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Contents

Regional Updates

Signing Ceremony Operationalizes SIGMAT	2
ECOWAS Hosts 3rd Meeting of RTFC	3
TFWA Supports Mission to Burkina Faso and Togo	4

Country-level Updates

Burkina Faso	5
Côte d'Ivoire	6
Mali	7
Nigeria	9
Senegal	10
Togo	11

About the TFWA Program

The Trade Facilitation West Africa (TFWA) Program is an initiative driven by multiple development partners that aims to improve existing trade facilitation measures in West Africa. The program strives to reduce the time and cost of trade borne by the private sector, especially by improving the movement of goods along selected corridors, and supporting small-scale traders – including women and other key stakeholders – with trade facilitation reforms and programs.

The TFWA Program brings together key development partners, including European Union, USAID, Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Government of the Federal Republic of

Germany to support countries in the region and regional bodies (the ECOWAS and UEMOA Commissions) in the implementation of a combination of targeted interventions and measures.

The TFWA Program is managed by the World Bank Group and the German Development Cooperation Agency (GIZ) – the program's implementing partners – with strategic oversight and guidance provided by a Steering Committee, chaired by the ECOWAS Commission and supported by the UEMOA Commission as deputy chair.

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Signing Ceremony Operationalizes SIGMAT

On June 9th, Director Generals of Customs from ECOWAS Member States signed a memorandum of understanding and the framework instruction to deploy SIGMAT across the region. The operationalization of SIGMAT is an outstanding achievement for the region, and gained a lot of coverage across media platforms. The event also marked a major milestone for the TFWA Program, which has spent several years supporting this move toward interconnectivity of customs agencies.

SIGMAT is a digital system that was developed to improve customs interconnectivity in West Africa. Launched in 2019, SIGMAT has already been operationalized in Togo, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Benin and recently, four more countries—Mali, Guinea, Senegal and Ghana—followed suit.

This monumental occasion is a testament to Member States' commitment to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of transit procedures. With SIGMAT, countries can simplify transit procedures, making it easier to track goods, improve the detection of fraud, and secure customs revenues. Additionally, the implementation of SIGMAT will greatly benefit key economic actors such as small-scale, cross-border traders by reducing costs and delays, ultimately making trade easier, cheaper, and safer for them.

In his remarks, Akou Mawussé Afidenyigba, Director of Cabinet at the Togolese Ministry of Economy and Finance stated: "SIGMAT contributes to the implementation of the major instruments of the World Customs Organization and the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, in that it ensures computerized management of transit on an international scale, and thus drives forward the development of a single transit system. The SIGMAT project is designed to implement the major instruments of the World Customs Organization and the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, by providing computerized transit management on an international scale, thus giving a real boost to the dematerialization of customs procedures."

Mr. Salifou Tiemtore, Commission Director of the Customs Union and Taxation at the ECOWAS Commission, which has worked diligently to support the adoption of SIGMAT, added that an efficient transit system contributes enormously to the facilitation of cross-border movements of goods.

The SIGMAT pilot is expected to commence on July 10, followed by an evaluation meeting on October 10. The TFWA Program celebrates this progress and is excited to continue supporting connectivity in the region.



ECOWAS Commission Hosts 3rd Meeting of the RTFC



The third meeting of the Regional Trade Facilitation Committee (RTFC) was held on 27 to 29 of March in Accra. With support from the TFWA Program, 45 participants attended the meeting, including Hon. Michael Baafi, Ghana's Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry; Mr. Kolawole Sofola, Acting Director of Trade at the ECOWAS Commission; and Mr. Abas Djalo, Secretary General at the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Guinea Bissau; among others.

Over the very productive three-day session, experts and other key stakeholders reviewed and discussed the implementation of regional trade facilitation reforms, addressed trade barriers, and provided recommendations to improve the free movement of goods in the region, including:

- Taking advantage of the AfCFTA to improve intra-regional trade.
- Implementing mechanisms to deepen collaboration between the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) Task Force and the RTFC in ensuring the full implementation of the ETLS across ECOWAS Member States.
- Creating mechanisms to report and eliminate non-tariff barriers that continue to hinder intra-regional trade, especially for MSMEs and small traders.

Additionally, the experts discussed the ECOWAS Non-Tariff Barrier (NTB) Elimination Policy and the Regional Trade and Transport Facilitation Strategy, which are expected to improve intra-regional trade.

The ECOWAS Commission established the RTFC to enhance the coordination, cooperation, and monitoring of all international, regional, and national trade facilitation initiatives. The TFWA Program is happy to have supported the RTFC's launch and ongoing work.



TFWA Supports Mission to Burkina Faso and Togo



This quarter, the TFWA Program undertook a mission to conduct a SIGMAT evaluation along the Lome - Ouagadougou trade corridor. This mission focused on meeting key trade facilitation stakeholders, including customs officials, border agencies, chambers of commerce, freight forwarders, transporters, and truck drivers in Burkina Faso and Togo.

In both countries, stakeholders recognized the positive impacts of SIGMAT, which include increased customs revenue, reduced fraud, and time savings. Some issues were also addressed to take full advantage of the mission while improving the SIGMAT rollout. Notably, this included coordinated working hours of customs and other agencies on both sides of the Cinkanse joint border post, internet connection, regular training for customs officers and freight forwarders, and extension of the SIGMAT declaration to new routes and destinations, mainly due to the current security situation.

Thanks to SIGMAT, customs services of two or more countries of the sub-region can instantly exchange real-time, electronic/automated information relating to goods in transit, helping to facilitate and revitalize trade between ECOWAS Member States. The use of SIGMAT reduces transit time and costs, making it easier to track goods, increase transparency and fight fraud.



Burkina Faso



Burkina Faso Launches OCOD



After months of anticipation, Burkina Faso's Observatory for the Customs Clearance Operations Celerity (OCOD) has officially launched. The ceremony, which was presided over by the Minister for Transport, Urban Mobility and Road Safety, gathered key stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, including freight forwarders, customs officers, traders and transporters to witness the landmark moment.

The OCOD was set up at the initiative of Customs and the Freight Forwarders and Customs Brokers Association (APTCDA) to monitor the speed of customs clearance operations with a view to contributing to the fluidity of traffic, particularly at borders, dry ports and airports. The body is also responsible for:

- Ensuring customs compliance — with the commitments made by Customs and the private sector in the context of improving customs clearance operations— for various types of goods (as well as individuals); and
- Handling public complaints regarding customs clearance processes.

In the months leading up to the launch, several key steps were successfully completed including:

- In November 2022, a Protocol on Extra Legal Work between the Private Sector and Customs was signed, covering the OCOD operations, the collection of overtime costs (TS) and the commitments of each party.
- The Director General of Customs signed the Decision appointing members to the Observatory and;
- The decree establishing the OCOD-BF was signed by the Minister of Economy and Finance in December 2022 (the Observatory became effective on June 1st, 2023).

With the OCOD now fully operational, time, complexity and costs in clearance will be significantly reduced, making trade across borders faster and more predictable. The TFWA Program congratulates the Burkinabe government on this commendable achievement.





ePhyto Launches in Côte d'Ivoire

On March 23rd, Côte d'Ivoire officially launched ePhyto, an electronic version of the paper phytosanitary, making it the first country in francophone Africa to introduce such an innovative solution. This landmark event was well attended by numerous distinguished guests from Côte d'Ivoire's private and public sector, including representatives of the Directorate of Plant Protection, Control and Quality (DPVCQ), private sector, customs and other key stakeholders.

In the past, paper phytosanitary certificates (issued by the relevant competent authority of the exporting country) were exchanged between countries to confirm that agricultural products (such as plants and plant products) meet certain sanitary and phytosanitary import requirements for international trade. However, the paper-based exchange of certificates introduces risks of fraud, extra administrative costs, and delays in clearance time.

By transitioning to ePhyto, Côte d'Ivoire will now be able to seamlessly exchange ePhyto certificates with other key trading partners—quickly, accurately, and at a low cost. The event raised awareness among target stakeholders on the numerous features and benefits of the new ePhyto system:

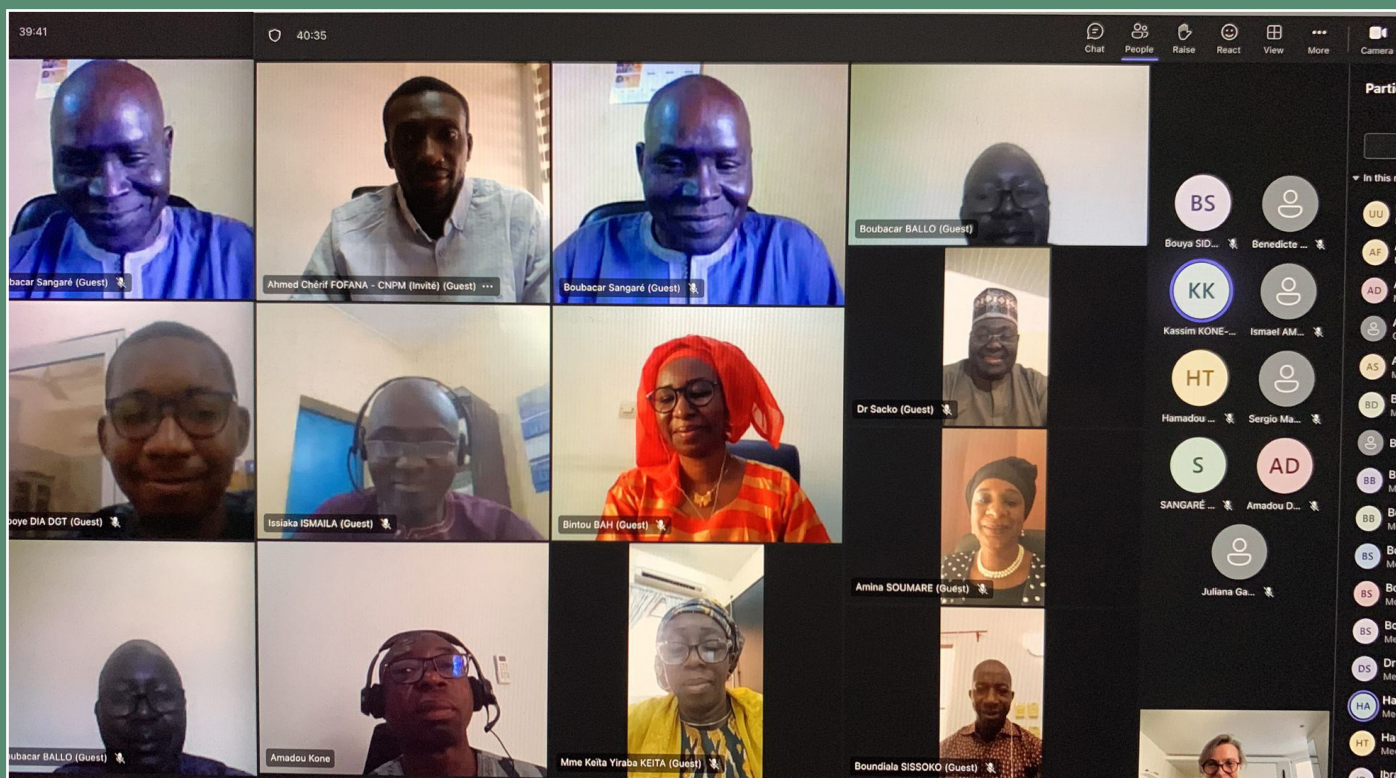
- ePhyto has streamlined the certification process (reducing the steps required for inspections by more than half, from 39 to 18);
- ePhyto allows certificates to be signed electronically (a QR code is used to verify the certificate's authenticity), helping to minimize fraud;
- By speeding up information exchange and the tracing of shipments, ePhyto will strengthen Côte d'Ivoire's trade competitiveness in the international market;
- ePhyto reduces administrative burden on border agencies and businesses; and
- ePhyto helps level the playing field for traders by lowering barriers to trade.

Presently, the new system is being piloted with the cocoa and coffee sectors at the ports of Abidjan and San Pedro. The launch of the ePhyto system undoubtedly reflects Côte d'Ivoire's determination to grow business opportunities while making government services more efficient. In keeping with the country's ambitions to facilitate trade through digitalisation, it is expected that paper-based certificates will be phased out and relevant agencies will transition to a fully electronic process.





Mali Launches ECOWAS Online Program



In Mali, the TFWA Program supported the launch of the ECOWAS Online Empowerment Program for National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs), becoming the 13th NTFC to do so in the region.

This intensive professional capacity building training equips NTFC members and their Secretariats with the knowledge and awareness necessary to achieve their objective to advance the implementation of sustainable trade facilitation reforms in the region. Courses are delivered online, with key experts closely monitoring participant progress.

The program provided an opportunity for participants to familiarize themselves with key modules on trade facilitation, including:

- **National Trade Facilitation Committees:** Understanding the Concept of National Trade Facilitation Committees;
- **Trade Facilitation and Development:** Discovering the benefits of implementing trade facilitation reforms and how these reforms can contribute to a country's development;
- **Introduction to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement:** The history, structure, nature of obligations, and importance of the preferential and differential treatment provisions under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement; and
- **Gender Perspective on Trade Facilitation Reforms:** Understanding how trade facilitation and gender issues are interlinked and why discussing trade facilitation through a gender lens is essential.

Overall, the courses were well received and the feedback from program participants has been incredibly positive.

TFWA Program Holds Workshop Setting the Stage for SIGMAT



Under the framework of the SIGMAT project, TFWA Program experts held a working session with representatives of the High Directorate of Customs in Mali. This session reignited the SIGMAT work previously undertaken by the TFWA Program in Mali, which was paused due to political instability.

SIGMAT is a customs interconnection initiative that aims to improve regional integration by automating transit procedures between ECOWAS Member States. In turn, this makes trade easier, faster, and more secure. Mali is one of the many countries in West Africa to benefit from SIGMAT's technological advancement, which greatly impacts trade by reducing cost and delays in transit.

To show their appreciation for the renewed efforts to operationalize SIGMAT, high-level personnel of the High Directorate of Customs, including the Director General, presented gifts to the TFWA Program team (pictured here), thanking them for their unwavering support for the SIGMAT initiative.



TFWA Program Supports NTFC Capacity-Building Workshop

In May, the TFWA Program hosted a capacity-building workshop in collaboration with the NTFC Secretariat in Abuja. The two-day session brought together members of the Nigerian NTFC, representatives of the ECOWAS Commission, GIZ, and representatives of different ministries, departments, and agencies, including: the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment (FMITI), Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Nigeria Export Processing Zone, Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON), among others.

The workshop aimed to equip the NTFC secretariat with the skills and tools they need to effectively implement international best practices. The workshop also provided ample opportunity to operationalize the TFWA NTFC Maturity Model.

During the workshop, Bénédicte Meille, Trade Facilitation Specialist for the TFWA Program, delivered a session on inclusive project management, an essential component of the TFWA Program's capacity-building framework for NTFCs. This work aims to strengthen NTFC's sustainability and maturity levels. The working sessions allowed participants to work on projects deemed critical and strategic to their work, such as:

- Coordinating TF reform planning;
- Strengthening NTFC capacity to plan; and
- Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of sustainable TF measures by ensuring strategic alignment and operational coherence through an inclusive results-based approach.

The need to create robust institutional capacity and sustainability for the NTFC was identified as critical to delivering excellent technical recommendations in trade facilitation. Additionally, the workshop incorporated inclusive and gender-sensitive elements to ensure that the gains of trade facilitation reforms reach all traders, especially women small-scale cross-border traders.

Over the course of the workshop, discussions focused on ensuring the operational coordination of trade facilitation reforms across sectoral policies to secure ownership, sustainability, and relevance within the Nigeria National Development Plan (NDP). Other topics of discussion included mitigating NTFC member turnover, identifying committed human and financial resources, and pooling NTFC member capacity for shared logistics on meeting sites.

Participants also worked together to identify how the NTFC can strengthen and align its activities and progress indicators to the Nigeria Agenda 2050 and the NDP in a 'cross-cutting manner'—this is because trade facilitation reforms in Nigeria simultaneously contribute to the chapters on business environment, trade and competitiveness, as well as equity, women, youth, and job creation, as well as digital economy, transport, and good governance.

At the same time, the workshop contributed to the preparation of the overdue WTO TFA notifications through interactive discussions on the seven technical measures in Category C with upcoming definitive implementation dates.

The completion of the workshop is expected to play a significant role in strengthening the NTFC's work, and the TFWA Program looks forward to supporting next steps agreed in the meeting.



NTFC Meets to Advance Trade and Gender Agenda



The TFWA Program continues to provide technical support to NTFCs across the region, ensuring they are equipped to effectively carry out their mandates. This is especially true in terms of raising awareness of the importance of gender mainstreaming in NTFC trade policy work, operations, and representation.

Recently, Senegal's NTFC held a meeting to discuss and finalize the establishment of the gender and trade working group, or sub-committee. This represents an important step in ensuring continued dialogue, accountability, and monitoring of TF reforms and their impact on women, especially small-scale cross border traders. Once established, Senegal will join Burkina Faso, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, which have all successfully launched trade and gender sub-committees with TFWA Program support.

As a first step, NTFC members have expanded their membership to include women trader NGOs and the Ministry of Women, Family and Gender (MFFG), which will be presiding over the gender and trade sub-working group sessions.

TFWA Program Delivers Cycle 2 of SSCBT Training

Building on the success of the pilot training for small-scale cross-border traders (SSCBTs) in northern Togo, the TFWA Program initiated a second training cycle from March 27 to May 5. In total, 182 small-scale cross-border traders—about 72% women—were trained on national and regional rules and regulations for cross-border trade.

Over the course of six weeks, this second cycle of training centered on twelve modules designed to empower small-scale traders and improve the flow of goods in the region. From traders' rights and obligations, to interpersonal communication and negotiation techniques—the coursework was designed to address the technical and behavioral aspects of trade. This second training cycle features a special two-month, post-training coaching to support SSCBTs in the implementation of their personal goals.

The closing of the training was chaired by Colonel Hemou Badibawou Bakali, Prefect of Kozah, in the presence of the Mayor, the Regional Director of Trade, a representative of the UEMOA Commission, and representatives of several other institutions supporting this work (the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, the Togolese Revenue Office, and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Togo). The ceremony also benefited from the support of members of the National Office of the SEFECTO association (Solidarité pour l'Epanouissement de la Femme Commerçante du Togo), which helped mobilize participants.

The presence and strong involvement of local authorities and public agents, and the strong commitment of SEFECTO, were critical to the program's success. With positive feedback from participants and calls to expand the program across the country and region, the TFWA Program aims to continue advancing this important work.

