2016)
- Gabon - Phase 3 mission (2016)
- Central African Republic - Diagnostic and strategic planning mission (January 2017)

A Phase 3 mission to Cameroon is under preparation (May 2017).

Pre-shipment inspection/Destination inspection

27. 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 new five-year contract with a private-sector company to support the organization with 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.

Other requests for similar support have been received from Burkina Faso, Gabon, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and are currently being examined or actioned.

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

28. 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 countries in the WCA region, regularly pay visits to WCO Headquarters. The most recent visits of this kind took place on 16/17 November 2016 and 4/5 April 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

29. The following accessions by WCA countries to the main WCO Conventions have been recorded since 2016:

- **HS:** No further accessions since January 2016
- **RKC:** Benin (5 January 2017)

WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)

30. Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo are the only countries in the region to have ratified the **WTO TFA** to date.

Bearing in mind that the TFA covers a wide range of topics, the majority of WCO activities can be carried out within this framework. The most important activities for the WCA region include the following:

- National workshops were held in Togo and in Ghana to support these countries with the establishment and operationalization of their National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF).
- A regional workshop on PCA, in which 17 officials from the WCA region participated, was held in Yaoundé (Cameroon) in January 2017. This workshop provided an opportunity to raise participants' awareness of related WCO standards and tools and to develop a more harmonized understanding of this concept, especially by differentiating PCA from Customs investigations and deferred controls.
- A regional workshop on risk management was held in Abuja in February 2017. Some twenty officials from the region took part. This workshop was an opportunity to begin the work on developing a holistic risk management strategy based on the potential risks facing the WCA region.

To prepare its Members for implementation of the TFA, the WCO is organizing a second workshop for officials from WCA countries, in Lomé (Togo) from 29 to 31 May 2017. This follows 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 will be attended by representatives of these countries' Ministries of Trade, representatives of regional economic communities and representatives of other government structures and the private sector.

31. In 2015, the WCO concluded a partnership with the United Kingdom's HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and UNCTAD to support 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 targeted capacity building support to selected 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** has developed a made-to-measure plan to implement the Mercator Programme for Sierra Leone. Following this plan, a number of activities were carried out in 2016, including a strategic planning workshop (September 2016), a diagnostic study on valuation, classification and controls on origin - Revenue Package (September 2016), and a TRS (October 2016). To ensure proper coordination with other development partners operating in this country, this multi-component and multi-year programme is supported by a Mercator Programme Advisor and has forged cooperation with other stakeholders such as the World Bank and Adam Smith International.

In Ghana and Liberia, the HMRC-WCO-UNCTAD Programme focuses its support on the NCTFs. In Ghana, the WCO and UNCTAD jointly held three workshops in 2016 to support the NCTF. Further workshops are planned to round out the assistance provided to these countries by other development partners.

Conclusions

32. 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. These activities will be followed by other events to support this initiative.
 - 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 many WCA countries have not yet ratified this Agreement.

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. The WCO Secretariat's Activity Report reveals that overall, the Secretariat's operations had a positive impact on the capacity of WCA Customs administrations, in particular regarding certain priority themes for these administrations, such as the Revenue Package (HS, Valuation, Origin), Trade Facilitation, HRM 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.
- E. The support of the WACAM project enables beneficiary administrations to greatly enhance HRM. However, frequent changes of leaders of Customs administrations and shortcomings in recruitment, training and staff turnover remain major obstacles for many WCA Customs to sustainable reform and modernization.

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 a competency-based approach.

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.

- F. 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.

- G. 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.

- H. 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 Mauritania, Nigeria, Ghana and DRC 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 Sierra Leone and Liberia.
- I. 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.
- J. The region now 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).
- K. It was not/is not possible to conduct missions in certain countries, in some cases for security reasons and in others because of the inactive status of certain Members in the WCA region.
- L. Many development partners have pledged to support Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone to revitalize their reform process after the Ebola crisis. Thanks to this support and the 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.
- M. 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.
- N. 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.
- O. 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 (on subjects such as Transit, HS, Mercator Programme, PCA and Customs Valuation) and will still continue in the near future. 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.

WCA capacity building activities

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

Regional workshops		Previous period	Current period
	Regional	14	8
	Sub-regional/several Members	12	16
	Accreditation	3	5
	Total	29	29
National workshops			
	Benin	1	2
	Burkina Faso	1	4
	Cameroon	4	2
	Cape Verde	1	2
	Central African Republic	0	1
	Chad	1	0
	Congo (Republic of the)	0	1
	Côte d'Ivoire	0	0
	DRC	5	3
	Gabon	1	2
	Gambia	2	2
	Ghana	3	6
	Guinea	2	3
	Guinea-Bissau	0	0
	Liberia	5	6
	Mali	1	2
	Mauritania	0	0
	Niger	0	0
	Nigeria	2	2
	Sao Tome and Principe	0	0
	Senegal	3	3
	Sierra Leone	3	6
	Togo	6	4
	Total	41	51
GRAND TOTAL		70	80

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***