

ESA Newsletter

OCTOBER - DECEMBER
2022

CUSTOMS DIGITIZATION FORUM



3rd & 4th November 2022



Kigali, Rwanda



East and Southern Africa
Region

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Editorial

Hello, Bonjour and Olá our dear readers. ‘The bee is more honored than other animals, not because she labors, but because she labors for others’. We are pleased to present to you our fourth and final issue of the ESA Newsletter for the year 2022. This issue highlights the events of our third quarter with informative Customs stories and insights from our esteemed ESA Members, development partners, and stakeholders. A highlight though is a new section: ROCB Insight, bringing forth from our staff team. Our Director introduced this section as part of our Learning and Development, aimed at encouraging creative thinking and expression of thoughts among our staff team. Check it out!

Did you know? Lesotho Revenue Authority rebranded to Revenue Services Lesotho! Meanwhile, following the signing of the MoU between the WCO ESA Region & ULTRA, we held our first webinar on ‘Bolstering Revenue and Public Safety through Digital Transformation, one, among other planned capacity building activities that will be made possible by this partnership. Herein too are articles on Botswana embracing automated data exchange with other territories, Zambia and Zimbabwe Capacity Development on smooth Customs operations at two OSBPs in Southern Africa, as well as KRA and UNEP launching of the Green Customs course curriculum. Malagasy Customs shares their modernization implementation as Namibia does their Advanced Rulings implementation. South Africa shares on their netting illicit cigarettes worth R6.7 million as Tanzania breaks down the challenges of Customs clearance of goods and their solutions in ESA and conflicting roles of Customs, Lake Tanganyika’s Karema port a gateway to the DRC, Burundi & Zambia. Uganda Revenue Authority is making trade work for small cross border women traders amidst the pandemic... among other enlightening articles.

Finally, we, in conjunction with the African Union Commission (AUC) and GIZ, take this opportunity to invite you to the upcoming Customs Digitization Forum under the theme: “Accelerating Digitalization in Customs to boost intra- African trade” which is scheduled to take place on the 3rd & 4th November 2022, hosted by the Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA) in Kigali, Rwanda.

The conference will focus on enhancing Customs performance and increasing efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of Customs’ mandate as well as boosting Intra-African trade through the use of Information Technology. You are invited to register here <https://www.wcoesarocb.org/first-esa-ict-conference/> and join us in the Land of a Thousand Hills.

With our next issue coming out, hopefully, in January 2023, I take this earliest opportunity, on behalf of our Director Larry Liza, and the team at the regional office to wish you a Merry Christmas 2022 and a upcoming glorious holiday season.

Happy reading.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Botswana Unified Revenue Service
Kenya Revenue Authority
Madagascar Revenue Authority
Mozambique Revenue Authority
Namibia Revenue Agency
Revenue Service Lesotho
South Africa Revenue Service
Tanzania Revenue Authority
Uganda Revenue Authority
Zimbabwe Revenue Authority
Japan International Cooperation Agency
Ultra Information Solutions
World Customs Organization
World Customs Organization, East and Southern Africa,
Regional Private Sector Group

EDITORIAL

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Faith Mosongo – Programme Officer and Editor
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Faith Mosongo
PROGRAMME OFFICER

LRA Rebrands to Revenue Services Lesotho...1/2

A groundbreaking milestone was witnessed as the Lesotho Revenue Authority (LRA) changed its corporate brand identity, which entails, a change in the corporate name, corporate logo, corporate colours and tagline. Lesotho's Tax Administration is now known as Revenue Services Lesotho (RSL), moving from Authority to a Service. The ceremony to launch a totally new brand strategy was held at Avani Maseru Hotel, on Tuesday 30th August 2022.

This change in brand identity came as a result of the implementation of the 2018-23 Corporate Strategy known as "REA AHA" (We are Building), which dictates a major shift from the historic bureaucracy, to being a modern service focused agency.

The essence of why the then LRA had to rebrand is better captured by the Commissioner General, Mr. Thabo Khasipe. In his presentation, Mr. Khasipe explained that the rebranding was underpinned by the strategic objective to increase the organization's brand reputation index. "We are deliberate and committed to forging mutually beneficial relationships amongst ourselves and with strategic external partners, anchored on trust, whilst building our brand to be recognized and respected," he said.

He also emphasized that part one of the strategy (Rea Aha 1.0) focused more on building a service culture through collaborative leadership, while part two of the strategy (Rea Aha 2.0) is more towards building automatic compliance by harnessing strategic partnerships and developing business acumen.

The RSL Board Chairperson, Mr. Robert Likhanga said against the gloomy picture of the LRA of old characterized by an approach of heavy enforcement meted on the tax paying community they consolidated the lessons learnt from interactions with partners, Clients and Stakeholders and formulated a new strategy that would enable them to make a fresh start and set out on a right footing.

He added that interactions with key stakeholders enabled the organization to develop a strategy which among others targeted to change the way revenue was raised by focusing on the following:

- Lifting the capacities of the revenue administration entities to ensure that revenue is raised in an economically efficient way that reduces the costs of collection and eases compliance burden for individuals and businesses.



LRA Rebrands to Revenue Services Lesotho ...2/2

- Enhancing service delivery, deepening tax education and engagement, and access to information to ensure that we are all on one path.

- Leveraging available data and collaborating with partners to obtain and exchange information for revenue purposes. Broadening the spectrum of the tax net from which we have to collect the required taxes.

He said at its core the essence of the new brand was the transformative experience that organization provide to the Clients. "The two key words, "Rea Aha", are the central theme of our new brand. They capture the spirit of transformational growth and excellence of service while we are at it. On a deeper level, a more meaningful level, these two words –Rea Aha – they communicate the life changing impact we have on our Clients as they encounter our services daily," he said explaining the new tagline. In his remarks, the Right Honourable the Prime Minister Dr. Moeketsi Majoro said when the Government signed off on the proposal to allow this change, they foresaw an organization that could bring stability to Lesotho's tax framework.

"This stability will be critical for businesses and for revenue collection resources as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and other economic crippling global challenges," he said. He said the new brand identity underscore and highlight the role of revenue as an enabler to the Government's transformation agenda adding that over the years the LRA – now RSL demonstrated its capacity to serve as a key pillar in supporting Lesotho's development agenda through effective revenue mobilization.

"This achievement has been earned through consistent focus on reforms geared towards modernizing revenue administration processes, and re-vamping the administration's identity gives this process a new momentum," he added.

He further said with brand evolution they expect to see to see a new tax administration that continues to support collaboration in domestic resource mobilization; facilitates healthy but appropriate and acceptable tax collection aligned to best practices and principles and that ultimately yields an outcome beneficial and significant towards economic growth and development.

The ceremony to launch the new brand identity was graced by the presence of the Right Honourable the Prime Minister, Dr Moeketsi Majoro and the First Lady Mrs 'Mammusa 'Masekoalane Majoro, Cabinet Ministers including the Honourable Minister of Finance Mr. Thabo Sophonea, senior government officials, private and the corporate sector.



Bolstering Revenue and Public Safety Through Digital Transformation Workshop...1/2

The workshop on “Bolstering Revenue and Public Safety through Digital Transformation” was held virtually on 22nd September 2022. It was co-organized by the WCO ESA Regional Office for Capacity Building, in conjunction with Publican by Ultra. The Workshop was attended by more than 70 participants from across the world and was moderated by WCO ESA ROCB, Programme Officer, Ms. Faith Mosongo. Participants included senior technical and administrative officials from various member Customs administrations, WCO Regional Training Centres (RTCs), the private sector, and other cooperating partners. It was also graced by the presence of the WCO ESA Vice Chair, Mr. Batsirai Chadzingwa, Zimbabwe; Mr. Rudy Kirzhner, Vice President, Trade and Customs, Publican by Ultra; Customs Commissioners and Directors General; and the WCO ESA ROCB Director, Mr. Larry Liza.

In his opening remarks, the WCO ESA ROCB Director, Mr. Larry Liza, emphasized the importance of Customs – Business collaborations and highlighted the cooperation between Ultra Information Solutions Ltd and the WCO ESA ROCB. He further highlighted the crucial role played by research, risk profiling and successful AEO implementation in strengthening revenue collection and public safety through digital transformation. He recognized and thanked the panelists that presented on the various topics including, Innovative digitalization driving increased revenue and public safety - Rudy Kirzhner, Vice President, of Trade and Customs (Publican) for Ultra Information Solutions; The effects of Under Valuation in relation to Bolstering Revenue and Public Safety through Digital Transformation - James Ndege, Chief Manager-Business Intelligence & Analysis, Kenya Revenue Authority. The effects of Illicit Trade in relation to Bolstering Revenue and Public Safety through Digital Transformation - Cornelius Kakwesa, Deputy Commissioner for Customs Business Support, Malawi Revenue Authority; and Public Safety - Bolstering Revenue and Public Safety through Digital Transformation - Nundiswar Bhugwant, Section Head at the Mauritius Revenue Authority.

It was noted that illicit trade lowers revenue because not all import Taxes and Value Added Tax and Excise due to the government are paid in full, depriving the government of the much needed revenue for national development. Secondly, illicit imports circumvent efforts of the government to protect local industries, especially in developing countries that are still in infancy. Erosion of productive capacity in the country, Job losses, particularly in the manufacturing sector, exposing consumers to unregulated products often manufactured in unsanitary conditions, lowering company profits, unfair competition with legitimate traders, disincentivizing innovation by companies and undermining government’s efforts to curb corruption are some of the negative effects of illicit trade.

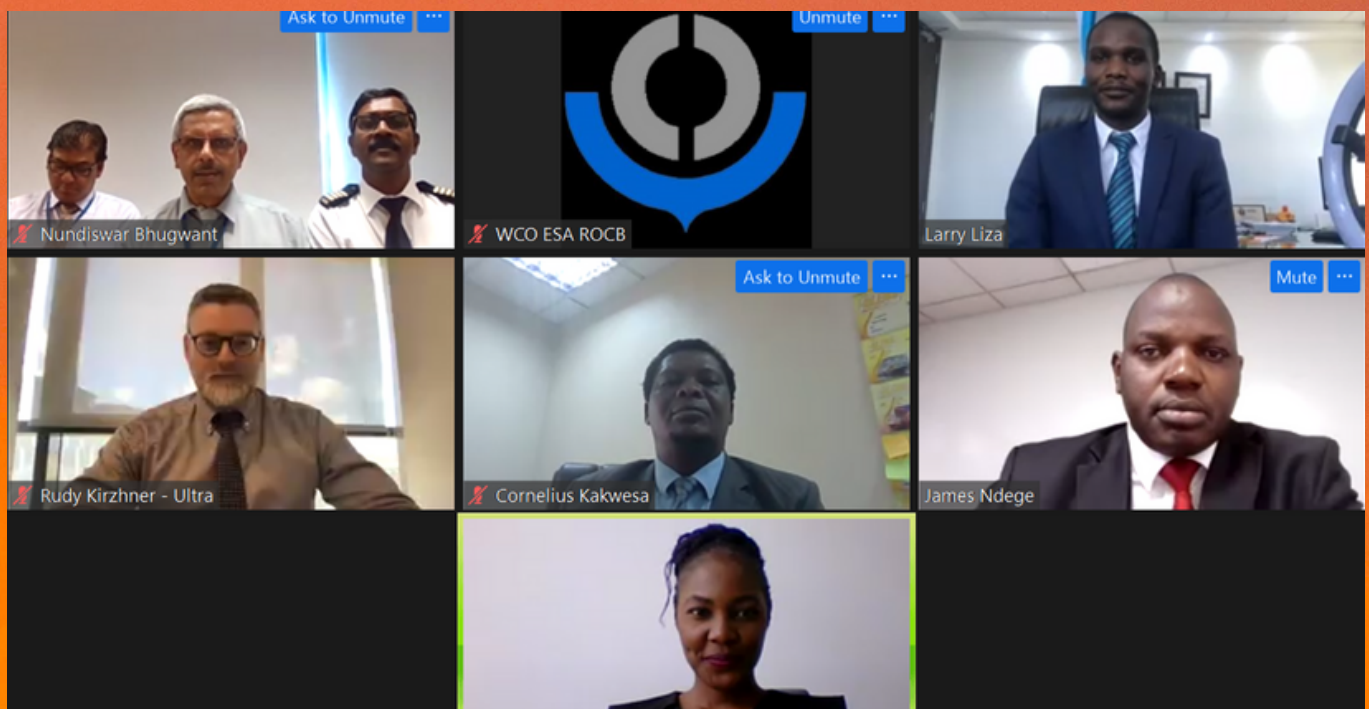
It was also noted that in June 2020, a review of Customs Valuation process with specific focus on information relating to Importers and Clearing & Forwarding Agents revealed that Chapters 85, 87, 94, 40, and 84 ranked among the top ten chapters with additional assessments, with undervaluation risk constituting 44.8% of all the uplifts. The Importers of goods under Chapters 85, 40, 87, and 84 accounted for the highest risk of undervaluation at 35.8%, 22.2%, 18.2% and 12.7% respectively.

It was agreed that with an up to date digitalization and cargo tracking it is easy to trace where the goods were diverted to. In this case, an electronic seal and updated tracking devices could have complimented the information sharing platform.

The participants appreciated some of the emerging technologies recommended by the WCO to enhance customs control include Blockchain and Distributed Ledger Technology, Internet of Things, and big data, data analytics, AI and machine learning.

Bolstering Revenue and Public Safety Through Digital Transformation Workshop...2/2

Whilst these emerging technologies can bring numerous benefits to Customs in terms of expedited clearance, better risk management, greater efficiency, etc., there can also be several challenges in making their use a reality due to high implementation costs, legal constraints, lack of expertise and standard practice and data security and privacy issues, etc.



Webinar: Bolstering Revenue and Public Safety Through Digital Transformation Workshop



Namibia Implements Advance Rulings

Just over a year after its establishment, the Namibia Revenue Agency (NamRA) has implemented several customs modernization projects to improve efficiency.

One such crucial project is the Advance Rulings programme which was launched on 12 July 2022 at an occasion graced by the Secretary General of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) Dr. Kunio Mikuriya in Windhoek, Namibia.

Advance Rulings are trade facilitation tools for traders and Customs Officials aimed at enhancing the certainty and predictability of cross-border trade transactions.

The Programme was launched by NamRA Commissioner Sam SHIVUTE joined by Dr. Mikuriya, Executive Secretary of the Southern Africa Customs Organization Paulina Elago and Ambassador of the European Union delegation in Namibia Sinikka Antila.

Advance Rulings as widely known are important enablers for facilitating the seamless and timely movement of goods and reducing disputes during the clearance of goods, thus eliminating unnecessary delays at the border.

Namibia has launched three forms of advance rulings – an advance binding ruling on classification, valuation and origin.

At the launch event, NamRA's Commissioner SHIVUTE expressed confidence in providing the rulings within 30 days of request and called on all traders to ensure full compliance with their submissions for the rulings.

WCO Secretary General Dr. Mikuriya congratulated NamRA on providing enhanced transparency and predictability to the trading community, saying the initiative will reduce the time and cost of moving goods and enhance Namibia's competitiveness in national, regional and international markets.

The Programme is part of NamRA's obligation to fulfilling its international commitment contained in the World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).



NamRA Impresses WCO Secretary General

The Secretary General of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) Dr. Kunio Mikuriya expressed satisfaction with the pace at which Namibia is moving in terms of development, especially on trade facilitation and efficiency.

Dr. Mikuriya visited Namibia from 11 to 13 July 2022, at the invitation of the Namibia Revenue Agency (NamRA) Commissioner Sam SHIVUTE, being his second visit to the country.

He first visited the Southern African country in October 2012 where he met Customs Management then under the Ministry of Finance and political leaders to discuss Customs modernization and its contribution to economic development.

Speaking during the launch of Advance Ruling Programme in Windhoek on 12 July 2022, the Secretary General indicated that ten years down the line, he was impressed not only by the infrastructure development in the country but also by the creation of institutions such as NamRA.

“When I met the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Minister of Industrialisation and Trade, they all recognized how important is to build institutional and the vision to make Namibia a vibrant country and a regional hub for transport and trade”, he said.

Dr Mikuriya further appreciated Namibia’s vision to be connected to the world as a commendable effort as was in line with the vision of the WCO of ensuring connectivity through their motto “Borders divide, Customs connects”.

Namibia is one of the best beef producers on the African continent and the beef industry contributes 3.5 percent to the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The Secretary General also visited an informal market in Namibia’s capital city Windhoek for what is popularly known as “Kapana”, where raw meat is grilled on an open fire and sold in small pieces.

The public from all walks of life including tourists come and enjoy the meat.

“I fully enjoyed my stay because I could see the life of both Namibian people and its wildlife”, he told stakeholders as he narrated his experience at Kapana and the wildlife conservation camp where he was taken to before his official programme.



Data Exchange

Background

Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS) has also been actively aligning to the 2022 WCO theme “Scale up Customs Digital Transformation by Embracing a Data Culture and Building a Data Ecosystem” by embracing automated data exchange with other territories.

To date, BURS has connected with South African Revenue Service (SARS) in August 2020 and Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) in January 2022 for automated data exchange of information relating to the movement of goods between customs territories.

Botswana – South Africa Data Exchange

The exchange of data is guided by the SACU “Your export is my entry” utility block.

In exchanging data, a unique consignment reference (UCR) is used for direct imports and exports and follows the agreed SACU UCR format.

The UCR is used to match import transactions against exports of the other territory and it is essential for trade data reconciliation and risk management.

Botswana – Zambia Data Exchange

Botswana went live on 27th of February 2022 whilst Zambia went live on 13th of June 2022. The exchange is enabled by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and utilises a UCR format that is aligned to the SACU format. Furthermore, the data exchange allows for pre-population for agreed data fields, a tremendous step forward in facilitating trade.

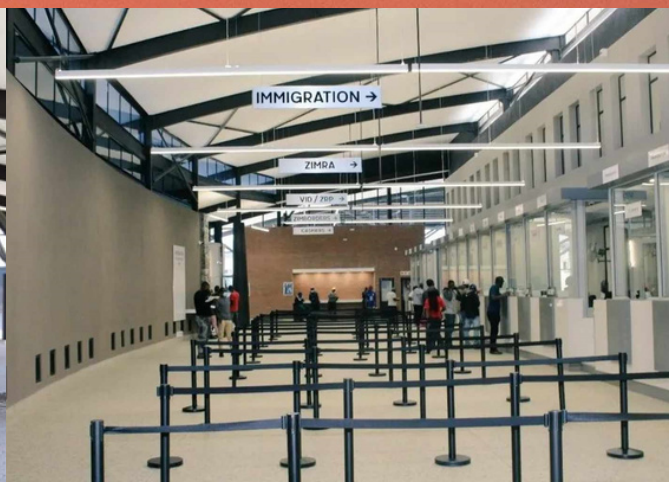
BURS and ZRA successfully mapped their declaration data sets using the WCO data model to ensure interoperability for reporting requirements and enable smooth automated exchange of information. A lot of harmonization was employed to ensure consistencies where differences were experienced.

Future Endeavours

Botswana seeks to leverage on SACU regional agreement on data exchange that was signed in 2021 for connecting with more SACU countries. Botswana will further explore data exchange for transit purposes.



Beitbridge Border Post Modernization: Boost to Trade Facilitation and Development



New Look Beitbridge Border Post (Pictures Courtesy Of The Herald, Zimbabwe)

Trade facilitation does not only revolve around the simplification of customs processes and procedures. It also involves reforming and modernizing border infrastructure to complement the processes and procedures. Identifying bottlenecks imposed by weaknesses in trade logistics that prevent the timely and cost effective movement of goods through targeted development interventions is a major element of trade facilitation. Such targeted interventions complemented by streamlining documentary requirements, elimination of unnecessary bureaucracy and cumbersome procedures and other NTBs play a significant role in improving the performance of trade supply chains.

In order to ensure efficient regional and international trade, Zimbabwe is modernizing the Beitbridge Border Post which is the busiest port of entry into Zimbabwe. The Border, on the North South Corridor, is the busiest regional transit link in Southern and Eastern Africa. It connects South Africa and Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Malawi and Tanzania. Studies reveal that the border crossing handles an average of 470 trucks per day and about 800 passenger vehicles per day going to and from the South African ports and, to a lesser extent, Maputo, and countries to the north such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, DR Congo and Malawi.

In some instances, Beitbridge has been used as a land route to the north, into Tanzania and even into Sudan, in preference to the sea route. As such Beitbridge Border Post plays a vital role in regional and international trade and its modernization is a game-changer in global trade.

The Beitbridge modernization project entails the construction and upgrading of terminal buildings, ICT, surveillance technology, office space, truck and baggage scanners among others. Numerous benefits will be derived from the new-look border spanning from a reduction in time taken to undertake border processes, ease of movement of people, ease of doing business, decongestion, boosting tourism and investment among others. In order to achieve the much anticipated benefits, there is however need to complement the modernization of the border with streamlining documentary and regulatory requirements through coordinated border management.



**By Sendra Chihaka,
Zimbabwe Revenue Authority**

KRA and UNEP Launch Green Customs Course Curriculum...1/2



Dr. Mugambi Mwirigi, Commissioner KESRA and Ms. Lilian, Nyawanda Commissioner – Customs & Border Control (KRA) launch the Green Customs Course Curriculum.

**By: Loice Akello,
International Relations & Diplomacy Division,
Kenya Revenue Authority**

On 2nd August 2022, Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) through the Kenya School of Revenue Administration (KESRA) launched the Green Customs Curriculum becoming the first World Customs Organization (WCO) accredited Regional Training Centre (RTC) to offer the course. The course was developed in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as the Secretariat of the Green Customs Initiative (GCI).

The Green Customs Initiative was launched by UNEP in 2004. The Initiative aims to prevent the illegal trade in environmentally sensitive commodities and substances considered to cause inherent hazardous effects to human health or ecosystem, and to facilitate the legal trade. The objective of the Initiative is to enhance the capacity of Customs and other relevant border control officers to monitor and facilitate legal trade and to detect and prevent illegal trade in environmentally sensitive commodities covered by the relevant conventions and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

The collaboration between KESRA and UNEP sought to develop a model Green Customs Curriculum for Kenya to raise awareness among Customs officers and border enforcement agencies on their role in the control of movement of environmentally sensitive commodities (ESCs). The course will cover sessions on relevant trade-related MEAs, the role of Customs Officers in preventing illegal trade of ESCs, health and safety protocols, among others.

The curriculum was informed by the findings and recommendations of a Training Needs Assessment Survey administered by KESRA and UNEP in 2020. Consultations were held with key trade, health and environmental regulatory bodies. The survey established that there is need to enhance the existing curriculum to adequately provide for comprehensive training of Kenyan Customs officers on the control of environmentally sensitive commodities.

KRA and UNEP Launch Green Customs Course Curriculum...2/2

The curriculum was launched by Commissioner KESRA, Dr. Mugambi Mwirigi, Commissioner, Customs & Border Control (KRA), Ms. Lilian Nyawanda and UNEP's representative, Ms. Jackline Wanjia. The course will commence with Customs and Border Control officers in Kenya and the East African Region. It is envisaged that upon successful implementation, KESRA will open the course to other countries and organizations. There's need to strengthen the capacity of Customs across borders to combat illegal cross-border trade.



**Kenya School
of Revenue
Administration**



Finding a Balancing Practice Between the Conflicting Roles of Customs

Introduction

All over the World, Customs administrations are duty-bound to two main roles which are; Customs control and Trade facilitation. The roles conflict with each other.

In most developing countries, Customs control is associated with; the collection of Customs duties/taxes, Protection of the society from hazardous consumptions (e.g. Cigarettes, Alcohol, etc.), Prevention of the trade of Narcotics, prevention of the trade of human trafficking, protection of young industries from competing with quality imports, and enhancement of national and international security.

On the other hand, Trade facilitation has something to do with; the saving of time and costs of doing business for cross-border traders, and the provision of trade statistics (import and export data) to the Governments.

Problem statement:

Despite of the above facts, most Customs administrations of developing countries had been putting much emphasis on the control role and decline the role of trade facilitation. Perhaps, this has been attributed to some factors such as; many dependencies on the collection of Customs duties for financing their national budgets, there has been a low level of compliance or unscrupulous traders in the cross-border trade and a low level of technology to employ in Customs interventions, to mention a few.

In fact, in a dynamic World of today, where there has been a considerable number of consignments and passengers across the borders, exercising 100% Customs check to each and every consignment or passenger, will cause 100% inefficiency of the other Customs role of trade facilitation.

Implementation advice:

Notwithstanding the above, we can yet reduce the friction between control and trade facilitation roles by simply finding a balancing practice between the two roles.

The best remedy to mitigate the aforesaid friction is to engage RISK MANAGEMENT in the selectivity of Customs intervention to apply to a particular type of declaration. All declarations have to be run through the Computerized Risk Management System for assigning the risk level associated with each import/export transaction and determining the applicable level of Customs intervention. These levels of risk and their applicable customs interventions in brackets are; high (Physical inspection), medium (x-ray scanning inspection), low (documentary check or/and cursory inspection).

This will take care of the time and costs of inspection at the border crossings, airports and ports, hence trade facilitation role will be achieved to some extent to reduce the friction.

In a nutshell, selecting an appropriate Customs intervention that corresponds to the level of risk assessed on a particular consignment will fast-track the Customs operations at the border crossings and hence, the balancing practice between control and trade facilitation will be achieved.

**By: Ernest Elias Myenda,
Customs Principal Officer,
Mtambaswala Border,
Mtwara, Tanzania.**

Challenges of Customs Clearance of Goods and their Solutions in ESA

Customs clearance is the act of taking goods through the Customs authority to facilitate their importation or exportation by following Customs procedures.

The following are some of the challenges and solutions to customs clearance of goods in less developing countries; Lack of knowledge; Most of the clearing agents, officers and clients lack Customs knowledge hence causing difficulty in completing Customs procedures on time. This may include wrong use of the H.S, hence the solution for this problem is to provide regular training on Customs to make them competent.

Poor network; In ESA, system failure during working hours is reported very frequently which as a result affects the working process and work not being done on time and leads to delays in the development of the nations. The solution for this is the government improving the network infrastructure so as to make the automated work easy and smooth flowing.

Subtleties of Packaging: Some of the clients repackaging goods from another country which makes the originality of a particular good lose its originality. To solve this, strict laws and penalties must be taken to ensuring proper packaging of cargoes.

Insufficient labor; When the personnel is not enough, this makes delays of the Customs work which may take a long time to be accomplished on time. To solve this, more workers should be employed in order to fasten Customs work.

The above are some of the challenges and solutions of Customs clearance which should be mitigated in order to make Customs work more easily.



Project for Capacity Development on Smooth Operation of OSBPs on the North-South Transport Corridor Supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

This Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) technical cooperation project has been implemented since December 2020 to improve customs operations at two OSBPs in Southern Africa: one at Kazungula, between Botswana and Zambia, and another at Chirundu, between Zambia and Zimbabwe. In July 2022 various activities were undertaken at these OSBPs.

First Joint Committee Meetings Held in a Bilateral Physical Format

For the first time since its commencement, the project supported several bilateral committee meetings in a physical format. Compared to the previous virtual meetings, the participants were able to exchange views more actively while they jointly reviewed the progress of project activity plans and made recommendations on ways forward.

On 19 July 2022, the third meeting of the Chirundu Joint Steering Committee was held in Lusaka, Zambia. This committee consists mainly of headquarters officials from the two countries, and a total of 20 committee members and other participants from Zambia and Zimbabwe attended. In addition, at both Kazungula and Chirundu, officials from the border agencies of the neighboring countries participated in the fourth quarterly meetings of the respective Joint Border Coordinating Committees.

First Procedures Manual Meetings in Kazungula and Chirundu

The first meetings were held in Kazungula and Chirundu to update OSBP Procedures Manuals. Over a few days, the project team shared proposed revisions of the procedures manuals, which border officials from customs and other government agencies actively discussed.

A total of 23 officials participated in Kazungula and 44 in Chirundu.

The OSBP Procedures Manuals will cover a wide range of areas including OSBP operations, clearance procedures, the duties of border officials, and business continuity planning. The Chirundu OSBP Procedures Manual has not been updated in over 10 years; while a draft of the Kazungula OSBP manual was prepared in 2019, it has not yet been finalized. Both of these manuals require restructuring and updating to reflect changes in response to COVID-19 and the need to streamline overlapping procedures between/among border agencies.

First Training Program for Border Officials at Kazungula

A three-day training course on OSBP principles and procedures was conducted for border officials at the Kazungula OSBP. The training was conducted jointly for Botswana and Zambia, with a total of 30 participants from the two countries. Various modes of training (e.g., lectures, group work) were used, ensuring active participation and effective learning.

This project will be carried out until March 2025. JICA is strongly committed to enhancing trade facilitation in Southern Africa through strengthening of the capacity of customs administrations and promoting OSBPs through this Project.



WCO ESA RPSG Situation Report – Q2 2022



The report, along with other resources on customs and trade-related issues in the region, is available on the RPSG's website.

In the last week, the Regional Private Sector Group (RPSG) published their 12th "COVID-19 Situation Report", which provides a brief overview of the state of trade for the 24 countries in the East and Southern Africa (ESA) region.

The report provided an update on (1) Africa's economic outlook for 2022, (2) COVID-19 vaccines and infections, (3) an impact on trade (including services, merchandise, ocean, air, and road), and also (4) economic recovery recommendations.

Growth for the African continent is predicted to stabilise at $\uparrow 4,7\%$ in East Africa and is projected to decelerate to $\uparrow 2,5\%$ in Southern Africa in 2022 due to diminished fiscal stimuli. Consequently, the outlook appears less than ideal, as Africa's low COVID-19 vaccination rollout, persistent sovereign debt vulnerabilities, high debt levels, and climate and environmental concerns remain the main threats to long-term growth prospects. In addition, disruptions to global trade and supply chains — primarily in agricultural, fertiliser, and energy sectors — following the Ukrainian war and the accompanying sanctions on trade with Russia have tilted the balance of risks to Africa's economic outlook to the downside.



WCO ESA RPSG Webinar – "AfCFTA" Uptake and Challenges

On Thursday, 25 August, the WCO ESA RPSG hosted their 14th webinar, "AfCFTA: Uptake and Challenges". The event was headlined by two distinguished speakers, Mohamed Ali, Director of Trade in Goods and Competition of the AfCFTA Secretariat, and Trudi Hartzenberg, Executive Director of the Trade Law Centre (tralac)

The webinar was attended by a total of 235 unique viewers, which shows interest in the subject.

During the event, several poll questions yielded fascinating results. Some highlights include that 45% believed that the AfCFTA would increase intra-African trade to between 20-30%, and 31% think that it will increase to 30-40%, compared to the current figure of 14%. Despite some optimism in the group, 24% of attendees said there is insufficient information on the AfCFTA. Lastly, on a more positive note, 84% of attendees believed that SMMEs would benefit from the AfCFTA, which is vital considering that the vast majority of trade in Africa is informal and takes place between small entities.

The webinar was recorded and is accessible on the RPSG's website and YouTube channel.



Modernization Programme

The Korean government supports the digitization of Malagasy Customs. The implementation of the Malagasy Customs modernization programme is accelerating. The Korean government formalized its support for the strategic plan of the General Directorate of Customs by agreeing to finance the implementation of three key projects. The two parties proceeded to the signature of the convention on the "Improvement of the Customs system in Madagascar" on 30th August 2022 at the Novotel Convention and Spa, Antananarivo.

This contribution from the Korean government will be implemented by the Korea Customs Service (KCS) and the total amount of Korean funding for these three projects is USD 5,163,000 for a period of four years. The first project will focus on the development of the modernization of the Electronic Customs Clearance System in Madagascar, the second on capacity building and operational support, and the last on the expansion of Information and Communication Technology in the Customs service.

"These are very specific projects on key sectors of the Customs Administration," explained Lainkana Zafivanona Ernest, Director General of Malagasy Customs, after the signing of the agreement. "In concrete terms, there will be capacity building at the technical and managerial levels, but also the acquisition of equipment for the digitalization and dematerialization of Customs procedures", the Director General continues. In the long term, the modernization of the Customs administration should further secure customs revenues and increase the competitiveness of the local private sector by reducing and facilitating customs clearance.

"We are proud to contribute to the establishment of a healthy and competitive economy in Madagascar and Korea will continue to support the initiatives of the Malagasy government in this direction," said the Ambassador of Korea to Madagascar, His Excellency Yong Ho Son. The signing of this agreement strengthens the bilateral cooperation between Korea and Madagascar, especially on new technologies to be applied to the Customs system.



One-Stop Border Post in Mozambique...1/2

For the Africa Union, One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) are fundamental to the implementation of the program of infrastructure development for Africa (PIDA) that aims to enhance the interconnectivity of markets as well as regional integration on the continent.

Mozambique is located in Southern Africa and shares its border with Eswatini, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It has a population of 31 million and a total surface of 489.192 square miles with 21.841 miles of land and 1535 miles of coastline. Mozambique is a member of SADC and party to the Trade Protocol that established the SADC Free Trade Area. Mozambique has already signed the AfCFTA and the process of its accession is underway.

The establishment of an OSBP between Mozambique and South Africa at Ressano Garcia/Lebombo border crossing has been based on the bilateral cooperation agenda established by the Maputo Corridor Logistic Initiative. Establishing OSBP's is also on the regional agenda of SADC and AfCFTA and is designed to boost the intra-regional market through improved connectivity.

Bilateral negotiations between Mozambique and South Africa on the establishment of OSBP at Ressano Garcia/Lebombo resulted in the signature of the bilateral agreement on 18 September 2007 thus setting up a bilateral legal framework.

Ressano Garcia/Lebombo Border Post is one of the busiest in Southern Africa with between 250 and 600 trucks and 3,000 and 4,000 light vehicles per day. This border is also a busy crossing for passengers with traffic estimated at 12.000 people per day but with peaks at over 120.000 persons per day (around Christmas and Easter). The movement of passengers was facilitated by the implementation in 2006 of visa-free travel by citizens of the two countries. NEPAD (2022)

Benefits of the OSBP

OSBP operations can reduce duplication of customs procedures, reduce logistics costs, simplify customs procedures, expedite procedures, ensure connectivity, improve border post efficiency, reduce the time spent at border posts, reduce travel time and costs and improve transport time and costs. For Customs, the OSBP can also enable advanced integrated risk management and information sharing and enhanced control over border crossing movements.

The ultimate objective of an OSBP is not to eliminate formalities or controls but to provide a shared environment to support more effective coordination. That means that the cross-border movement of international travel and trade stop only once in a particular dedicated environment in order to comply with the border formalities and controls of both countries

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Collaborative Operations Net Illicit Cigarettes Worth R6.7 Million in August...1/2

The Customs National Rapid Response Team (NRRT) in collaboration with other units in Customs Enforcement and the South African Police (SAPS) have detained thousands of illicit cigarettes worth more than R6,7 million in different operations over the past few weeks.

On 18 August 2022, the NRRT conducted a joint operation with the South African Police Crime Intelligence aimed at the prevention and detection of illicit trade in cigarettes and tobacco products in Rustenburg.

According to SARS, the crime intelligence information received led to a Customs Enforcement operation taking the form of "test buys" at a warehouse suspected of selling illicit cigarettes. The team found cigarettes being sold as low as R10 a packet thus providing reasonable doubt on tax compliance. Subsequently, the team conducted a Customs inspection and detained 329 master cases, each containing 50 cartons with 10 packets each, in different brands to the value of R4,7 million.

A few days later, on 22 August, the NRRT conducted a Customs Enforcement operation in Lephalale, following up on intelligence received from a whistle blower. The operation followed the same modus operandi of "test buying" at a specific trader suspected of selling illicit cigarettes. The team found cigarettes being sold as low as R9 for a packet of 20 cigarettes, or R90 for a carton consisting of 10 packets, thus providing reasonable suspicion of non-compliance.

The team consequently conducted a Customs inspection and detained 25 master cases each containing 50 cartons with 10 packets each, of different brands to the value of R370 000. All the detained cigarettes were handed in at the State Warehouse, and the tax and compliance investigation into the two cases continues.



Collaborative Operations Net Illicit Cigarettes Worth R6.7 million in August...2/2

Joint Operation

In another successful operation, a collaborative operation to prevent and detect illicit trade in cigarettes and tobacco products in the Northern Cape Province was conducted from

8 August 2022 to 12 August 2022. Participating units and agencies included the National Rapid Respond Team (NRRT), the Tactical Analysis Investigations Unit (TAIU), Customs Northern Cape Dog Detector Unit, the Customs National Targeting Unit (NTU) and the South African Police Service (SAPS).

According to SARS, Customs and SA Police Service investigations found traders selling cigarettes between R10 & R15 a packet, establishing reasonable suspicion of non-compliance. In most cases cartons consisting of 10 packets each sold for as low as R50 a carton. In addition, Lion Matches marked for export being sold illegally in South Africa were detected.

The joint inter-departmental enforcement operation recorded the following successes:

- 110 master cases of cigarettes and 18 packets of 20's with an estimated value of R 1 601 792 were detained.
- One master case of bidi molasses tobacco imported from India with an estimated a value of R 50 000 was detained.
- Five cases of Liona Match boxes, "marked export" with an estimated value of R 10 000 were detained.

The Customs and Excise and Police Enforcement operations will continue nationally in a whole of government approach to detect and prevent cross border smuggling and illicit trade in cigarettes and tobacco products, Hugo said.



Making Trade Work for Small Cross Border Women Traders Amidst the Pandemic

At the wake of the pandemic in early 2020, borders were closed, markets and shops shut down, curfew was put in place but amidst all the above, life had to continue. A lot of questions lingered around the survival of humanity. Fundamentally, small cross border women traders pondered on how to make ends meet when borders were closed and as an ardent facilitator of legitimate cross border trade and a resident border gender champion at Busia OSBP, I was approached by a group of perplexed small cross border women traders who lamented.....“we can no longer carry our goods on heads to cross through the borders the way we used to do, and yet we can’t also afford to hire trucks to transport our goods like the well-established traders, our families are starving, we have to ensure survival.” The above excerpt is just a drop in the ocean of the concerns that were raised by the women.

When I look back today, I can comfortably say, the border stations of Malaba and Busia OSBPs contributed a lot to restoring normalcy and dignifying the lives of the cross-border traders. And how did we do that? I would say by doing ordinary things in an extraordinary manner. We had to shift our focus from only revenue collection to the person from whom we would like to receive revenue from by investing in stakeholder management engagements.

Through offering psychosocial support to the traders to help them adjust to the new normal. Many of the women traders do not have smart phones and yet we still managed to reach out to them in small manageable groups and even via phone calls to explore options through which they could continue trading while observing SOPs.

Owing to the fact that movement of goods were not restricted, together with the women we had to think outside the box. At this point, personal relationships built across borders became very critical, each active member was tasked to come up with a coordination point with the human capital available at the opposite side of the borders.

As such relying on previous clusters formed and trained as part of the project “making trade Work for Women Across Borders” both at the Kenyan and Ugandan sides, the women were able to use these groups to move goods from one border point to the other in a more organized manner after identifying the goods they could easily trade amidst the restrictions put to combat the spread of Covid-19.

This was social capital at work, and with that we were all able to pull through till the time borders were re-opened.

“Umoja ni nguvu”



**By Josephine Oyer Teddy,
Customs Officer Malaba OSBP**

The Lake Tanganyika's Karema Port A' Gateway to The DRC, Burundi & Zambia



from third countries, Duty-free Trade between the members and Common Customs Procedures in accordance with the East African Community Customs Management Act (EACCMA), 2004.

The new port will be linked with a standard gauge railway to be constructed from Mpanda District in Katavi Region and road to make it a proper gateway for DRC, Burundi and Zambia to the Asian market through the Dar es salaam Port.

Therefore, the Congolese, Burundians, Zambians and Tanzanians have to arrest this mighty opportunity to do business together under the sectors which are under Customs Union, like; agriculture and food security, customs, health, immigration and labour, industrialization, infrastructure, tourism and wildlife management and trade. The EAC welcomes DRC on board this fast growing economic bloc in sub-Saharan Africa.

By Anthony Irafay, Tanzania

The Government of Tanzania through Tanzania Ports Authority (TPA), has just recently constructed a port on the shore of Lake Tanganyika by China's Xiamen Ongoing Construction at a cost of US\$ 22m. This project aims to exploit the untapped great potential of a cross-border trade with the DRC, and revitalization of the same for Burundi and Zambia.

The DRC as a new member of East African Community (EAC) since July 2022, need to be connected with other member countries, in order to facilitate trade between Partner States through EAC – Customs Union, the first regional integration milestone and critical foundation of the EAC which is operational from 2005.

The EAC Partner States have agreed to establish free trade (or zero duty) imposed on goods and services amongst themselves, as defined in Article 75 of the Treaty of the Establishment of the EAC. The aspects of the Customs Union including a Common External Tariff (CET) on imports



Successful Step Towards the Expansion of the “Pool of Trainers” in Africa through the Master Trainer Programme on Rules of Origin



The World Customs Organization (WCO), in cooperation with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), has been carrying out the Master Trainer Programme (MTP) on Rules of Origin (RoO) for Africa the major aim of which is to cooperate with African WCO Members to implement the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Based on the remarkable success of MTP and taking into account the needs from Members and the importance of improving the Customs capability in the region for the implementation of AfCFTA, the WCO and the JICA agreed to expand the MTP on RoO to Ethiopia, Madagascar and South Africa regarding ESA region.

With this background, the WCO/JICA Joint Project organized a supplementary workshop from 22 to 26 August 2022 in Brussels, Belgium, and an online supplementary RoO session on 30 and 31 August 2022 for new participants (new MTP Working Group (WG) members) from the above-mentioned 5 WCO Members.

The workshop in Brussels got new WG members together and provided them with the occasion to understand and apply the fundamentals of competency-based training. In addition, experts from the WCO and Japan Customs shared their expertise on technical aspects of RoO via their presentations and case studies. Furthermore, Mr. Ricardo Treviño Chapa, Deputy Secretary General of the WCO, had a dialogue with new WG members, where he encouraged them and expressed WCO's expectation regarding their future work as qualified trainers to respond to the demand for capacity building activities from Members.

At the online session, new WG members worked on advanced case studies on RoO which deepened their practical knowledge on the origin determination.

New WG members will be invited to Working Group 3 which will be held in October 2022 in Lusaka, Zambia in cooperation with Zambia Revenue Authority.

All the efforts and exchanges provided by new WG members seem very promising for the progress of the MTP and for the acceleration of AfCFTA implementation in entire Africa. For more information, please, contact capacity.building@wcoomd.org.

Namra Hosts the 19th Administrative Meeting for the WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Office Eastern Southern Africa-WCO RILO-ESA National Contact Points (NCPs)



The Namibia Revenue Agency (NamRA) hosted the 19th Administrative NCPs Hybrid Meeting of the WCO RILO-ESA under the theme "Data-driven technologies: Rethinking our collaborations, making intelligence sharing simple".

The meeting was held in Swakopmund, Namibia from 23 - 25 August 2022. Thirty representatives consisting of NamRA officials, representatives from Burundi, Zimbabwe and Kenya RILO-ESA Member States, WCO, SADC TWIX, together with national stakeholders such as INTERPOL, Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism and the Namibia Central Intelligence Service attended the meeting. 20 stakeholders participated virtually.

NamRA Commissioner Sam SHIVUTE officiated the meeting, expressing gratitude to WCO and RILO-ESA leadership for according NamRA the opportunity to host the meeting.

The meeting was funded by the Namibia Nature Foundation, a cooperation that SHIVUTE said should not be taken lightly.

"The theme of this meeting is consistent with the theme of the 2022 International Customs Day, which calls for "Scaling up Customs Digital Transformation by Embracing a Data Culture and Building a Data Ecosystem." "The WCO has committed to investing in the establishment of a more global digitalized and data-driven customs environment in 2022", he said.

SHIVUTE emphasized the importance of intelligence sharing among customs administrations and other enforcement agencies, pointing to the WCO Illicit Trade Report, particularly the most recent report issued in 2021 and its importance for data collection.

Delivering his remarks virtually, Batsirai Chadzingwa, ZIMRA Customs and Excise Commissioner of ZIMRA stressed the importance of the theme, adding that it required commitment from all to become a reality. He observed that to address illicit trade issues and maximize revenue collection, the RILO-ESA must share intelligence and NCPs must be active and visible in ensuring the visibility of the intelligence-sharing network.

At the meeting, Burundi was welcomed as a new RILO-ESA member.



P.I.H.S.2 Holds Fifth Joint Coordinating Committee Meeting (JCC)



A photo of JCC delegates in the meeting

The Project for Capacity Development of South Sudan Customs for Introduction of Harmonized System Code Phase 2 (P.I.H.S.2.) held the fifth Joint Coordinating Committee meeting in Kampala and Juba on 10th - August - 2022. In the meeting, JICA and NRA exchanged opinions about project activities (including challenges on project implementation), and agreed on the monitoring sheet version 4.

At the outset, Mr. Makoto Yamane, the senior representative JICA South Sudan Office re-echoed that the project has successfully implemented a number of capacity building activities on Harmonized System code and Rules of Origin (RoO) for customs officers and clearing agents. In addition, the project has broadened target areas and is now training officers in Wau and Renk.

Increasing non-oil revenue is key in the revised National Development Strategy and NRA 5 years' strategic plan. Furthermore, having a competent customs authority will play an important role in increasing non-oil revenue collection. Therefore, to achieve the overall goal of this project; there is need to continuously strengthen capacity

for customs officers. JICA re-affirms its endless aid in this sector and hopes that NRA and customs division continue to cooperate to develop the capacity of South Sudan customs.



P.I.H.S.2 Holds Media Conference



Mr. Mitsunori Numaguchi, Chief advisor of the project addressing the media

The Project for Capacity Development of South Sudan Customs for Introduction of Harmonized System Code Phase 2 (P.I.H.S.2.) held a media conference on 10th-August-2022. It reported the progress and plan, and shared achievements / outcomes with stakeholders to the public of South Sudan, Uganda and Japan.

Mr Mitsunori Numaguchi, the chief advisor of the project highlighted project activities and expressed that the project has introduced and currently exercising HS code in South Sudan. South Sudan is a member of the East African Community (EAC) and the EAC uses the Common External Tariff (EAC-CET) to classify goods and impose customs duties.

EAC Rules of Origin refer to a set of criteria used to distinguish between goods that are produced within the EAC Customs territory and are eligible to the Community preferential tariff treatment, and those produced outside the EAC customs territory that attract import duties specified in the Common External Tariff (CET).

This project is fostering Rules of Origin (RoO) experts of South Sudan National Revenue Authority to introduce EAC instruments namely EAC-CET.



Fifty Customs Officers from Wau and Renk Receive Training on Harmonized System Code (HS) and Rules of Origin (RoO)

Master trainers fostered by the JICA Project for Capacity Development of South Sudan Customs for Introduction of Harmonized System Code Phase 2 (P.I.H.S.2.) have trained fifty customs officers from Wau and Renk.

The objectives of these trainings were to contribute to the achievement of the Project Output 2, "Staff in charge of customs clearance are able to impose appropriate customs tariff using HS code." Its emphasis is to enhance the understanding of customs officers on the impact of HS classification on trade statistics and to develop their capacity to exercise HS classification and basic principles of Rules of Origin (RoO) in South Sudan.

In these trainings, the customs officers understood how to execute HS codes for customs procedures, such as import and export declarations, HS Convention, and its Nomenclature. HS classification and the Rules of Origin are very important tools that govern goods internationally. Furthermore, harmonizing products makes statistics easier, thus, correct classification is very important and mastering these elements will make a positive impact on non-oil revenue administration.

Mr. Peter Yel Mawien a customs officer from Renk stated that, "I am positive that we shall be able to employ the HS and ROO skills acquired. The trainers were very knowledgeable and the experience was a total success from start to finish."

Ms. Akec Rose Peter a customs officer from Wau stated, "JICA is a very reputable organization. The course content on HS code was excellent with a good balance between theory and practical application, which I think was a great way to learn. More courses and training on HS code will give me a more cemented view in my role as a customs officer."



Customs officers from Wau in the training.



Customs officers from Renk in the training.

Operationalizing the ESA Strategy – Collaborations & Partnerships

The East and Southern Africa (ESA) region recently operationalized its new strategy (2022-2025) whose main focus is to promote trade facilitation and integration while securing the global supply chain. The plan has four key strategic objectives: Promoting Trade Facilitation & Integration; supporting efficient Revenue Mobilization & Customs Modernization; strengthening Security, Enforcement & Compliance; and fostering Professionalism and Partnerships. All of these areas will incorporate digitalization and big data analytics, while paying attention to the important role played by all emerging technologies; Artificial intelligence (AI), Blockchain, Machine Learning, robotics, and drones, among others.

The WCO ESA Regional Strategy 2018-2021 aimed at advocating trade facilitation and intra-regional trade was largely implemented though this was hampered by financial and technical challenges, compounded by the unprecedented fatal and crippling effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. To mitigate these challenges, the region felt it was necessary to tap fully into the opportunities presented by collaborations and partnerships in its strategy, hence the inclusion of the objective that specifically speaks to partnerships in the current strategy.

The region envisions buttressing its collaboration with all development partners, Partner Government Agencies (PGAs), Private sector, Regional Economic Communities, African Union Commission, AfCFTA Secretariat, the World Customs Organizations, and other international bodies as well as all the Regional entities towards ensuring the successful implementation of the strategy. This process is supervised by the ESA Management Committee (on behalf of the region's Governing Council) and led by the Regional Office for Capacity Building, which was recently conferred legal status by its host country, Kenya.

It is worth noting that the region has already made huge strides towards achieving this, with an ever-so-vibrant Regional Private Sector Consultative Group (RPSCG), whose Members consist of the Private Sector Associations in the region. The main mandate of the ESA RPSCG is to offer an official forum to provide information and developmental support to the region's Customs administrations, its members, all stakeholders in trade, and the global trading society on customs and trade-related matters from the perspective of the ESA region's private sector. In the same vein, the ROCB and Ultra Information Solutions Ltd, a private entity, entered a partnership aimed at accelerating Customs Modernization and Digitalization in the ESA region in July 2022. We hope that through such partnerships, the region will be supported to deliver various capacity building activities, hence ensuring the successful implementation of its strategy.



**By Faith Mosongo,
Programme Officer,
WCO ESA ROCB.**

Saving Money For A Better Tomorrow

A number of years back when I was young, there was a common advertisement on the radio encouraging people to save money. It hammered the point with a mantra, kula tano, weka tano. This is Swahili language encouraging proportionate saving from earnings, and translating to “eat five, save five”. I distantly recall a second advertisement which championed ‘saving for a rainy day.’ At my tender age, I barely understood the points driven by these advertisements. Yet as I matured in age and knowledge, the importance of saving became clearer, cushioning against unforeseen financial emergencies and unexpected expenses. Money saved can help in settling huge purchases which otherwise would only be achieved through debt financing. Needless to say, avoiding debt reduces chances of financial stress especially during economic hardships, with approaching due dates and disposable income playing hard to get. A debtless environment provides a greater sense of financial freedom.

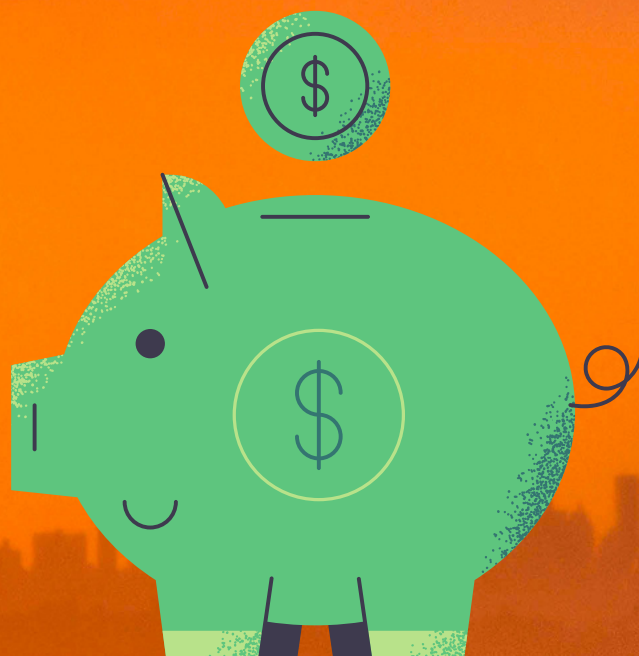
Something will always come up and compete for your resources. Saving for the future should be at the forefront of your mind and your finances regardless of whatever else comes around.



**By Samuel Wachiuri,
Finance Officer,
WCO ESA ROCB.**

The mantra of ‘eat five save five’, while sounding easy and automatic, requires a lot of discipline to actualize. It calls for one to prepare beforehand a cash projection and a budget to help keep track of the expenses. It is much easier and more enjoyable to spend hard earned income with disregard to the future. Any loss of track may result into excessive spending thereby eating into the share earmarked for saving. Once one realizes the importance of saving and the role that it plays in one’s life, creating goals becomes the next step to stay on track. A part of setting financial goals is making sure that one can meet them by dedicating enough money to reach them.

Saving for a better tomorrow should therefore be a clarion call to all and sundry as it gives one a financial safety net for the future. There are many reasons supporting savings for all, such as for a retirement home, a medical cover or a pension scheme, among others. Whatever your goal is, start now.



My Transformational Journey as a Personal Assistant

Prior to the 21st Century, the position of a Personal Assistant focused on essential secretarial skills, with the secretary's responsibilities including taking shorthand notes while being dictated to and composing correspondence. The major roles and duties of the Personal Assistant was to carry out support tasks for individuals and managers, mostly on face-to-face basis. The duties carried out were clear and simple, to provide secretarial support to executives, booking meetings on request, minute taking, filing, managing paper correspondence, taking telephone messages, and so on. The original typewriters used were manual and noisy since one had to pull the carriage from one side to the other. Carbon papers were used to produce a copy of the document and correction fluid solution as the eraser. As the years progressed, through technology advancement, electric typewriters were invented. These were more friendly than the manual typewriters as one could store a document and reproduce it later when required without re-typing it all over again. Telex machines, telegram coded messages and the post office were used to send and receive international messages. Pagers and walkie-talkies were also used to communicate especially in the remote areas.

The 21st Century Personal Assistants are relied upon by their executives not only for administration support, but also for their technical abilities, counsel on team/ company culture, strategic input, and sometimes also their research skills or project management experience. In the 21st Century, the advancement of new technologies and the evolution of new working environments, has transformed the contemporary Personal Assistant role into a much wider and more diverse scope globally. The new emerging roles of a Personal Assistant in addition to the traditional roles comprises of excellent communication skills, organizational skills to facilitate administration matters, good time management, networking skills, information technology skills, willingness to learn, multi-tasking and being a team player.

The availability of internet connectivity, sophisticated machines such as the computers, laptops, smart phones, iPads have enabled the Personal Assistant to work beyond the office environment. One can work at home, do scheduled shift office working hours, or even work in remote areas since electricity and network is available. E-Commerce businesses can be transacted without one occupying an office space through World Wide Web forum. Meetings both international and local are carried out virtually without having to travel. Social Media Platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Face time etc. have facilitated the sending of messages to many people through a touch of a button.



By Judy Mwaura,
Administrator & PA to the Director,
WCO ESA ROCB.

Enhancing Security in Basic Finances

Accounting information has always been one of the easiest targets for hackers, and especially with the rise of online banking and e-commerce, where sensitive information is required to facilitate such transactions. Are risk are bank account details, passwords, or accounting systems, all being high-value pieces of information for any hacker. With the rapid increase in cybersecurity attacks, some organizations have put in place stringent measures in place to protect financial data. Others though, still lag behind, a position that makes them vulnerable.

Although real-time financial data management is what financial institutions aim for, it is not always easy to achieve as most of these institutions, especially startups. Many of these still rely on spreadsheets for day-to-day tasks, hence resulting in duplication of work. The extensive use of Microsoft Excel and Quick books programs is very useful for data organization, keeping track of financial transactions and reporting accurate information on financials.

The World Customs Organization, East and Southern Africa, Regional Office for Capacity Building (WCO ESA ROCB) has put in place stringent measures to protect financial data and track office expenditure. With the Quick Books and Microsoft Excel worksheets, we are able to update our financial reports real time and keep accurate information. This is in line with the region's vision to ensure financial discipline and to ensure ease of the periodical audit exercises. The region's finances are monitored by a Finance and Governance Committee (FGC) comprised of four member counties which currently include Burundi, Ethiopia, Lesotho and Zambia.

The ROCB has currently semi-merged the roles of the administrative staff with those of the finance office. Managing administrative tasks, includes reporting, filing as well as monitoring the office budget by controlling expenses.

Understanding how to handle sensitive financial information and proper record management has helped the administrative staff in thriving on multiple projects at the same time – considering the automated systems in place.



**By Jamilah N. Mutah,
Administrative/Finance Assistant ,
WCO ESA ROCB.**



How Virtual Connections Came Through

About two years ago, holding virtual meetings was very unlikely to be considered in most of our workplaces. Instead, we held regular gatherings in boardrooms, conferences, and workshops where we discussed our various agendas and agreed on when to meet next if need be. We shook hands, shared a meal or two and if we had more time to spare, we could catch up on our lives.

Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic made many of us suddenly start working from our homes due to the need for social distancing. All this to prevent risking one's health and those of coworkers and clients thus resulting in us finding alternatives avenues for meetings.

This widely disconnected workforce resulted in working remotely using virtual meetings as a reliable way of staying in touch. These virtual meetings took place with the help of online tools supporting video conferencing, teleconferencing, chatting functionality, screen sharing, meeting recordings, and more. These remain largely offered by Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Webex, KUDO, among others.

All these have largely worked well for different parties even as, two years later, the world has seen a slow yet steady return to normalcy with the reducing number of cases of mortalities and morbidities from COVID-19. While the significance of physical meetings cannot be overlooked, virtual connections came with their challenges including low productivity as result of poor involvement of participants, poor internet connectivity, different time zones, hacking, online meeting etiquette, and technical issues among many others.

Despite the partiality, the convenience brought about by the virtual meetings outweighed the inconveniences. At the WCO ESA ROCB for instance, we plan our work better with our regional and international colleagues in that we spend less of our funds which initially could be used on work trips which is a win for us and also the region.

We are also able to utilize our time more efficiently, and host more virtual training, workshops, and various forums via webinars. An excellent example is the successful 3rd ESA Research Conference which was held in November 2021. This is the future of enhanced collaboration and capacity building... but not in isolation.



By Erick Kaburu,
ICT Officer,
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