# Digitalisation of Trade and Revenue in Disaster Environments

White Paper Report

# Executive Summary

The Covid-19 crisis has created an enormous social disruption that is likely to have lasting effects on international exchanges and dramatically affect countries' economies. However, most countries have reacted swiftly and energetically to the situation. The legendary and universal adaptability of Customs administrations has also ensured that essential lines of supply are maintained.

Contingency management measures were introduced to follow directions on social distancing, remote operations, and also voicing a concern for business continuity.

Most of these measures have proved highly effective, as they were usually supported by longstanding automation efforts from a business process, reengineering and automation perspective. The crisis has shown that the optimisation of existing and new IT solutions, has enabled Customs clearance in a physical-distancing environment not necessarily requiring full teams on site.

# 01.

Physical distancing has easily been compensated by distant, computerised, processing and reinventing business processes. However, it went against the cultural habits of person-to- person interface with the standard (and possibly overstated) requirement for physical presence of importers during the clearance process. The paperless approach has shown that a comprehensive overhaul of Government regulations was and is necessary, but at the same time has demonstrated that what was important was not so much the document itself but the data it contained.

Section 1 shows how this encouraged new research into upstream data collection, along with the legal issues this implied. This was in particular the case for paperless transactions such as digitalisation of procedures, rationalisation of control, better inter-agency cooperation and overall simplification, thus raising the awareness in globalised, post-release control systems. It also showed that such protocols operated better when there was a comprehensive automation and business simplification approach in the country concerned.

# 02.

Under section 2, revenue collection is obviously a major issue, but the epidemic has enabled traditional systems to re-emerge. For example, deferred payment schemes which had been in operation for decades, but had been overlooked more recently, were reintroduced. It also showed that modern technology, such as contactless payment, could be factored subject to legislative and administrative adjustments, such as the example Benin has demonstrated.

# 03.

Section 3 examines the consequences of (and prerequisites for) reducing physical presence to a minimum. This has also encouraged modernised procedures, which has been recommended for a long time. Advance lodging and processing were thus mainstreamed in several countries, with the release of goods as soon as they reached the country. The concept of inspection (both documentary and physical) had to be revisited. It implies a new notion of "green by default" as opposed to the traditional compliance verification, in one way or another, of all declarations. Therefore, the entire risk management chain underwent an overhaul, which could lead to new procedures in the future. The Authorised Economic Operator concept is a major step in this direction, but it usually requires lengthy approval processes. In crisis time, lower temporary compliance standards should be introduced, if only temporarily, to facilitate operations by legitimate importers. It is important for Customs to identify categories of importers based on revenue generation and reliability.

New physical inspection procedures should also be considered, using advanced technologies (such as remotely piloted examinations, the use of augmented reality, or the establishment of comprehensive inspection facilities, even on the premises of importers). Passengers are a major vector of contagion, but there are methods already available for passenger screening.

# 04.

Moving goods across land borders (such as under transit schemes) has obviously been affected, as described under section 4. The fact that the same goods (and the same conveyance) are repeatedly checked under a transit route, multiplies risks, but does not necessarily guarantee compliance. This paper examines how existing or new approaches could be considered, such as advanced clearance procedures in the first port of landing, data exchange between countries, notably using artificial intelligence to detect anomalies in container loads and their manipulation, and unique data capture avoiding multiple checks of the same documents.

Border management has been significantly affected by reduction in staffing, but has also showed that many repetitive checks could, under special circumstances, be consolidated. This has highlighted the need for reinforced inter-agency cooperation. Conversely staff furlough need not be considered as an employment threat: With the streamlining of inspection mandates, existing staff could readily be redeployed to other, more effective and value-added, functions.

What the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted is, in many cases, the obvious need for readiness in the event of a crisis situation. While some countries were prepared (as was Guinea for example, having dealt with the past experience of the Ebola epidemic), others had to improvise, and were usually effective as described above, or at least had the necessary tools available to adjust to the situation. However, as examined under section 5, contingency procedures urgently need to be put in place, if only to prevent abuse or misuse of international aid. Technical solutions must be designed, with for example, reliable emergency recovery sites. Standard operating procedures should be designed, according to international standards. As preparedness implies a mindset, there should be periodic exercises to ensure that contingency measures are adequately internalised.

The pandemic has also, once again, highlighted that Customs are indispensable for maintaining economic activity and for providing immediate recovery measures. Customs should be involved from the start in any emergency situation.

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Finally, rapidly deployable emergency infrastructure should be made available.

The Covid-19 crisis has thus shown the usefulness of past automation activities, as long as they were supported fully by robust institutional reforms, and has also acted as a catalyst for innovative approaches in Customs and border management streamlining. Staffing issues meanwhile may have highlighted the need for re-allocating personnel to more value-added activities.

We therefore have the opportunity to revise a business model that should take into account modern technologies, while also preparing for emergency situation operations. It has highlighted that automation only works at its best when it is supported by across-the-board institutional reforms, but also points out the necessity for the development of emergency contingency procedures.

# COVID-19

has dramatically changed our day to day lives, with supply chains and revenue collection expected to be significantly disrupted all over the world. In such emergencies it is paramount to secure contingency delivery and be agile and adaptable.

The main objective during the Covid-19 crisis was therefore to maintain supply chains and revenue collection in an environment where traditional operations were severely restricted. A survey of countries where Webb Fontaine is active shows that over 80 percent of countries adopted broad measures affecting the economy (lockdown, distant communication) and to a lesser extent closure of business and relaxation of revenue collection. In that context, Customs authorities adjusted some of their procedures: Covid-19-related measures taken to address the pandemic by Customs Administrations from across several continents and many countries were examined during a set of Webb Fontaine webinars. Some measures were introduced across-the-board, while others were directly focused on the supply chains and the clearance of goods.

This paper explores key themes and ideas around these newly adopted measures. It examines how international best practice could be factored when dealing with such emergencies, recommends possible immediate action in critical situations, and attempts to draw conclusions from lessons learnt and how they could be integrated into an emergency recovery package.

This paper also demonstrates how measures taken during the pandemic can, if they are perpetuated, facilitate trade in a post-epidemic context and open up avenues towards improving clearance and security within a dematerialised clearance framework.

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# Spotlight on Jordan

Since the outbreak, there has been a *50 percent* decline in both the workforce and daily number of lorries going through Aqaba free zone. Dwell time has *increased from 7.5 days to 12*, and the extra cost due to berthing delays has *gone up to USD 22,000 per day.*

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# Section 1

The optimisation of IT, which is usually already in place, would enable the processing of clearance in a physical-distancing environment without necessarily requiring full teams on site.
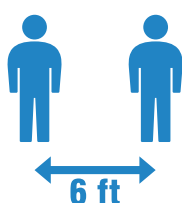
## Contents

# Section 1

## a. Physical Distancing

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The first obvious measure was a reduction in personal interface, and what needed to be done to ensure it. Most countries introduced distancing measures, and where partial or total lockdown was imposed, Customs staff could no longer be present at clearance locations. This in theory would have affected the clearance process, as one of the requirements is that importers or their agent must attend the clearance process in person, and that inspection of goods must take place in their presence. Under the current situation, Customs are facing challenges to meet these rules (e.g risk of contamination, staff furlough ect). This creates challenges in dealing with "traditional" Customs processes when physical distancing becomes a (main) requirement.

While this implied reinventing the work process and communication between Customs and trade, the objective of reducing physical interface at Customs houses was often reached. To achieve this, the use of IT was optimised, as well as telecommunications. Physical presence was not (always) necessary, although past habits sometimes remained prevalent. What emerged is that current IT systems were globally capable of handling remote transactions, subject to some required adjustments. In addition, some technologically advanced systems already provide for advance lodging and clearance, meaning that goods can be removed as they are landed.

This process has been happening in countries where Webb Fontaine is involved. Yet, distancing had to be balanced, when Customs clearance was involved, with the legal requirement that importers must attend physical examinations. However, international standards and best practices (e.g. The WCO's Kyoto Convention), provide for contactless clearance processes when declarations are deemed compliant.

# Section 1

## a. Physical Distancing continued...

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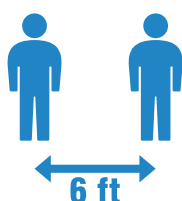
Systems therefore can keep operating in a crisis situation, and protocols already in place could be immediately applied in an emergency. Some Middle-East countries now accept copies of documents instead of originals, at least temporarily. Morocco has in addition also introduced advance lodging and processing of all declarations.

Nonetheless, there is still a prevailing culture of face-to- face interaction and a need to convince stakeholders of taking advantage of these new technologies and procedures, although new options, such as tele- hearings, or remote attendance by declarants of physical examinations could be envisaged. This calls for a development of communication between Customs and the trade. As an example, Ethiopia asked Webb Fontaine to optimise the interface modules which were already in place.

Besides, distancing and work from home implies that officials make decisions on their own, without the possibilities of informal networking and feedback from colleagues and supervisors that exist within a classical work structure. They also may not have access rights to all functionalities of the clearance system. This implies that specific procedures should be put in place to optimise tele-clearance.

*Remote and contactless operations are therefore possible, and could be mainstreamed, using current technologies. Obviously, this also relies on the country infrastructure, in particular telecoms. This would enable countries to take advantage of the advanced Customs systems offered (and technology is often in place, but would need to be optimised) but would require a change in mindset, and continued commitment to introducing internationally accepted standards.*

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# Spotlight on Gulf states

A distancing approach had been in place in Bahrain and Oman since 2017. This approach resulted in totally remote transactions, including payment and a spectacular reduction in the number of visitors to Customs houses.

Importers do have the option to print the release note from their premises but Customs has yet to agree to this happening.

Users operating from home are able to scan their documents. As declarants and Customs officers are connected through this system transactions are dealt with under the current social distancing rules. Similarly, other agencies can approve permits and feed scanned documents or images directly into the system. Dematerialisation measures thus proved extremely useful in the context of the pandemic.
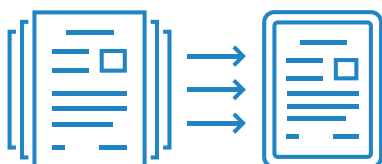
# Section 1

## b. Digitalisation and paperless approach

Remote operations using the internet imply virtual documents rather than hard copies. However, experience shows in most countries that simply digitalising papers is not sufficient as the clearance processing requirements still remain the same. It would therefore be important to reduce the total number of documents required, as many could be consolidated. A new approach consisting in processing data rather than documents (i.e. looking for relevant data where it is initially created or stored, rather than asking importers to create a specific document) should be considered. This would enable Customs to obtain relevant clearance data from source documents (as is the case in EU countries for large importers). Oman is also exploring the possibility of collecting necessary data in different source documents. While the legislative/conventional framework for such paperless operations exists, it may require additional provisions for access to data and consolidation or rationalising of paperwork, even if it is virtual. Government policies in this area should be consistent across agencies.

Another aspect on digitalisation of documents is its impact on ISO standards. While current regulations would tend to legitimate paperless transactions, further research would be necessary to assess their conformity with ISO guidelines.

This entirely paperless approach calls in turn for a system to guarantee the authenticity of data, as it raises the problem of fraudulent data, and finding ways to detect it. Webb Fontaine has carried out extensive research on 'Big Data' and has developed Artificial Intelligence and Block-chain technology tools for identifying possibilities of fraud or irregularities.

Remote and contactless operations are therefore possible, and could be mainstreamed, using current technologies. This would also enable countries to take advantage of the advanced systems offered, but would require a change in mindset, and continued commitment to introducing internationally accepted standards.

An immediate poll carried out on the audience shows that **79 percent** of the attendees would favour entirely **remote clearance.**

# Spotlight on Benin

Benin has, for a while, made major efforts in digitalising exchanges between administrations (not only Customs) and the public. It initially experienced social and cultural difficulties in an environment where human contact is prevalent. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the need for distancing, this was largely accepted by the business community. Another finding was that, although Customs are traditionally open to new procedures and techniques, it was essential that the digitalised approach needed to be supported by Government policies across agencies. Priority sectors were identified under a phased approach, and efforts were made to prioritise requirements in terms of infrastructure and equipment.

Additionally, there was an underlying need to streamline legislation, which at times proved to be somewhat bureaucratic and stifling. Despite these difficulties Benin managed successfully to maintain Customs operations which have managed to run at an acceptable level throughout the Covid-19 crisis. These longstanding efforts have had a significant impact on international trade facilitation indicators, such as the World Bank's Cost of Doing Busines indicator.

# Section 2

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## Revenue collection

If trade is stopped, no revenue is collected. One of the fundamental objectives, in the current crisis, is to avoid a major drop in collections. Some countries have achieved this.

From a procedural perspective, payment of Customs duties (and other import-related taxes) is based on self-assessment by the importer. This is done through an import declaration, and is subject to verification by Customs. Duties and taxes are in theory payable before the removal of the goods, as goods act as a collateral. Importers then make a payment either to the Customs house cashier or to the Treasury. Payment can be made in numerous forms, including cash, banker's check, promissory note (and any other electronic means of payment). However, to facilitate trade, schemes have been developed for a long time to allow the importers to take possession of goods as soon as the declaration is accepted and successfully processed, without immediate payment. Most of these schemes are based on (i) deferred payment subject to a bank guarantee for trustworthy

# Section 2

operators (but these are not necessarily AEOs), with up to 30 days' credit, and subject to a guarantee and payment of interest, (ii) waiver of interest and guarantee for major and reliable importers, or (iii) existence of a standing deposit or a revolving line of credit. This leads in fact to a complete separation between release and collection.

The Covid-19 crisis has introduced a major challenge as, irrespective of the mode adopted, payment usually implies a visit to a Customs or bank cashier. This was largely temporarily discontinued. However, while Customs legislation or operations allow remote or contactless payment, this is not always the case for other Government agencies. In some cases, there is often a technical incompatibility between billing procedures and existing computerised operations, especially under a pre-existing Port Community System where bills are originating from a number of organisations and private bodies (Cargo handlers, carriers, Port authority, Customs, etc.). However, digitalisation can be the first step towards e-payment, as the example of Nigeria shows, with better optimisation of existing modes of payment.

To (partially) offset this limitation, many countries have introduced contingency schemes:

• Partial and deferred period, with a grace period up to 90 days (Jordan, Tunisia, Guinea, among others), or sometimes a tax holiday;

• Removal of goods prior to payment (Côte d'Ivoire);

• Waiver of penalties or late payment charges, and in some cases reduced enforcement, such as suspension of audits (Côte d'Ivoire, Congo).

Another aspect is that, worldwide, twenty percent of importers represent eighty percent of duties collected. Different techniques, such as advance or standing deposits, recurrent monthly payments, deferred payment schemes (as often used in Western countries) would contribute to optimise and secure key collections.

These new approaches are supported by Webb Fontaine, which is deploying a single window model which allows a single, distant, and consolidated payment with redistribution to all the agencies and beneficiaries involved. Webb Fontaine has already implemented new payment mechanisms, including the use of mobile money.

Option that could be considered at least for reliable importers would include (i) separation between imports and payment, and (ii) end-of-month consolidated payment. Existing electronic tools (such as internet-based payment) could be factored under a single window remote clearance approach. Small scale traders could also use online smartphone payment schemes. This implies a comprehensive review of existing legislation, adequate client identification and segmentation, and streamlined inter-agency exchanges.

# Spotlight on Nigeria

The Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) has maintained revenue performance, which has not been the case for other Government agencies. While the NCS revenue target changes from year to year, it was initially slashed in 2020 because of the expected revenue shortfall due to Covid-19, however, the total collections up to May this year are greater than last year's total during the same period and NCS achieved well over 60 percent of their target. The Customs IT platform operated robustly throughout the period of reduced movement.

Revenue performance was enhanced due to careful preparation as a result of good planning, proper infrastructure deployment and maintenance.

It also highlighted:

• Availability of Webb Fontaine technical and maintenance staff, who were present and housed in hotels near sites where necessary, despite movement restrictions throughout Nigeria

• Adequate forward planning as Webb Fontaine stocked up on essentials like diesel fuel for generators

• Maintaining a very close watch on all activities at the various Customs sites.

# Section 3

## Reducing physical presence to a minimum

Digitalisation shows that most Customs transactions can take place remotely without major risks in terms of additional fraud or unreliability. This should be supported by adequate procedural features.

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a. Advance lodging and processing

b. Risk management

c. Physical inspection

d. Passenger screening

# Section 3

## a. Advance lodging and processing

A few countries have introduced during the epidemic an advance lodging scheme, whereby a declaration is vetted and assessed before the goods actually arrive. This is possible because in most cases, data required for clearance is available ahead of arrival. Such a scheme, especially combined with a modern payment system, can enable in certain cases entirely automated release, without any physical interface. Such an approach can be supported by:

• A preliminary or simplified declaration, lodged beforehand. It can be a commercial or transport document (manifest, transit document, invoice), which usually includes sufficient data for a straightforward transaction.

• A summary declaration, subsequently discharged by the import declaration itself. This can be highly effective for importers with recurrent shipments of identical commodities.

• An anticipated declaration (which is only finalised when the goods actually arrive) that enables automated processing, subject to amendments in terms of short or long-shipment, differences in goods description, or valuation adjustments.

These schemes would essentially be suited for large and regular importers, whose transactions are traceable, and who offer adequate guarantees. This should be supported through a Single Window approach. Better communication between the clearance computerised system and the Single Window, when it is in operation, would result in a Port Community System integrated approach, and avoid multiple capture, payment to different entities, and physical checks.

The objective is to expedite clearance and reduce immobilisation of goods. As in most cases, data required for clearance is available in advance, from the country of departure, this could be used for advance processing, either prior to the declaration itself, or as an anticipated declaration. The identification of goods and their characteristics could be used in a pre-declaration format, which would be finalised when the declaration is finally cleared (and even this step could take place after, given adequate guarantees, the release).

# Section 3

## b. Risk management

**Random selectivity**
Experiments have been carried-out with entirely random examinations. Interestingly, they showed a slightly higher rate of fraud detection, but the underlying reasons for this were never fully investigated.

In the Covid-19 context, it is important to reduce interaction between Customs officials (and those form other regulatory agencies) and importers, in particular during the physical examination of goods. In many countries, rates of inspection have been reduced. This implies a notion of selectivity, which can be applied in a number of ways:

• Partial inspection of consignments. Risk management evolved from the principle that Customs could no longer inspect thoroughly everything that was imported (or even exported). Thus the inspector focuses on one item of the consignment but the transaction cost and time remains high.

• Partial waiver of inspections for reliable importers.

• Three-tiered system, based on (i) mandatory inspection (red channel), (ii) documentary review (yellow channel), and (iii) post-release documentary review (blue channel).

• Blanket waiver of inspections by default, and inspections determined when risk criteria reach a certain level.

The computerised clearance systems usually apply a "weighing" process for risk, and when the added criteria reach a certain level, declarations are routed through one of the control channels. However, most often, each channel is treated in isolation, whereas a physical examination (red) should be prepared through a proper documentary review (yellow) and may be backed-up with a later paperwork review or on-site company audit (blue).

A comprehensive and integrated inspection (in the broad sense) should therefore be put in place, and evaluated. This requires organisational (and in some cases legislative) reforms within the Customs administration, and constant monitoring of results (both in terms of detection, but, more importantly, in terms of additional revenue collected.

# Section 3

## c. Physical inspection
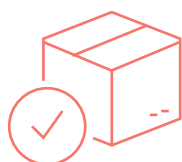
The inspection of goods has been reduced significantly in a majority of countries, partly due to a reduced workforce in Customs and also as a preventive measure. The physical inspection of shipments (and luggage) is the phase in clearance when health risks are the highest, and it also inevitably raises the risk of unethical behaviour:  Customs are probably the only agency where there is such an institutionalised and discreet interface between people and tangible wealth. This is epitomised during the inspection process.  Traditional methods of inspection are based on documenting precisely the process:  the inspector describes in the inspection act all the steps he took to examine the goods and how they did (or why they did not) meet the tariff and quantity or valuation descriptions on the declaration. This is the traditional approach, but it has often been abused by unethical Customs staff and clearing agents. A more recent method consists in scanning containers or parcels, largely to detect concealed items.  It avoids to some extent physical manipulation, although when an anomaly is detected the whole container is usually  stripped.

Neither of these methods are entirely optimal as (i) repetitive examinations are not known for their efficiency, and (ii) over-reliance on routine scanning, when not supported by a serious risk management approach, is usually ineffective.

Another facilitation feature introduced in some countries is an increase in the number of inspections on the premises of importers, not at ports.

Physical inspection however should and will remain a key prerogative of Customs, While the notion of inspection should not be the default option, as has been analysed earlier, when it takes place it requires (with a few exceptions, such as parcel post) the physical presence of the owner of the goods.  However, "virtualising" this presence could be explored: taking this one step further, augmented reality would enable a Customs supervisor to monitor and direct from his desk the inspection.

# Spotlight on Côte d'Ivoire

In addition to numerous across-the-board measures to adjust the national economy of Côte d'Ivoire to the pandemic environment they developed a specific facilitation environment. Additionally, in the area of Customs control there has been the opportunity to establish/reinforce, multi-disciplinary inspection teams. Under earlier practice each regulatory agency would set its own goods inspection schedule. Using the Single Window as a coordination platform, goods inspections have now been consolidated, with all involved agencies attending at the same time, thus avoiding multiple goods manipulations.
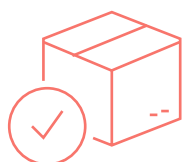
# Section 3

## c. Physical inspection

The importer or his agent could be the one performing, under the guidance of Customs, the actual inspection and provide when required additional information to the examining officer. Another benefit would be that pilferage during inspection would be deterred, as all inspections would be recorded. There is therefore also a need to redefine the structural organisation of scanning.

*The options would be to introduce (i) a "self-service" inspection performed by the importer himself using augmented reality, and (ii) a state-of the-art comprehensive inspection site, with cameras, pallet scanners, drug/radiation/explosives testing equipment.*

Other agencies could also apply principles of risk management when inspecting goods. Obviously, the definition or risk varies from sector to sector, and in some cases a notion of zero risk may well prevail. However, this does not preclude a hierarchy in categories of risks, and the use of techniques to identify them. The overall mechanism is quite similar to Customs risk management.

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# Spotlight on Artificial Intelligence

These developments imply a new approach, and new processes. Current company risk assessment initiatives include the use of machine learning techniques dedicated to train a fraud detection model out of a bulk of existing inspected declarations, resulting in the detection of fraudulent new declarations (already in place in Nigeria for risk management). This evaluation complements the traditional risk management process and can be adapted in the clearance flow either as a post-release "second opinion" control or as a blocking factor preventing release. New A.I. applications are also deployed for valuation, detection of forged invoices, and accurate classification, all of which guide the examination process, in one way or another. A.I. is fed by inspection findings, and is permanently updating the model with new fraudulent techniques.
As the issue is how to migrate from a red to a yellow/green default approach, using A.I. can be very effective, and leads to smart fraud detection.

# Section 3

## d. Passenger screening and client segmentation

The inspection of passenger luggage is not a major revenue issue (except in the case of small-scale cross-border trade where it can represent a significant fraction of local GDP), but it raises major risks in the context of the Covid epidemic. To support passenger examination, Customs often rely on x-ray scanning on arrival, but this becomes a routine and most usually ineffective method of control, often mitigating the facilitation process incurred by the passenger self- declaration (i.e., selecting a red or green channel).

Advanced passenger screening offers, on the other hand, many features that enable the identification of suspicious travellers. Customs should take advantage of Advance Passenger Information System (APIS), an international scheme for sharing relevant traveller information to expedite controls on arrival.

It is important for Customs to identify categories of importers based on revenue generation (and risk), but also reliability. The Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) approach is a major step in this direction, but it usually requires a lengthy approval process. On the other hand, it can lead to mutual recognition by other countries, thus streamlining the entire logistics chain.

When a comprehensive AEO programme is too long or complicated to generalise, lower compliance standards could be introduced to facilitate operations by legitimate importers. Such customised, company-specific, schemes were introduced in Western countries many years ago, and include simplified declarations supported by a monthly consolidated declaration, deferred payment schemes with a waiver of guarantee, inspections on site, and an adaptation of the control process to the organisation of a specific importer (for example, an entry in the inventory control system of the importer can be accepted as a provisional import declaration).

*A drastic reduction in human interaction could therefore be achieved by using already available procedures and systems subject to an adaptation of mindsets and the introduction of new organisational layouts. The approach should be towards control by exception, supported by (i) advance information, and (ii) strong and streamlined post release checks. However, this should be supported by new tools such as those developed by Webb Fontaine.*

An immediate poll carried out on the audience shows that 96 percent of the attendees would be happy with a simplified import process subject to reinforced, ex-post, compliance checks.

# Section 4

## Movement of goods across land borders

While numerous efforts have been made to streamline transit operations (in particular in the case of landlocked countries) queues still exist at borders, and border processing often remains lengthy. This has a significant cost, and also, in the Covid context, multiplies risks of contamination. For example, long waiting times encourage the establishment of commercial or para-commercial activities (not all of which are moral or safe) to cope with the captive public waiting for administrative processes to be concluded.

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b. Border management

c. Inter-agency cooperation

d. Staff reduction

# Section 4

## a. Regional and international connectivity



In theory the same commodity that travels, identification and control data captured upstream should be used from end-to-end. It is already the case to a certain extent, but there can be incompatibilities between systems and processes that make seamless transmission and subsequent discharge difficult (e.g data interface between IM8 and T1 documents).

International road transit is subject to two types of physical control:

• Weighing, which can be problematic, as gauging standards may differ from one country to the other. Besides, there are cases where different agencies at the border each insist on weighing commercial vehicles for their own purposes (e.g., the roads administrations weigh for road safety purposes, and Customs weigh again to ensure consistency between the load and the transit document, and this is replicated on the other side of the border.)

• Scanning also generates queues, congestion, and delays. Often there are multiple scanning operations, on both sides of the border, when a single scanner with displays in the different agencies of both countries could suffice (as the example of Ras A Jdir border station between Tunisia and Libya demonstrated). An interesting development is the real-time sharing of scanned images of containers departing the port of Karachi with US Customs, which enables quasi-immediate release when they reach the US.

Webb Fontaine has been supporting data conversion and transmission between different countries to achieve this seamless objective (for example between Nigeria and Benin). Such approaches also meet the objectives of regional connectivity as recommended by different International Financial Institutions. The concept is to achieve a single capture at the point of departure, and disseminate the information to all relevant parties down the line.

# Section 4

## b. Border management

There have been significant efforts to rationalise border operations, notably through the establishment of shared border facilities (known as collocated stations, or so-called One Stop Border Posts – OSBP). Efforts included the establishment of joint control areas, combined inspections between the authorities of adjacent countries, and attempts at mutual recognition of findings. However, there is a need for further streamlining, notably through reinforced inter-agency cooperation and data sharing.

An interesting development is the establishment of an "advance" Customs station in the country of departure (i.e. Customs administration of the country of destination located in the country of departure). This is the case in Djibouti, where Ethiopian Customs have had for a long time a Customs house on the port of Djibouti, and there is also a strong demand on West African corridors for a similar approach. Thus, goods could be pre-cleared, and only subject to random or targeted checks on arrival at the final destination (and that could even take place, in certain cases, on the premises of the importers).

Another important aspect of border management in numerous regions is small scale border trade, which plays an important social and economic role, but requires specific processing considering the volumes of goods exchanged and the nature of the traders (which also generates gender-based issues). The lockdown period has also obviously severely affected this type of trade.

# Section 4

## c. Inter-agency cooperation

Experience shows that multiple agencies at the borders operate in isolation, when most of the data requirements could be pooled. While efforts have been made at consolidating inspections, documentary processing remains agency-specific. In addition, some of the inspection requirements (e.g taking of samples) could in some cases, be subject to supervision by the relevant agency, and delegated to Customs. Consolidation and rationalisation of inspection mandates could then be achieved.

# Section 4

## d.Staff reduction

The lockdown situation has caused significant reductions in staffing at Customs houses and border posts. Not all agencies have been able to maintain adequate staffing, and this has led to efforts in rationalising control operations. The issue is now the post-crisis handling of redundancies. However, as previously discussed, many activities which require frontline presence could be shifted to post-clearance control; this would require some re-training, but would serve the streamlining recommendations above.

This leads to a "smart corridor" approach, on which Webb Fontaine has been carrying-out research, notably in terms of data sharing. Further efforts should be made to reduce the number of stops along a corridor, and streamline controls. For example, scanned images could be shared, and through the use of Artificial Intelligence, differences between departure, en route, and arrival images could be analysed to detect possible manipulation of the load during the journey.

Similarly, large movements of people could be better monitored at land borders through the use of facial recognition, cross-border sharing of immigration data (if only to control abuse of simplified trade regimes subject to a maximum allowance), and electronic payment systems (e.g., using a smartphone) to avoid cash transactions. All of this would also contribute to reducing risks of contamination in an epidemic situation.

# Spotlight on Guinea

Guinea has had previous first-hand experience in crisis management. Experience in dealing with the Ebola crisis has helped in Guinea, as Customs staff were already prepared for contactless interventions. Detailed procedures manuals had been established for remote operations, these have proved highly effective when deploying contingency measures for the Covid-19 pandemic.

# Section 5

## Readiness for crisis

The Covid-19 crisis practically disrupted the supply chains overnight, yet, some countries were better prepared: After the 2010 Haiti earthquake, Customs were able to resume operations overnight, because the Asycuda backup servers were safe. Guinea acquired significant experience during the Ebola epidemic and Guinean Customs staff were well prepared for emergency situations, which shows how past situations have created a better adaptability. However, this was not always the case in other countries, although many rapidly adjusted to new circumstances (e.g Benin Customs developed in a very short time, with the help of Webb Fontaine, completely remote communication facilities). This again highlights an emergency situation plan should be prepared to deal with possible future accidents. It also indicates the importance of crisis plans, policies and procedural approaches need to be prepared, evaluated, and reviewed on a frequent basis.

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a.  Contingency procedures need to be put in place

b.  Technical solutions must be designed

c.  Standard operating procedures

d.  Preparedness implies a mindset

e.  Customs should be involved in any emergency situation

f.  Emergency infrastructure should be made available

# Section 5

## a. Contigency procedures need to be put in place

The objective is to ensure immediate recovery (to maintain supply chain security and collect all necessary data for future processing and clearance), and to maintain continuity in communications. Even if revenue collection is partially disrupted, it still should be assessed, and collected later.

## b. Technical solutions must be designed

The most obvious approach is to have an emergency recovery centre, as the Haiti example has shown, to keep at least a historical record of transactions. Also, staff should be trained in moving rapidly from a normal situation to emergency operations. This would be significantly enhanced through a standardised approach based on experience-sharing between different countries.

# Section 5

## c. Standard operating procedures

A number of international agencies or national governments (for example UNCTAD or the World Bank, or Guinea Government) have produced guidelines on disaster environments and recovery. These should be mainstreamed and made available to all staff.

## d. Preparedness implied a mindset

Periodic exercises (on the model of Army Staff College "sandbox" simulation exercises) would raise awareness and highlight deficiencies.

# Section 5

## e. Customs should be involved in any emergency situation

There is ample experience with emergency and post-conflict situations where Customs were only involved at a later stage. For example, after the 2004 Sumatra tsunami, large quantities of foreign aid poured into Indonesia (notably mechanical equipment), but were diverted because Customs were not initially involved in the contingency supply procedure, in particular for documenting imports. Similarly, post-conflict Yugoslavia Customs issues were only addressed long after the diplomatic agreements, and this resulted in an unmanageable border re-organisation. Another example was recently the supply by Webb Fontaine of emergency medical aid to some countries, but in a few cases the equipment could not be swiftly released by Customs due to the absence of technical controllers.

## f. Emergency infrastructure should be available
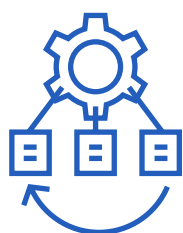
Natural disasters (or political violence) often destroy border or clearance infrastructure. This makes it difficult to restore normal operations. It could be worth preparing plans for contingency infrastructure, for example pre-equipped containers that could be deployed rapidly at key border points. These could be specialised (office accommodation, telecommunications, computer servers, power) and assembled according to local needs. Under normal circumstances, they would be securely stored. Thus, Customs physical presence could be re-established at short notice in the event of a major infrastructure meltdown.

*Webb Fontaine has supported accommodation and equipment needs in remote locations, so this experience should be further enhanced.*

An immediate poll carried out on the audience shows that only 54 percent of the attendees consider there is currently good availability of back-up infrastructure, equipment, and telecom in emergencies in their country.

# What conclusions can be drawn

The Covid-19 crisis has shown the remarkable adaptability of Customs administrations which has contributed to maintaining supply chains and revenue mobilisation. Customs have continually shown that they can cope with emergency crises and maintain operations in a downgraded environment. It is essential that this flexibility be maintained, supported and enhanced.

It has also revealed "historical" Customs procedures – some of which are several centuries old – are failsafe, and still adapted to the current environment, especially with the aid of IT solutions.

Unfortunately, many countries were not prepared – with a few exceptions – to such a crisis, and while their Customs administrations reacted soundly to the situation, other agencies may not have been as well prepared; there is an obvious need for disaster recovery protocols and procedures, as the countries reviewed did not always have the optimal environment to be able to cope with the pandemic crisis. The crisis has provided the opportunity to test and validate new approaches, and these should now be mainstreamed in regular operations. Many improvised measures were successful, but may have caused long-lasting disruption (e.g waivers of duty payment, or post-clearance company audits, which may require a long time to clear after the crisis is over).

This shows that sharing knowledge and experience is crucial. While contingency reaction needs to be envisaged, new and permanent, business models need to be developed to make full advantage of digitalisation, remote operations, and a new approach to risk management.

Another lesson learnt was the need to take advantage of regional connectivity, with data interchange, and streamlining of control procedures.

This experience revealed that procedures were sufficiently robust to cope with an emergency situation, but many reforms, often recommended by the international community and featuring international best practices, could be safely deployed, and mainstreamed even after the Covid-19 crisis. Webb Fontaine has always supported these initiatives, and offers a full range of technical achievement to guarantee continuity in business, and also provides its expertise to adapt administrative and institutional structures and policies to the new post Covid-19 environment.

# Questions from the audience...

# Social distancing and paperless transactions

# 01.

**ARE WE CONSIDERING THE USE OF BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY WITH EDI FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND SHARING OF INFORMATION?**

Webb Fontaine is building extensions for its systems to access share ledgers containing EDI files instead of traditional databases, this applies particularly for its Port Community System where container prearrival information is now available as part of a global supply chain blockchain program.

# 02.

**DIFFICULTY IN INTRODUCING CONTACTLESS AND PAPERLESS TRANSACTIONS IN CERTAIN COUNTRIES, IN PARTICULAR IN WEST AFRICA.**

It is obvious that there is a cultural dimension, but possibly more historic than sociological. The examples of Benin (and other countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Guinea) show that the situation may change rapidly.

# 03.

**WHAT ARE THE PRECONDITIONS TO ESTABLISH A CUSTOMS HOUSE WITH NO VISITORS?**

**IN COUNTRIES SUCH AS GUINEA, VISITS TO THE CUSTOMS HOUSE SEEM TO BE ENCOURAGED BY CUSTOMS.**

**WHAT ARE THE MEASURES RECOMMENDED BY WEBB FONTAINE TO ASSIST SUCH COUNTRIES?**

Our applications are designed for remote operations, even more so in the single window context. There is a learning curve for eliminating face-to-face contact in most cases, but as rightly pointed-out by the audience, this also requires commitment at state level. Bénin is a good example of how this issue needs to be addressed from an overarching perspective.

# 04.

### WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES HINDERING MENA COUNTRIES TO ADOPT C2C DATA EXCHANGE ELECTRONICALLY?

While this question is addressed separately later on, Morocco has adopted an ambitious B2C model, largely followed in Tunisia (Tunisia Trade Net), Oman, Saudi Arabia (e-TIR), Jordan (electronic approvals). Documents can be submitted electronically, some documentary requirements are temporarily waived, and in most cases, the need for original forms is ignored.

# 05.

### REDUCING PAPER BASED SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS IS A GOOD START, BUT WOULDN'T IT BE POSSIBLE TO REMOVE MOST OF THOSE SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS, REPLACING THEM BY PROPER INTERFACING BETWEEN AGENCIES, ALLOWING CUSTOMS TO VERIFY INFORMATION ONLY WHEN NEEDED, DIRECTLY WITH THE RELEVANT BODY INSTEAD OF REQUIRING SO MANY COPIES OF SO MANY PERMITS AND LICENSES?

This is a topic that is currently discussed.  See the Oman example. In Bahrain, licenses and permits references are entered as mandatory attached documents of the Customs declaration and are electronically verified, especially their conformance with product and company, remaining values on quotas.

# 06.

### CONSUMERS ARE LIKELY, IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT, TO PREFER E-TRADING TO PHYSICAL VISITS TO SHOPS AND INSTITUTIONS. WHAT IS WEBB FONTAINE'S APPROACH TO E-COMMERCE?

This is an axis for research, which implies end-to-end integration, from the country of origin to the point of destination. Postal and Express courier services are already available in our applications, but it would be worth encouraging supply chain integration, along with brokerage services. An option could be to prepare import clearance from the country of export, using an international brokerage module.

»

# 07.

**MOST SME TRADERS DON'T COME WITH BASIC DOCUMENTS LIKE INVOICES. THEY ARE NOT WORKING NOW BECAUSE OF BORDER CLOSURES.**

**WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD AFTER COVID?**

The current disruption is an opportunity to streamline some processes (see above), but Customs still need to process imports and to ensure that data provided by the traders is accurate. However, the need for physical documents can be replaced with electronic data in most cases. The specific processing of cross-border small trade is also discussed further down.

# 08.

**IN THE CASE OF AEOS AND SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR, WHAT COULD BE THE OBSTACLES TO DIGITALISING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ADMINISTRATION AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR?**

Indeed there could be a number of obstacles : (i) Lack of adequate or limited political support to impose reforms; (ii) Weak leadership of the official in charge of these; (iii) Failure by the parties involved to understand the purposes of such reforms, leading to lack of commitment; (iv) An unsuitable reform path not matching the real needs of the parties involved; and (v) Absence of, or weakness in, communication on the reforms.

# 09.

**HOW DO WE CONVINCE REGULATORY AGENCIES TO ACCEPT ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS BECAUSE THE DELAYS RESULT FROM WAITING FOR HARD COPIES?**

This is happening despite enactment on laws on electronic transactions.

This appears to be an organisational issue that needs to be addressed at national level.

# **Tele**comm unications

# 10.

## WHAT MEASURES SHOULD BE TAKEN IN COUNTRIES WITH WEAK OR UNRELIABLE TELECOM INFRASTRUCTURES?

It obviously depends on how "weak" these infrastructures are.  Even in the absence of good telecommunication systems, it could be an option for Customs to implement a Trade Portal with access to a specific help desk on Customs clearance issues, not related to IT support,  interactive communication systems embedded in the software. However, if the network is down, distance communication will not be available. This is where contingency measures become useful:  As discussed later in the event, reduced interface and control, allowing goods in and clearing them later, postponing payments and audits, can offer a temporary relief.

# Single **Window**

# 11.

## WHAT IS THE PROGRESS OR PROGNOSIS ON THE SINGLE WINDOW?

Rather than implement a country-specific customised single window, which could end-up in reinforcing current practices, would it not be more effective to offer a standard product that would compel countries to adopt best practice standards?

*Single windows and other reform packages are offered at the request of Governments, and need to be customised, yet they all incorporate international best practices and standards.  It is not the role of a service provider to impose reforms, but to suggest approaches that have proved effective in other countries.*

# Modern
## isation

# 12.

**COMPANIES SUCH AS WEBB FONTAINE ASSIST GOVERNMENTS IN THEIR MODERNISATION EFFORT BY IMPLEMENTING SPECIFIC TOOLS SUCH AS ELECTRONIC PAYMENT, SINGLE WINDOWS, ETC.**

**HOWEVER, THIS REQUIRES STRONG COMMITMENT FROM THE AUTHORITIES. CAN THIS BE ACHIEVED?**

Government commitment is definitely the key aspect. There is a learning curve, and authorities usually realise that comprehensive solutions also require institutional reforms. Performance measurement is also a way to show early results of the modernisation plans.

# 13.

**CAN FACILITATION MEASURES BE IMPLEMENTED WITHOUT A STRONG POLITICAL WILL?**

As discussed above, political commitment is essential, otherwise reforms will end as simple window-dressing.

# Risk manage
## –ment and
## control
## policies

# 14.

**IN SOME COUNTRIES, VALUATION CHECKS ON IMPORTED GOODS LEAD TO DISPUTES, BECAUSE OF OCCASIONAL TECHNICAL LIMITATIONS OF CUSTOMS IN DETERMINING CUSTOMS VALUES.**

**WHAT WOULD BE THE SOLUTIONS, IN A DIGITALISED ENVIRONMENT, TO DEAL WITH THIS?**

Webb Fontaine offers and application called « ValueWebb » which provides guidance on values in real time, the application is also left for Customs use after the valuation contract has expired.  One of its assets is the capability to establish classification using machine learning trained models, it also offers values on historical data.

# 15.

**DEMATERIALISATION OF SUPPORT DOCUMENTS IS A GREAT THING, AND SIMPLIFIED PROCESSES SUCH AS BLUE OR GREEN LANES ALSO, HOWEVER, WE OFTEN FIND THAT THE PROCESS TO APPLY FOR THESE SCHEMES (AEOS, BLUE LANE, ETC.) USUALLY INVOLVES TEDIOUS PROCESSES AND GREAT AMOUNT OF SUPPORT DOCUMENTS, DOESN'T IT DEFEAT THE PURPOSE?**

There are two issues here: (i) Change management, which requires the involvement of the authorities, and (ii) adjustment of computerised procedures in such a way that only disputed transactions, as identified by the system, will be reported to Customs officials, the rest being cleared and released (subject to payment) by default.

# 16.

**IS THERE A SIMPLER PROCESS TO IMPLEMENT AEO PROGRAMS IN THE CONTEXT OF CRISIS?**

The official AEO accreditation process is largely driven by the US-led CT-Pat, and does include numerous requirements. However, simplified formats for the scheme have been in wide use in European countries for the past sixty years, so similar initiatives could be taken in other countries.

»

# 17.

**WHEN IT COMES TO LANES AND RISK ANALYSIS, IT IS OFTEN OBSERVED THAT COUNTRIES APPLY A "RED" STATUS BY DEFAULT FOR UNKNOWN COMPANIES.**

**IT IS NICE TO SPEAK ABOUT REWARDING GOOD PARTNERS, BUT IF IT TAKES TOO LONG TO DO SO, EVERY NEW COMPANY WILL BE FLAGGED AS RED FOR A LONG TIME, AND SOMETIME FOR SO LONG THAT THEY WILL NEVER SEE THE POINT OF COMPLYING WITH RULES.**

This is absolutely correct. If there is an overarching culture of control by default, the implication is that "all importers are crooks", and there is no incentive for complying operators. Besides, Customs administrations should realise that 100 percent compliance is impossible to achieve, so there should be a level of "acceptable" risk. However, there are numerous cases where Customs did apply risk management and waive inspection, and subsequent downstream checks carried-out by other agencies revealed fraud, for which Customs officers were blamed and sometimes even prosecuted. It should be noted that the notion of "acceptable risk" is basically a Customs concept, and other agencies still, for many reasons, apply a concept of blanket inspection. This may evolve in the current pandemic situation, where a concept of acceptable sanitary risk has emerged.

# Inspections

## 18.

**REGARDING INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION FOR PHYSICAL EXAMINATION, WOULD IT NOT JUSTIFY SOME FORM OF « REMOTE » PARTICIPATION? FOR EXAMPLE, AN OFFICIAL ON-SITE COULD USE A SMARTPHONE OR TABLET, WHEN OTHER PERSONNEL WOULD BE WATCHING REMOTELY, AND PROVIDE GUIDANCE FOR THE EXAMINATION.**

It is an interesting option.  It all depends on whether the inspection is purely "visual, or if it implies detailed and technical examination. However, this could be envisaged, notably for sampling protocols. Remote inspection with some degree of augmented reality is certainly a facility that could be used.

## 19.

**COULD WEBB FONTAINE PUT IN PLACE A WEB-BASED TOOL FOR SECURITY ASSESSMENT OF GOODS DECLARED, THUS AVOIDING ON-SITE INSPECTIONS?**

This requires a comprehensive approach, but is totally relevant in the context of corridor management.  Pascal Minvielle described possibilities of using Artificial Intelligence in relation to interpretation of scanned images, enabling the detection of abnormal shifts in the location of goods with a container throughout a journey, thus pointing at possible manipulations.

# Border
## management

### 20.

**IF YOU DO ALL THE PROCESSING ONLINE, HOW TO CHECK PHYSICALLY THE GOODS THAT ENTER IN A NATIONAL TERRITORY IN TERMS OF LAW?**

It then relies on data previously collected (for example under a "smart corridor" approach, where goods and conveyances are periodically checked along the route, as long as there is a mutual recognition agreement between countries, and that checking protocols are unified. The principle would be that standards are adjusted to the specifications of the strictest country, and are mutually acceptable.

### 21.

**IN THE CASE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF MULTI-AGENCIES TASKS FORCES, WHAT WOULD BE THE BEST WAY TO DESIGNATE THE LEADING AGENCY? SINCE WITHOUT LEADERSHIP IT WILL NOT WORK**

The major issue is between Customs and Immigration/Border Police authorities. It has proved to be a real problem in particular

"transition countries". Some countries have developed coordination structures (border and regional committees, inter-agency task forces, etc.) but a lot depends on political will and the respective influence of major border agencies.

### 22.

**HOW TO MANAGE TARGETING OF PASSENGERS, WITHOUT CROSSING TOO MANY LINES WHEN IT COMES TO DATA PRIVACY AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT?**

This is a fine balance that needs to be found, but bearing in mind that border control is always intrusive to some extent, and States have regalian powers governing cross-border movements. Therefore, the answer sits with national data protection and freedom of movement legislation.

# 23.

**IN CERTAIN COUNTRIES, REDUCED MANPOWER AT BORDER STATIONS COULD LEAD TO LOSS OF INTELLIGENCE SOURCES AND A REDUCTION IN EFFICIENCY, FOLLOWED BY INCREASED FRAUD.**

Again, the EU example has shown that Customs inland mobile enforcement, when appropriately supported by intelligence-based operations, was far more cost/effective than static border control.

# 24.

**WOULD REORGANISING CUSTOMS MISSIONS LEAD TO REDUNDANCIES?**

International and historic experience shows this is not the case, as Customs staff have an exceptional ability to adjust to new work conditions. The procedures may change, but the broad approach (i.e., securing borders, revenue, and security) remains the same.

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# Scanning

# 25.

**HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THE EFFECTS OF SCANNERS ON PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS CONSIDERING THEIR SENSITIVE NATURES?**

Scanning and verification protocols are adjusted to the type of goods under examination.

# 26.

**IS IT ALWAYS APPROPRIATE TO SYSTEMATICALLY SCAN ALL CONTAINERS, EXPORT AND IMPORT, AS IS THE CASE IN GUINEA, AND THEN PERFORM A PHYSICAL INSPECTION?**

**IS THIS COMMON PRACTICE? IT DOES SIGNIFICANTLY SLOW DOWN RELEASE.**

This was answered by Major Diawara. Normally, there should be risk-based selectivity for x-ray scan, and, if an anomaly is detected, for a more detailed physical inspection. International experience shows that targeted checks are far more effective, when well prepared, and intelligence-led, than "blanket" inspections.

# 27.

**WHAT OF THE ACTUAL EXAMINATION PROCESS (PHYSICAL EXAMINATION, SCANNING, ETC.)?**

**HOW ARE CUSTOMS OFFICERS CURRENTLY MANAGING THE PROCESS? THE CURRENT STATUS CREATED (BY COVID-19) SHOULD HAVE HAD AN IMPACT, BUT HOW HUGE ARE THE DIVIDENDS FROM THE CHANGE?**

**GENERAL QUESTION REGARDING PAPERLESS PROCESSES IN RELATION TO WHAT WE ARE FACING CURRENTLY**

The entire Customs clearance process needs to be reviewed, and not only in light of the Covid-19 crisis. Tools provided by Webb Fontaine offer that possibility (including institutional reform inputs), as they are aligned to international best practice and standards.

»

# E-payment

# 28.

**HOW DOES PAYMENT IMPACT THE PROCESS IN COUNTRIES WHERE E-PAYMENT IS NOT YET AVAILABLE?**

Existing mechanisms do provide for delivery before payment, if adequate security is provided.

# 29.

**REGARDING REMOTE PAYMENT MECHANISMS, COUNTRIES LIKE CÔTE D'IVOIRE HAVE INTRODUCED GSM PAYMENT OPTIONS. WOULD THIS KIND OF OPTION HAVE A FUTURE IN AFRICA IN COMING YEARS?**

Indeed. The use of GSM technology is a low-cost solution, that is envisaged also for small scale cross border trade.

# 30.

**WHAT WOULD BE THE STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING E-PAYMENT IN CERTAIN AFRICAN COUNTRIES, WHERE FEW HAVE BANK ACCOUNTS?**

A whole range of payment options should be offered, including payment using smartphones.

# Health
# issues

## 31.

**EXPERTS ARE EXPECTING FOOD SUPPLY DISRUPTIONS AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES SHORTAGES IN A POST COVID ENVIRONMENT. THIS WILL LEAD TO LARGE CROSS-BORDER TRADE IN THESE HUMANITARIAN OR SEMI-HUMANITARIAN SHIPMENTS. HOW SHOULD CUSTOMS DEAL WITH THIS ENVIRONMENT?**

For specific emergency supplies, countries have introduced emergency relief provisions (for example, waiving import duties and accelerating the clearance process).

## 32.

**COVID IS BRINGING TO FRONT NATIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY ROLE. WHAT ARE THE CHANNELS IN WHICH CUSTOMS AND NATIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY CAN COOPERATE IN THIS RESPECT?**

**IS THE SINGLE WINDOW STILL A VIABLE PLATFORM? IN PARTICULAR HOW CAN CUSTOMS AND HEALTH COOPERATE FOR VETTING OF PASSENGERS?**

Cooperation was always strong between Customs and health authorities (in the past, Customs were usually designated quarantine officers when ships landed). The current crisis would be the opportunity to strengthen the links between the two agencies, as a number of checks could be delegated to Customs officials.

## 33.

**I WOULD LIKE TO ASK THE PANEL WHETHER THEY BELIEVE THAT THE EXEMPTIONS AND/OR FAST-TRACKING BEING PROVIDED FOR IMPORTS OF COVID19-RELATED GOODS POSE A SIGNIFICANT THREAT OF ABUSE AND FRAUD?**

**IF SO, ARE THEY AWARE OF MEASURES BEING TAKEN TO TACKLE THIS THREAT, OR MEASURES THEY THINK COULD BE TAKEN, PARTICULARLY IN TERMS OF DIGITAL SOLUTIONS?**

There is definitely a threat of abuse. Some countries (Guinea) have introduced protocols for handling these imports.

# Thanks to
# Our Panel

**DR. JAWWAD UWAIS AGHA – FORMER HEAD OF PAKISTAN CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATION**

Member Customs Operations, Federal Board of Revenue, Pakistan. Supervising the collection of 50% of State's total revenues & handling USD 90 billion worth of cross border trade. Coordinated the 'Customs Five year Strategic Plan' with World Bank / UK AID support, reorganized and redeployed Customs field formations on functional lines, prepared the National Anti-smuggling Strategy, achieved major progress in development of the 'Pakistan Single Window' program. Earlier as 'Directorate General of Internal Audit' and the 'Input, Output Co-efficient Organization' and Collector of Customs at all major ports in Karachi and Gawadar. Internationally he worked as 'Customs Advisor' in World Bank funded Emergency Customs and Trade Facilitation Project with Ministry of Finance in Afghanistan from 2005 to 2007 supporting modernization of the Afghan Customs Department. To his credit are a number of studies on organizational growth and trade. He has represented Pakistan as the delegate at the WCO / ADB conferences and meetings.

**AHMED AL KHATTAB – ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OF CUSTOMS AND LOGISTICS IN THE AQABA SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE AUTHORITY**

Ahmed Al Khattab is Assistant Commissioner of Customs and logistics in the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, where he has served in numerous capacities since 2001.

Mr. Al Khattab has extensive experience in the field of trade and transport facilitation and customs control. He is a member of the Technical Committee for export control and dual-use goods and is head of the Supervisory Committee for assessing Aqaba Container Terminal (ACT) indicators. He also serves as Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC) for transportation and logistics.

In addition, Mr. Al Khattab is a representative of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone to the National Committee for Trade and Transport Facilitation and serves as a representative of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone to the National Committee for the Control of Chemical Substances. He holds a B.Sc. in General Adminstration from Yarmouk University.

## MAJOR KARAMOKOBA DIAWARA – GUINEAN CUSTOMS INSPECTOR

Currently acting as liaison officer to the Foreign Trade Single Window of Guinea, he was formerly the Customs representative in the Private Investment Promotion Agency, where he also participated in the Cost of Doing Business task force. Before that, he was the commanding officer of a Customs enforcement unit in Conakry, and had various postings in Customs headquarters (international relations, Post-clearance a udit, IT and Public relations). Major Diawara holds a Master's degree from the University of Le Havre and a post-graduate diploma in Customs classification from the Belgian Customs Academy.

## MICHEL ZARNOWIECKI – DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS – WEBB FONTAINE GROUP

Former director of Customs services in France, then joined the IMF's Fiscal Affairs Department, and later joined the World Bank as senior regional coordinator for Customs and Border Affairs, and worked in over 100 countries. After retiring, M. Zarnowiecki was hired by Webb Fontaine as director of institutional reforms, and participated in a number of WF projects, including Côte d'Ivoire and Benin. Mr. Zarnowiecki studied at Paris University (Political Sciences and Faculty of Law), and specialised for PhD in Public Law.

## TAPIO NAULA – VP, TRADE FACILITATION AT OMAN LOGISTICS CENTER WITHIN ASYAD

Tapio has worked with a number of international development organizations such as African Development Bank, World Bank, USAID, GIZ, UNIDO and the EU in more than 20 countries. He has made his earlier career in logistics services industry and research in Finland, USA, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. He is a co-designer of the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index.

## SERGE MANOUAN – DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE FOREIGN TRADE SINGLE WINDOW OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Guy Serge Manouan is the Director General of the Foreign Trade Single Window of Côte d'Ivoire. He has 25 years of managerial experience, largely in Africa, in international groups dedicated to securing Customs revenue and promoting Trade facilitation measures. He holds a Masters degree from Abidjan Cocody University and is a former vice-president of the International Students' Society for Economic and Trade Sciences, in charge of international exchanges. He also holds a degree from the Paris Sorbonne Business School.

**FRANK FERGUSON – CUSTOMS CONSULTANT**

Has more than 40 years' experience in the area of Customs and border masnagement. Originally from the UK he was the Deputy Chief of Investigation (national level) in British Customs. He went on to spend 14 years as a Team Leader managing large and complex Customs and border management programmes in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Indonesia (ASEAN) and Moldova. Shorter term assignments included Countries as diverse as Russia, Nigeria, Albania and Kosovo. In 2011 he was appointed the Director General of the Montserrat Customs and Revenue Service in the Eastern Caribbean. He has spent the past five years working in sub-Saharan Africa including two years as the Personal Adviser to the Commissioner General of the Sierra Leone National Revenue Authority.



**STEPHEN ADEKUNLE OLOYEDE – COMPTROLLER RISK MANAGEMENT AT THE NIGERIA CUSTOMS SERVICE**

Previously he was in charge of the revenue seat in Onne Port (PH) Nigeria. Stephen Oloyede also participated in training sessions organised by the AFRITAC IMF on Risk Management.



**APEH FATEH – ASSISTANT COMPTROLLER FOR ICT AND HEAD OF THE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM FOR THE NIGERIA CUSTOMS SERVICE**

He has served as a member of the WCO working group on e-commerce and of the working group of the African Union Commission ( AUC) on the interconnectivity of African Customs Systems.

## ERIC AKOUTE – CHARTERED ACCOUNTANT, DIRECTOR OF STUDIES AND IN CHARGE OF SUPPORT TO INVESTMENT PROJECTS AT BENIN'S AGENCY FOR THE PROMOTION OF INVESTMENT AND EXPORTS (APIEX)

He was previously responsible for reforms in the Presidential Office, and contributed to modernising various administrative audit bodies, the Investment code, the Governance Law on public enterprises, the Law on promoting micro and small and medium enterprises, and multiple facilitation-oriented business climate reforms.

As a specialist in Public-Private Partnership contracts, Eric Akoute has an experience of 14 years in audit and advisory capacities, which he acquired while working for Mazars and then EY in Paris. Prior to joining the Benin Presidential Office, and then APIEx, Eric Akoute was mission director with EY Paris, and subsequently expert Government account auditor and member of the public-private partnership unit at the French State Court of Accounts.

## MAJOR RAOUF MALEHOSSOU – COMMANDING OFFICER OF A MAJOR CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT DIVISION IN BENIN CUSTOMS

Prior to that, he was the Chief of Staff of the Director General of Customs. Major Malehossou is also secretary to both the Customs institutional reforms task force and the Benin Government's business climate working party. He is a visiting lecturer at Abomey National University, and since 2016 a member of the World Customs Organisation SAFE work group. Raouf Malehossou is a Knight of the Order of Benin.

## PASCAL MINVIELLE – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TECHNOLOGY & PROJECTS IMPLEMENTATION – WEBB FONTAINE GROUP

Pascal is at the heart of Webb Fontaine's technological innovation strategy. Based in Dubai, UAE, he leads the largest Research and Development centres in the industry in France, Armenia, Philippines and Ukraine.

With 30 years' experience in Customs automation worldwide, Pascal is challenging industry practices to create innovative solutions for trade facilitation.

Since 2008 with Webb Fontaine, he has been instrumental in successful project implementations, working with key Government officials, Customs leaders as well as Webb Fontaine teams in the field.

Before Webb Fontaine, Pascal spent 20 years in Geneva at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) with the core designers of the Asycuda system (Automated System for Customs Data), a best seller in Customs automation.

Pascal graduated from a French "Grande Ecole" in the field of Computer Science & Applied Mathematics in 1986.

## ALIOUNE CISS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SALES – WEBB FONTAINE GROUP

Alioune is key to the strategic drive, focus and direction of the Webb Fontaine brand and is assisting governments torespond to digital disruption and accelerate innovation. Managing world leading Trade reform digitalisation projects across the globe with key Governmental partners.

Alioune is thought leader within the Trade and Customs field, strategically bringing together new technology and ideas to practically implement and change mindsets. He has managed and delivered some of Webb Fontaine's most ground breaking projects such as smart fraud detection for the Nigeria Customs Service.

Alioune has partaken in many panel discussions with the World Customs Organisation, United Nations, AFRITAC (IMF Regional Center for West Africa), WB/IFC and African Shippers Council Organisation.

Prior to his work at Webb Fontaine, Alioune spent 24 years at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development where he was for the last 10 years the ASYCUDA Project Coordinator for Africa and the Middle East.

## SAMY ZAYANI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SALES – WEBB FONTAINE GROUP

Samy is the driving force behind the growth of Webb Fontaine. His experience in marketing coupled with sales is key to the development and expansion of the brand across new markets and regions. Managing the development, commercialization and deployment of industry leading projects worldwide including key Reform work with Benin and the Cote d'ivoire Government.

Before joining Webb Fontaine, Samy worked at Procter & Gamble, which enabled him to acquire a solid background in marketing and product strategy. Prior to this, Samy was a member of the United Nations' ASYCUDA team, where he was instrumental in the development of ASYCUDAWorld. He took part in implementing the ASYCUDAWorld platform in several countries, including Côte d'Ivoire.
Samy holds a Master's Degree in communications systems from the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland.

**IBRAHIMA M. DIALLO, DIRECTOR OF PROJECTS IMPLEMENTATION – WEBB FONTAINE BENIN**

Ibrahima joined Webb Fontaine in 2019 and leads the Benin project where WF implements a Single Window for Foreign Trade and Institutional Reforms to modernize the Beninese Customs. Before joining Webb Fontaine, M. DIALLO was Project Director of the Single Window Multimodal Foreign Trade of Congo (DRC).

M. Diallo holds a Master in Management of Organizations and Information Systems from Paris Dauphine University and has 12 years of experience in digital transformation in various industries.



**OPE BABALOLA, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF WEBB FONTAINE NIGERIA**

Ope is key to the strategic development of Webb Fontaine Nigeria, working with the Nigeria Customs Service to implement world leading solutions and reforms. Managing the development and implementation of multiple projects in Nigeria to facilitate and optimise Trade.

Ope is a Chartered Management Accountant and started his career with HSBC Bank in the City of London, moving later to the London Stock Exchange.

For several years he has worked in business development and management across Africa, the USA and South East Asia, re-engineering and enhancing business productivity in a variety of enterprises. His experience spans organisations of all sizes and industries. The last several years have seen him working almost exclusively in trade and commerce across African countries, and promoting inter-African business in the digital era.



**ARA SHAMIRZYAN, DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT WEBB FONTAINE GROUP**

Ara is instrumental in the development of Webb Fontaine's product innovation and development. Managing some of the largest research and development centers in the industry across Armenia, France, Phillipines and Ukraine. He brings together a depth of industry and technology experience to make ground breaking ideas into reality.

Ara has previously worked as a lead developer in Trade facilitation at Webb Fontaine since 2005.

Ara holds a Master's Degreee in Computer and Information Science from the American University of Armenia.

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