



## SEPTEMBER 2023 NEWSLETTER

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### 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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# SIGMAT Deployment Progresses in Mali



On May 24, the Director Generals from Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali signed a tripartite agreement for the implementation of SIGMAT. The signing took place in Bamako under the supervision of Mali's Minister of Economy and Finance.

The timetable attached to the tripartite agreement outlines the pilot phase as July 10, 2023<sup>1</sup> and the pilot phase evaluation meeting in Ouagadougou as October 10, 2023.

Mali selected four offices across the three countries for the SIGMAT pilot phase:

- Bureau des Produits Pétroliers (BPP-Bamako);
- Labbezanga office (Niger-Mali);
- Gao office (Niger-Mali); and
- Hermakono/Sikasso offices (Burkina-Mali).

In mid-August, a forwarding agent specializing in hydrocarbons informed the Fédération des Transitaires du Mali (FETRAM) of his concerns regarding sudden job cuts — this is because transit operations, previously carried out at the Heremakono border post (Burkina - Mali), are now being transferred to the Petroleum Office in Bamako. As a result, T1s are being directed to the Bureau des Produits Pétroliers in Bamako (chosen as the pilot site) and FETRAM has gone on strike. In the midst of negotiations, the Customs DG reiterated Mali's determination to move forward with the implementation of SIGMAT, despite the ongoing challenges.

With a view to finding a definitive and comprehensive solution, Mali will undertake the following actions:

1. The Mali Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIM) issues the TRIE Carnets for the Hermakono Office only for the processing of T1s. The information collected will then be transferred to the SIGMAT module;
2. To hold information workshops and training workshops on SIGMAT; and
3. To organize study trips to countries that have already started the deployment of SIGMAT.

As part of the implementation of the recommendations made during the Customs/FETRAM negotiations, a SIGMAT information workshop was held on September 8, bringing together key actors involved in the trade and transport sectors. The event received attention across media platforms, including national media coverage by the Office de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision du Mali (ORTM). The workshop was facilitated by the SIGMAT Project Team from Mali Customs, with the active participation of the TFWA Program. Many speakers expressed a keen interest in the deployment of SIGMAT.

As a next step, stakeholders from key agencies including CCIM, Customs, FETRAM, the Conseil Malien des Transporteurs (CMTR) and the Conseil Malien des Chargeurs agreed to carry out study missions in Burkina Faso and Togo. The costs of these missions will be covered by the TRIE Fund of the Mali Chamber of Commerce and Industry and other professional organizations. As planned, the SIGMAT pilot phase will continue in other offices and their corridors, except for hydrocarbons imported from Niger via Burkina Faso. Also, Mali Customs expects to have significant quantities of T1s for the tripartite evaluation scheduled for October 10, 2023, in Ouagadougou.

Thanks to ECOWAS' commitment to improve regional Customs, and the support of the TFWA Program, the SIGMAT deployment marks a major victory in improving trade relations between countries in West Africa. Not only will the system help eliminate trade bottlenecks and improve customs operations, but it also aims to strengthen the business environment, fostering competitiveness across the region. The TFWA Program remains dedicated to supporting partners in the next phases of deployment and achieving its objective of improving trade facilitation.

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<sup>1</sup> It's important to point out that the pilot phase is, in principle of Customs, the implementation of SIGMAT in a sample of offices. After the pilot phase, SIGMAT is extended to other offices without interruption.



# Workshop on Measuring Agency Performance at Land Border Posts



From September 13 to 15, the UEMOA Commission, in collaboration with the TFWA Program, organized a workshop on measuring the performance of agencies at land border posts. The event took place in Lomé with a focus on trade facilitation in the UEMOA area. The event gathered experts from the UEMOA Member States to validate the matrix of performance indicators and determine its administration and implementation methods.

The workshop was opened by the representative of the Minister (responsible for Transport of Togo), Mr. Kossi Dogbey. Other high-level representatives in attendance included the Chief of Staff of the Commissioner (responsible for the Department of Regional Market and Cooperation), Professor Georges Anicet Ouedraogo, and Senior Private Sector Specialist at the World Bank, Mr. Olivier Hartmann.

The workshop aimed to establish a regional mechanism for measuring the performance of agencies at land border posts. This mechanism can ultimately help design modernization reform policies and initiatives that will enable the improvement of services to users at the border as well as the fluidity and speed of customs clearance of goods at land border posts in the UEMOA area.

The participants recognized that the training was highly valuable and important. At the end of the workshop, the stakeholders agreed to:

- Develop an action plan for the development of the validated matrix administration solution; and
- Pilot and deploy the solution in all Member States of UEMOA.

The TFWA Program will continue to support the Commission and other national partners to implement and integrate these measures for improved border /corridor management and overall trade in the region.



# TFWA Program Launches new SIGMAT Video

To improve customs-to-customs communication, cut red tape at the border, and facilitate trade across West Africa, the ECOWAS and UEMOA Commissions, with support from the TFWA Program, are actively deploying SIGMAT across the region. SIGMAT is a computer interconnection system between customs offices of ECOWAS Member States, allowing the quick and accurate sharing of data and information to improve regional integration. With SIGMAT, the customs administrations of two or more countries in the sub-region can instantly exchange digital information relating to goods in transit, enabling the easier and more secure flow of goods.

A new video recently released by the TFWA Program introduces SIGMAT to audiences, explaining how the system functions and the numerous benefits it offers to both private and public actors in the region. Specifically, the video (which is available in both French and English) shows a step-by-step guide of how SIGMAT works seamlessly (from departure to destination) to make trade easier, cheaper, and safer:

- At departure, the customs office assigns the cargo a unique transit number, which is used in all the countries cross through.
- The SIGMAT system notifies different customs offices as the goods arrive at posts along the corridor.
- The unique transit number allows the various offices to easily track and identify the declarations and goods.
- Each office issues transit notifications that are visible in customs' computer systems until the goods arrive at their final destination.

The exchange of information benefits both customs authorities and key economic operators, such as small-scale, cross-border traders, by reducing cumbersome administrative work, lowering transit and transportation costs, and increasing customs revenue. Overall, SIGMAT helps to secure trade, reduce fraud, and improve the business environment of the region.

Since its launch in 2019, SIGMAT has gained traction across the region. Following the earlier adoption in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Togo, in June 2023, four more countries (Ghana, Guinea, Mali, and Senegal) joined the list and signed an MoU to operationalize SIGMAT.



**Watch the video to learn more about SIGMAT**