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FIRST AFRICAN FORUM FOR NATIONAL TRADE FACILITATION COMMITTEES

Empowering Public-Private partnership for trade facilitation

UNECA's Conference Center, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

27-29 November 2018

#AfricanNTFCForum

FINAL REPORT



**FORUM FOR NATIONAL TRADE
FACILITATION COMMITTEES**

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I. Introduction

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Center (ITC), the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, the World Bank Group (WBG), the World Customs Organization (WCO), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) jointly organized the First African Forum for National Trade Facilitation Committees (the Forum), held from 27 to 29 November 2018 at the UNECA premises, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

More than 250 participants from some 44 countries attended. The participants represented public sector agencies such as the Ministry of Trade and the Customs Authority as well as the private sector. Women represented one quarter of participants.

II. Opening remarks

Ms. Ingrid Cyimana (Chief of Staff, UNECA) opened the programme with an explanation that the African Forum for National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) was an event where countries have come to take bold steps towards implementing the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). She mentioned that the AfCFTA will enter into force when 22 African countries have ratified it and that it was likely to be achieved at the first anniversary of the signing of the treaty. She further emphasized that an integrated Africa cannot be achieved without consensus. And that the AfCFTA will provide a great stimulus to Africa's economies and enhanced intra-African trade through customs cooperation, harmonization of practices and procedures to expedite movement and clearance of goods. She then underscored the critical need for countries to be supported in implementation of the AfCFTA and used the opportunity to share about UNECA's technical cooperation programme that helps countries implement trade facilitation reforms and take full advantage of available markets. She concluded by reemphasizing the need for partnerships to build an integrated Africa.

H.E. Kwesi Quartey, (Deputy Chairperson, Africa Union Commission), expressed African countries' readiness to boost intra-African trade because they know it will unlock great economic potential to the continent. Drawing examples from various countries of leading commodity supply capacities such as Ghana, Ivory Coast, Angola and Chad, he emphasized the importance of opening markets in Africa for Africans and value addition. He stressed the importance of proper government planning coupled with private sector free market operations to give a perfect blend for economic breakthrough for Africa. In conclusion, he reiterated the importance of partnerships between Africa and its European counterparts for successful trade reforms and thanked UNCTAD and its Secretary General for organizing the forum.

Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi (Secretary General, UNCTAD), indicated that the rise in tariff wars, nationalism and the unequal gains of globalization put pressure on global markets and challenge global supply chains. He emphasized that Africa faces a moment where market access can be eroded unless the continent addresses trade facilitation and issues related to cross border transport and predictability of trade environments. He drew an example of where benefits for cotton exporting countries under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act could be totally wiped out by China if the Trans Pacific Partnership had been signed. He then used this moment to emphasize importance of intra-Africa trade. He concluded by drawing attention to the need for proper structuring of NTFCs and the importance of partnerships for their work as well as the emergence and existence of new technologies available for NTFCs in trade reforms.

Ms. Fellework Gebregzabhier (Minister of Trade, Ethiopia), took the opportunity to underscore the importance of trade facilitation, an issue, she emphasized, is the reason why eminent persons from international organizations and governments gathered in Addis this week for the Africa Forum. She expressed confidence in the gathering as a sign that there is growing faith in trade facilitation and used that moment to outline Ethiopia's readiness and efforts towards trade facilitation. She further admonished countries to beware of the dangers of trade protectionism and reiterated the importance of trade, the need to streamline procedures and strengthen cooperation as well as need to formalize the informal sectors in Africa. Further laying out her optimism for the economic potential of the AfCFTA, she further underscored the need for intra-Africa trade and the necessity for critical infrastructure development that will support this mission. She concluded by thanking UNCTAD for putting together the Africa Forum for NTFCs.

Ms. Dorothy Tembo (Executive Director, ITC) quickly drew the link between the negotiations that went into the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and the need for trade facilitation around the world that informed the treaty in the first place. On this backdrop, she acknowledged that ITC is proud to have contributed to the organization of the First Africa Forum for NTFCs. She

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indicated that great trade benefits lie in full implementation of the needed trade reforms across the African continent and that cost of doing business could drop by 14% with the full implementation of the WTO TFA with major benefits for Small and Medium scale Businesses (SMEs). She further stressed the role of NTFCs as the platform to channel international best practices to fuel implementation and help SMEs with compliance issues. She concluded by stressing the work that ITC in conjunction with UNCTAD and UNECE are working to empower and strengthen NTFCs at national levels and further underscored the need for a regional level integration to have a successful implementation of the WTO TFA.

Ms. Brenda Mundia (Deputy Director, Capacity Building Directorate, WCO), opened her statement expressing how encouraging it is to have such broad participation on the common agenda of trade facilitation for Africa to promote intra-African trade that could help achieve sustainable social and economic development. She stressed the key role of Customs as the frontline agencies in implementing trade facilitation. She further expressed the need for predictability, transparency, partnerships and use of modern technology as critical for trade facilitation and underscored the importance of her organization's tools (the WCO) to achieve these, with the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) as the blueprint for modern Customs administrations. She further emphasized the unique Customs to Customs capacity building model of the WCO, including more than 150 Customs experts across Africa and highlighted the collaboration between WCO and partners including UNCTAD, World Bank, ITC among others, in trade reforms and strengthening of NTFCs and indicated that WCO has also aligned support towards the establishment of the AfCFTA. She acknowledged a new EU-funded programme on harmonized system aiming at supporting Customs administrations in Africa in collaboration with regional entities and concluded by thanking Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the UK and Finnish governments for sponsoring the WCO's participation in the forum.

Mr. Philippe Isler (Director, Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation) started his statement by briefly describing the Global Alliance as a public private initiative that operates in various African countries such as Ghana, Morocco, Kenya and to soon be in Zambia and thanked the governments supporting its works in these countries. The Global Alliance is dedicated to assisting developing countries in implementing TFA provisions. It operates by working with both governments and private sector as equal partners in a focused and pragmatic way. In furtherance of his statement, he mentioned that Global Alliance relies strongly on NTFCs to accomplish its objective in countries. To this end, it is of great importance to the Alliance that NTFCs are functioning efficiently and acting as catalysts for reform. He also called on the private sector to actively contribute and be part of the solution. He concluded by saying, that he hoped this conference would unlock some keys for progress and that both Governments and private sector would work together in a focused way to move the NTFC agenda forward.

Mr. Manuel Henriquez (Senior Private Sector Development Specialist, The World Bank Group), opened his statement by first thanking UNCTAD and the co-sponsors of the programme and expressed the gratitude of the World Bank for being invited to be a part of it. Furthering his statement, he underscored the success of this forum noting that just a quarter of this number participated in the last forum in Geneva. He further indicated that the NTFCs put a challenge to the World Bank Group to deliver the best services and assistance to them and that the collective strength showed in the forum means the best can only come out of this forum. He concluded by emphasizing the need for the trade community to be active in such fora to have the right priorities of trade facilitation set.

Mr. Roberto Azevedo (Director General, WTO) opened his statement with an assertion of the paramountcy of intra-African trade and movement of goods across borders and that the WTO TFA is designed to help countries in these efforts. He further indicated that the purpose of the TFA is to streamline, simplify and standardise the movement of goods and procedures to help boost trade and reduce trade cost which could deliver a strong boost to the African continent and foster integration. He said the work of the Trade Facilitation Facility is aimed at ensuring that all can have funding to implement the reforms and urged countries to work together to fully implement the TFA.

Ms. Olga Algayerova (UN Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary, UNECE), started her opening remarks by recalling that the establishment of NTFCs is one of the requirements of the WTO TFA and referred to the many challenges that countries still face in implementing the Agreement including poor coordination, inadequate political commitment and lack of private sector representation. She shared the work that UNECE does in this regard and mentioned the roadmap of Greece as an example of the role of trade facilitation in improving the trade situation and economic ranking of a country. She further highlighted the fact that implementing trade reforms normally leads to reduced trade cost, increased government revenue and open new markets that ends up improving citizens' lives. She then mentioned that UN/CEFACT plays a pioneering role in the implementation process of the TFA and supports countries in their trade facilitation efforts for an effective integration in the international trading system. She concluded by urging countries to work together, to harness the full potential of trade towards achieving the SDGs.

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III. Session 1: Trade Facilitation efforts and prospective in Africa

Africa is expected to see the biggest benefits from the full implementation of the WTO TFA with a 35% increase in exports and a 16% reduction in trade costs (WTO, Trade Report, 2015). Indeed, African countries predicted the potential benefits trade facilitation reforms could bring to the continent long before the end of the WTO TFA negotiations. Since then, they have embarked in national and regional initiatives to eliminate red tape. This session looked at the key factors for successful reforms, highlighting the unique African approach, and how to overcome the challenges. Experts also discussed how trade facilitation reforms can be leveraged to spur economic growth and development.

Ms. [Shamika Sirimanne](#) (Director, Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD) opened the session with a brief introductory presentation drawing attention to the low volume of intra-African trade compared to their European counterparts: 16% intra-African trade compared to 60% of intra-European trade. She used this opportunity to urge African countries to see the AfCFTA as a clear paradigm shift for trade facilitation and improved trade logistics with an important role for the NTFCs.

Mr. [David Luke](#) (Coordinator African Trade Policy Centre, UNECA) introduced the joint initiative of the UN Regional Commissions (i.e. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, ESCWA, Economic Commission for Latin America and The Caribbean, ECLAC, UNECE and UNECA), which is the Global Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation. This, he said, was published in 2015, with a second edition released in 2017, and an on-going preparation for the third edition. He said the report presents a joint global view on trade facilitation issues and allowed countries and their development partners to better understand and monitor progress in trade facilitation. Covering areas such as general trade facilitation measures, women and trade facilitation, cross-border paperless trade, transit facilitation and trade facilitation and SMEs. According to him, the 2015 and 2017 reports cumulatively covered 33 countries and is available on the ECA web site (www.uneca.org). He further mentioned that the results of this report have not been flattering and clearly shows Africa is behind in trade facilitation efforts. He took participants through relevant parts of the report and concluded by announcing that the ECA will be launching an AfCFTA Country Business Index as a robust monitoring and evaluation tool to measure and monitor the AfCFTA impact, including identification of shortcomings and ways in which implementation can be improved.

Mr. [Dhunraj Kassee](#) (Senior Policy Officer, African Union Commission - AUC) opened his statement by first acknowledging that intra-African trade is low and needs addressing. Briefly drawing historical antecedents, he indicated that the decision to design a continental free trade agreement (the AfCFTA) in 2012 towards boosting intra-African trade was a step in the right direction. He used the opportunity to introduce the Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT) programme which, has a specific pillar on trade facilitation targeting the simplification and harmonization of customs procedures. He also said National Information Trade Portals are being built, citing Lesotho as an example, and that these portals will serve as regional observatories for the BIAT programme to monitor the AfCFTA implementation progress of countries. He also took the opportunity to mention the activities of the African Union sub-committee on trade facilitation which met in Cameroon in 2017 and discussed issues such as regional integration and ICT system interconnectivity as well as security and private sector involvement. He concluded by presenting the AUC's specific activities on customs and cooperation.

Mr. [Manuel Henriquez](#) (Senior Private Sector Development Specialist, The World Bank Group), took turn to introduce the working objective of the World Bank which, according to him, is to eliminate extreme poverty and lift the bottom 40% of the world's poor out of poverty. To achieve this, he said, the World Bank values efficient use of resources and that implementing every infrastructure project must be need-driven and that some reforms can be achieved through soft policies without hard infrastructure. He said, however, that critical infrastructure must be combined with trade to generate a multiplier effect. He used the opportunity to highlight the important role of macroeconomics, investment and information availability to trade facilitation and indicated that there is a current ongoing mentality migration on trade facilitation from a historical approach based on customs and revenue collection to a modern approach based on facilitation and information, flexible solutions and simplification. He further introduced the World Bank's Trade Facilitation Support programme and said majority of beneficiary countries are in sub-Saharan Africa with work on six corridors in West Africa alone. He concluded by saying that financing of NTFCs should come from the government budget to make them sustainable.

Mr. [Eugene Torero](#) (Director of Trade Policy and Facilitation, TradeMark East Africa), briefly introduced what TradeMark East Africa does, which is promoting trade and marketing East Africa. He then quickly outlined some of the challenges faced by traders

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in the region as delays in cargo clearance, high cost of doing business and unpredictability of the trade environment. He said TradeMark is helping improve the trade environment through the pathways of customs automation, private sector engagement and the power of new technology. He mentioned the example of modernization of ports of Mombasa and Dar es Salam that reduced clearance time from eleven to six days. He also mentioned the establishment of cargo monitoring centres from Rwanda to Tanzania that reduced transit time by 70%. He concluded his statement with some lessons learnt and recommendations in these processes such as the need to deepen the trade facilitation agenda through technology, need for a balance between soft policy and hard infrastructure, the development of digital corridors and the importance of partnerships between bodies such as UNCTAD, World Bank and ITC.

IV. Session 2: The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement - Status of ratification, categorisation and notifications in Africa

This session provided an update on the current ratifications of the Agreement and the necessary 'A', 'B' and 'C' categorisations of provisions under the WTO TFA as well as other relevant notifications on transparency concerning Africa and donor partners.

Mr. [Mark Henderson](#) (Economic Affairs Officer, WTO), presented up-to-date information on ratifications and notifications¹ of the TFA. He said by November 2018, 139 WTO Members had ratified the WTO TFA, of which 31 are in Africa with 13 African countries yet to ratify. He said a total of 37 countries in Africa have notified their Category A, with 20 and 19 for Categories B and C notifications, respectively. He explained that the WTO TFA Facility exists to support developing and Least Developed Country (LDC) members in ratification, notification and implementation of the TFA. He further pointed out the various means through which such support is delivered as provision of technical assistance, helping members find implementation assistance, and encouraging coordination among assistance providers. He pointed out that when countries are not able to find funds available, WTO could provide grants. He concluded by indicating that the TF Facility serves as a platform for TFA information, primarily through its website www.tfafacility.org which provides an up-to-date picture on ratifications and notifications by country, guidance in the ratification and notification process and matchmaking contact information by country.

V. Session 3: The role of the African regional organizations in implementing Trade Facilitation reforms

Regional approaches to trade facilitation can deliver greater benefits to individual countries and the regional community than unconnected national reforms. Coordinated cross-border reforms would help create a more consistent and predictable regional trading environment without diverging administrative procedures and requirements in each member state. Harmonized formalities across regions would reduce business transaction costs, create the necessary condition for the development of regional value chains and further attract investment. African regional organizations can play a key role in coordinating trade facilitation reforms as they work towards deeper integration.

Mr. Francis Ikome (Chief Regional Integration Section, UNECA) opened the session by first highlighting the importance of regional communities in taking on trade facilitation reforms especially in recent years. He further made remarks on the different initiatives and ways in which they are being conducted.

Mr. Kolawole Sofola, (Principal Programme Officer-Multilateral Trade, Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS), gave an overview of the different regional trade facilitation initiatives within ECOWAS, namely; ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS), ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET), ECOWAS Customs Code, Customs Modernization & Interconnectivity and Joint Border Posts (JBPs). He also said recent initiatives of the regional body also include the establishment of Trade Information Systems/Portals, Institutional Structures (e.g. Inter Institutional Committees on Trade; Trade Facilitation Committees) as well as capacity building workshops, especially for the private sector. He mentioned that a major recently launched trade facilitation programme for West Africa will complement and further drive large-scale trade facilitation initiatives.

Ms. Ngoanamokgotho Maggie Tladi, (Southern African Customs Union, SACU) expressed how SACU has led trade facilitation reforms at a regional level through implementation of a flagship regional Customs Modernization and Reform Programme. She said, the SACU Customs Modernization Programme focuses on IT Connectivity; Trade Partnerships; Risk Management and

¹ Detailed information and analysis can be found online at [TFA Facility](#) and the [TFA Database](#)

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Enforcement; and Customs Legislative Framework. She further shared some of the concrete results from the flagship Customs Modernization Programme which include development of key regional frameworks required to strengthen customs cooperation and collaboration at a regional level. Ms Tladi noted that it takes time to implement large-scale reforms and modernization of IT Systems, processes and procedures as it requires investment in financial and human resources. In her conclusion, she maintained that the main challenge has been the slow pace of implementation of the regional customs frameworks at national level.

Mr. Jacob Kotcho (Economic Community of Central African States, ECCAS), gave a background of the history of trade facilitation measure in ECCAS beginning with the treaty adopted in 1983 that already included a set of texts related to trade facilitation mainly on trade procedures and infrastructure. He held that regional integration in the ECCAS area is hampered by a number of factors, including physical and non-physical barriers on cross-border corridors, slow customs procedures, and weak transport infrastructure. And said that thanks to a recent Africa Development Bank (AfDB) project the following measures are being taken on WTO TFA implementation that accompany the ratification of the TFA by the states; Establishment of National Trade Facilitation Committees in Central Africa; Establishment of a Regional Trade Facilitation Committee; Training of the members of the National Committees and the Regional Committees; and Realization of a study to propose reforms aimed at eliminating the constraints faced by women in cross-border trade in Central Africa. He said a pilot programme for Facilitation and Transit Security in Central Africa (FASTRAC) covering the CEMAC area was also commenced. He concluded his statement by announcing an upcoming project to strengthen the NTFCs of ECCAS member states with the support of UNCTAD.

Ms. Victoria Tuomisto (Associate Expert, ITC) reminded participants about the key benefits of regional approaches to trade facilitation, namely the predictability and consistency they bring to regional traders, the economic efficiencies of a harmonized and coordinated regional implementation, and how they can further boost intraregional trade. She also underlined the WTO TFA's key articles explicitly and implicitly encouraging regional approaches for reforms. Finally, she introduced the ITC publication on Charting a roadmap for regional integration with the WTO TFA which sets out a six-step methodology allowing regional communities to prepare a regional consensus and implementation plan for targeted TFA measures.

VI. Session 4: The role of NTFCs in the implementation of trade facilitation provisions in the African Continental Free Trade Area

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aspires to create a single market for intra-regional trade in goods and services, representing more than 1.26 billion people, and a GDP of \$2.14 trillion. The Agreement contains trade facilitation measures tailor-made to the African context and aimed to make import, export and transit procedures more efficient. The AfCFTA implementation will require a great deal of coordination among different public and private stakeholders at the national and regional level, ensuring the coherence with other relevant instruments. This session debated on the singularity of the Trade Facilitation Provisions in the AfCFTA. Panellists exchanged about the role of the NTFCs in the AfCFTA's implementation and how to establish regional networks. The session intended to provide proposals on how the NTFCs could ensure a coherent approach in the implementation of the trade facilitation reforms in the framework of the AfCFTA, WTO TFA and other regional agreements.

Mr. David Luke (UNECA), the moderator, opened the session with a brief note on the role of National Trade Facilitation Committees in implementing the key measures of Trade Facilitation, such as transit coordination, customs cooperation and Non-Tariff Measures under the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement. He indicated that there will be an inter-governmental committee that will monitor countries' progress in the implementation of these measures under the AfCFTA and opened the floor to the presentations of the panelists.

Mr. Robert Lisinge, (Chief, Operational Quality Section, UNECA) took turn to put the establishment and role of NTFCs in four perspectives: the historical perspective, their scope of responsibility, the strategic objectives of an NTFC, and the tools at the disposal of NTFCs. He pointed out that NTFCs have existed in Africa for decades under the direction of ECOWAS and that the main objective of NTFCs is to act as a single platform to resolve the various conflicts of interest normally present between different stakeholders. He further mentioned that the scope of NTFCs' role is broad and that many tools exist at their disposal for proper functioning. He stressed the fact that the broad nature of the role of NTFCs requires multi-stakeholder approach with transparency, inclusivity and resources adequacy for its success. He emphasized the working relationship between UNECA and UNCTAD in driving these principles and mentioned the Cost-Time-Distance methodological tool devised by the two bodies to establish an understanding of the challenges in the East Africa Corridors.

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Mr. [Willie Shumba](#) (Chief Customs Expert and Adviser, African Union, AU), took the opportunity to take the audience through the annexes of the AfCFTA highlighting the relevance of these annexes concerning the work of NTFCs and drew attention to the processes that led to the conclusion and agreement on those annexes. He mentioned the annexes on transit coordination, the committee on trade facilitation at the continental level, Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs), customs cooperation and the fact that the AfCFTA took inspiration from already existing international trade treaties such as the WTO TFA. Specifically, on the annex on transit, he said this was originally not included in the AfCFTA but was later considered a critical provision for the continent, given that many African countries have to deal with goods on transit and hence will need a coordinated framework to act within.

Mr. [Poul Hansen](#) (Chief, Trade Facilitation Section, UNCTAD), took his turn to highlight the coherence between the WTO TFA and the AfCFTA and reiterated the importance of not creating many NTFCs to handle the provisions in the various treaties. He further emphasised the importance of the NTFCs by the fact that NTFCs are mandatory under the WTO TFA and, hence, not one of the measures to be categorized by Member States. He indicated that 31 African countries had ratified the WTO TFA, and 12 had ratified the AfCFTA. However, there currently exist between 35 to 40 NTFCs in Africa (either formally established or de facto): something he considered positive. He also indicated the advantage of having a formally established NTFC backed by some form of legislation which normally allows the NTFC to transcend change of governments. He took the opportunity to show participants the [UNCTAD repository](#) and urged countries whose data are not yet in the repository to submit them to be included in the repository.

VII. Session 5: How to make an NTFC sustainable and ensure political will: best practices, challenges and lessons learned

The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (Art.23.2) requires that each country establishes a well-functioning national body – National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) - to coordinate the individual actions of a wide range of stakeholders. Though many countries in the region have already set-up effective NTFCs, others are still facing multiple challenges. It appears that it is often easier to set-up a body than to make sure it works well and pursues its long-term mission through secure funding and firm political commitment. In this session, NTFC representatives and international experts shared good practices and lessons learned, along with recommendations for these bodies.

Ms. Maria Teresa Pisani (Economic Affairs Officer, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, UNECE), who moderated the session, introduced the discussion recalling that globally, as of 2018, more than 110 countries have either formal or de facto NTFCs and that about 20 countries are in the process of doing so. According to her, however, although so many countries have a committee in place, it seems much harder to maintain and make them work. Ms. Pisani highlighted the important roles played by these committees for inclusive trade facilitation reforms, and invited panellists to share recommendations on how to ensure they can work as effective platforms and partnerships and deliver value for money for the trade community.

Ms. [Arántzazu Sánchez](#) (Economic Affairs Officer, Trade Facilitation Section, UNCTAD), presented key lessons learned from NTFCs from all around the world based on recent [UNCTAD studies](#). She said availability of resources as well as commitment of participants seem to be the most important factors for the sustainability of committees. She further mentioned that, in fact, only 21% of NTFCs claim to have an allocated budget for their activities. Ms Sánchez made a direct call to the participants of the forum as leaders of their NTFCs, to use their power to motivate national trade facilitation stakeholders to contribute and participate in trade facilitation reforms, to become change enablers, making trade work.

Mr. [Joseph Nguene Nteppe](#) (Permanent Secretary of the NTFC of Cameroon), presented his country case of CONAFE, the Cameroonian NTFC. He mentioned that a robust legal basis, a strong organizational set-up, an inclusive composition, along with adequate financial and human resources have been essential for the sustainability of the committee in the country.

Mr. [Tarik Maaouni](#) (Director, National Ports Agency, Morocco,) and Mr. [Said Maghraoui Hassani](#) (Coordinator of the NTFC of Morocco), took turns to explain how their national trade facilitation committee which was first established in the 1990s, has been playing an essential role in the simplification of trade procedures in their country and how their harmonization to international trade facilitation standards including the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) standards has led to the development of Portnet, a single window for port management in Morocco. They also made reference to their national action plan recently developed by the committee and highlighted the importance of a long-term vision to guide countries' trade facilitation reforms.

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Mr. [Célestin Nzengue](#) (Director of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Trade, Gabon), presented the activities of Gabon's NTFC in recent years, such as the draft of a trade facilitation roadmap, with support from UNCTAD, and emphasised the importance of high-level political commitment for the effective operation of such bodies.

In summary, experts agreed that, in terms of critical enabling factors, NTFCs should work beyond compliance with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreements; that such committees be inclusive and have the right people sitting at the table; that they should be established on a solid legal and institutional grounds; that there must have a clear vision to drive activities; that it is important to secure funding for the proper functioning of these bodies, to be provided not only by donors but also through government budget; and that high level political support and continued capacity building is key to their continuation.

It was concluded that such factors are essential to ensure NTFCs are real agents of change in advancing trade facilitation reforms that can help countries to better integrate in the international trading system, and to achieve relevant targets under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

VIII. Session 6: Mainstreaming gender equality in trade facilitation

Gender Equality and women empowerment is a key driver of economic and social development and is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite progress, women still face numerous challenges in participating in trade and other economic activities across countries in Africa: from limited access to assets to insecure conditions in cross-border activities, and unequal opportunities for training and managerial positions in trade policy-making bodies. This session brought together NTFC representatives and trade facilitation experts to share experiences and brainstorm on possible approaches to advance gender equality in trade facilitation reforms in Africa.

Ms. Shamika Sirimanne (Director of Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD), opened the session sharing some disquieting statistics regarding the existing structures and composition of various NTFCs around the world. First, she pointed to the fact that UNCTAD research has shown that National Trade Facilitation Committees are not gender balanced. That only 35% of members of NTFCs in Africa are female and that not only are committees not gender-balanced, but they are usually chaired or co-chaired by men. She further indicated that only 27% of the African NTFCs are led by women with a lack of awareness on gender mainstreaming, and a third of committees consider gender mainstreaming as irrelevant at this stage. Finally, she showed that 23% of NTFCs believed that gender mainstreaming is not even a priority.

Ms. Stella Kisuze (Executive Officer, Uganda Revenue Authority, URA), highlighted that the lack of gender disaggregated data, role models for women as well as the existence of male-biased cultural beliefs are hindering the mainstreaming of gender in trade facilitation policies. Highlighting a WCO led pilot workshop on advancing gender equality in customs administrations, she said, URA has put together a strategy to support women traders, with measures such as training directed at women traders to inform them about their rights and procedures, opportunities for providing free storage for women for 30 days at the One-Stop Border Stops or allocating office space at the border for women trade associations, among others.

Ms. Estelle Igwe (Nigerian Export Promotion Council, UN/CEFACT Vice-Chair), presented [UN/CEFACT Recommendation 42 on Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism](#) which requires that a gender dimension is reflected in norms, roles, procedures, and access to resources. She said the UN/CEFACT specifically encourages the collection, analysis, and monitoring of gender disaggregated data in order to better understand and support women's engagement in international trade and transport facilitation.

Ms. Dorothy Ng'ambi Tembo (Deputy Executive Director, ITC), asserted that linking gender equality with sustainable development and human rights is important for several reasons. She said it is a moral and an ethical imperative. She further said that, efforts to achieve a just and sustainable future cannot ignore the rights, dignity and capabilities of half of the world's population. And that the existing data reinforces this point. She said, 85% of women-owned SMEs have women executives that are making enormous contribution to the economy. She concluded by highlighting that cross-cutting issues like gender equality are relevant to all aspects of development.

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Ms. Johanna Tornstrom (Assistant Programme Manager, Capacity Building Directorate, WCO), stressed that there is still lack of awareness of the link between trade and gender even though more attention is given to this topic in recent years in international policy forums which is promising. She also called for increased involvement of men in this topic. She further said that the WCO has developed an assessment tool called the Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool (GEOAT), accessible on the following link, <https://bit.ly/2CWcGnF>. This tool includes recommendations for Customs on how to improve border operations and engagement with stakeholders to promote gender equality. For instance, improving safety at the border by ensuring adequate lighting and creating a 24h complain mechanism to report incidents of corruption and harassment. She also mentioned that the WCO is currently developing a blended training package which will include an e-learning module to raise awareness on how gender equality can be considered in Customs

Ms. Shamika Sirimanne concluded the session acknowledging the call for capacity building on this subject and announced that a special session on gender in UNCTAD Empowerment Programme for National Trade Facilitation Committees will be included.

IX. Session 7: The role of the NTFCs in the establishment and operation of Electronic Single Window and other paperless initiatives

The TFA obliges Members to establish or maintain a Single Window (SW), enabling traders to submit documentation and/or data requirements for importation, exportation or transit of goods through a single-entry point. As one of the most complex measures of the TFA, Single Window requires a combination of legal, procedural and coordination efforts, working in parallel with wide-reaching information technology upgrades and connections. The WCO Data Model, the United Nations Trade Data Element Directory and the UN/CEFACT Common Code are among the international standards used to harmonize data exchanges and support Single Window implementation. This session explored the importance of maintaining parallel efforts on both systems and procedures if Single Window implementation is to be successful. Considering the widespread use of the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA World) in Africa, particular attention was paid to best practices on this platform.

Mr. Rajendra Meena (moderator of the session, Expert, WCO) emphasized that Single Window systems can lead to wider utilization of ICT innovations to provision increased accessibility to regulatory information, functions and services and to promote a paperless processing of goods across borders in the African region. She said, this is one of the trade facilitation measures that contributes the most to reducing trade-related costs and delays, by reducing human interface, and by increasing transparency. She mentioned that some countries have tried to maximize the benefits out of the Single Window by having additional features like comprehensive risk assessment through integrated risk management and by making the whole communication chain between Business and Government completely electronic and paperless. Mr. Rajendra Meena further emphasized that NTFCs can help African governments to ensure that all border stakeholders are best positioned to adapt to technological and associated procedural changes and that SW implementation easily translates into efficient and smooth facilitation of legitimate trade at borders. Especially in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area. He also mentioned that the Blockchain technology can be a useful tool for the exchange of information, mutual recognition of controls, inspections, standards conformity and can generate savings for both trade and governments and help ensure security, safety and protection of society.

Mr. [Ibrahima Diagne](#) (GAINDE 2000, Senegal) highlighted several important strategies towards planning of Single Window project, including choosing an approach, management model (using a national or international provider) and sustainable funding. He said, to ensure sustainability of the Single Window, there is need for continuous innovation and maintenance of capacities for improvements. Mr. Diagne also mentioned solutions to avoid duplications and developing multiple single window solutions, or totally depend on one supplier which may undermine the desired objective. The key in successful implementation of SW, he said, lies in: effective stakeholder engagement, collaboration, consideration of local context, performance measurement and maximizing the potential of optimization of processes through international standards and ICT. He concluded by saying, to address all these challenges, leadership and long-term vision is crucial.

Mr. [John David](#) (ASYCUDA Team, UNCTAD) presented the potential of ASYCUDA World as a single window provider and highlighted key factors to improve inter-agency cooperation including using international recommendations, including the WCO data model, as well as electronic services. He also stressed the importance of effective project management, involving all stakeholders and to strengthen the collaboration among donors and international organizations to ensure sustainability of ICT projects. Mr. David stressed that Single Window implementation does not necessarily include large investments but requires

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commitment from the Government and that there is no one model that fits all. He said, when it comes to implementation of ASYCUDA World, there is an emphasis on using capacity built in the region and continent and that some of the successful implementations of Single Window based on ASYCUDA are Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi.

Mr. [Rajcurrun Koolash](#) (Risk Management Section, Mauritius Revenue Authority), emphasized key success factors including effective communication, strong collaboration, sharing of information, data mapping and harmonization of information. He said, NTFC played an important role in Mauritius in the Single Window implementation, both in coordinating the collaboration between the public and private sector and in disseminating and adopting best practices in single window, in conducting capacity building, awareness raising and stakeholder engagement. Mr. Koolash concluded by emphasizing the legal amendments required when moving from stand-alone regulations to integrated regulations through Single Window.

X. Session 8: Involvement and Role of the Private Sector in NTFCs

Trade Facilitation is an important tool for economies to improve their business environment. Therefore, the active participation of the private sector at all stages of trade facilitation reforms – from design and formulation to implementation and monitoring – through and beyond the work of the national trade facilitation committees is essential. In this session, we heard from representatives of the private sector how they ensure that their needs are considered in the implementation of trade agreements and how they drive trade facilitation reforms in the region.

Mr. Rajesh Aggarwal (Event moderator and Chief, Trade Facilitation and Policy for Business, ITC) opened the session by emphasizing the important role that the private sector plays in NTFCs. He said, the first key role of the private sector is to identify the trade facilitation reforms that will yield maximum results and their next role is to partner with the government to implement the identified reforms. He said, finally, the private sector must be the feedback loop that monitors whether the reforms are functioning as intended. He stressed that the combination of these three roles will ensure that the private sector reaps maximum benefits from the implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement and concluded at the end of the session by summarizing each panelist's main takeaways with common themes being public-private trust building, evidence-based advocacy, a regional approach being appropriate, and equality within the structure of the NTFC through a co-chaired structure.

Mr. Edouard Batiébo (Head of the Facilitation and Logistics Intelligence Service, Chamber of Commerce, Burkina Faso) brought the perspective of the private sector and highlighted the benefits of an organized, active national Chamber of Commerce. He said, in the case of Burkina Faso, the main mission of the Chamber within the NTFC is to ensure the creation of a synergy of actions between the private sector representatives on the committee and that, to achieve this, the Chamber created a working team to focus exclusively on cross-industry trade facilitation issues. He said, the Chamber's role does not end there, however, as they also have responsibilities in ensuring smooth implementation of reforms and ensuring professionalism of private actors in the supply chain. Mr. Batiébo concluded by explaining that the Chamber is obliged to quantitatively monitor the transport and transit of merchandise, thereby enabling the private sector to use empirical trade facilitation advocacy.

Mr. Ziad Malek Hamoui (National President, Borderless Alliance, Ghana) first observed the differing roles and incentives between the private sector and government as they pertain to trade facilitation. He said, because of these inherent differences, the establishment of a dialogue space for trade facilitation reforms is crucial to propose actionable solutions and follow-up on the implementation of any reforms. Mr. Hamoui further dispelled two common myths about trade facilitation. First, he said, trade facilitation does not compromise revenue collection, and that, it rather enhances it due to higher trade volumes over the long term. Second, he said, trade facilitation does not inhibit industrialization by promoting imports only. He said, in fact, trade facilitation can make intermediate goods imports cheaper for manufacturers, thereby enhancing integration into Global Value Chains and increasing volumes of exports. Mr. Hamoui further outlined that the private sector can play the roles of a technical expert, an end-user or a reform partner and conclude by saying, to unlock maximum benefit from trade facilitation reform, there must be a mix of political will, trust building and capacity building emanating from both the private sector and the government.

Mr. [Adrian Njau](#) (Trade and Policy Advisor, East Africa Business Council) brought regional expertise and experience to the discussion in the case of the East Africa Community (EAC) and the East Africa Business Council (EABC). He cited concrete examples, one of which focused on the implementation of Customs Union Protocol at the national level. He said, upon implementation of this protocol, the EABC began noticing a rise in Non-Tariff Barriers (NTB) as countries dismantled their individual

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tariff codes and that in response, the EABC created an NTB monitoring mechanism to identify, report, and monitor the dismantling of NTBs. He further highlighted that public-private collaboration for trade facilitation reforms yields a sense of ownership and thus higher degrees of voluntary compliance from the private sector. He then mentioned that collaboration can manifest in optimized results not only at the national level, but regionally as well and that as a key takeaway, a challenge for the private sector is to harmonize different industry positions to identify a unified message. He concluded by admonishing national private sector bodies to strive for this wherever possible and utilize evidence-based observations to reinforce it.

Ms. Rooma Pillay Narrainen (Manager, Trade division, The Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry) demonstrated the positive outcomes that can be attained through organized private sector participation in the NTFC. She said, the Mauritian NTFC has worked to categorize the TFA commitments and obtained assistance from the World Bank and World Customs Organization on key national trade facilitation priorities. She further mentioned two ongoing projects where the private sector has played a prominent role in designing and implementing reforms and said these successes, however, did not come without challenges. She added that at the national level, the private sector can struggle to find a coherent message and how communicate constructive criticism for trade facilitation reforms. And further added that the regional level is also of great importance because costs are so high due to a lack of trade facilitation. Ms. Narrainen concluded that to help overcome this regional problem, the private sector should play a more active role on a regional basis.

XI. Session 9: How to engage effectively with other border agencies in a coordinated border management context

The TFA requests all national border authorities/agencies to cooperate with each other and coordinate border control and procedures to facilitate trade. Such cooperation and coordination may include alignment of working days and hours, alignment of procedures and formalities, development and sharing of common facilities, joint controls and establishment of one-stop border post control. At the same time, different border agencies maintain their own particular institutional, legal and procedural frameworks. This session explored how the common interests among border agencies can be discovered and mobilized in support of TFA implementation and economic development.

Ms. Brenda Mundia, (Deputy Director, Capacity Building Directorate, WCO) started the session by stressing that Customs are the drivers for Coordinated Border Management (CBM) solutions and that coordinated interventions have proved to be good solutions for TFA implementation. Ms Mundia highlighted Article 8 of the TFA regarding the CBM; and the importance of aligning procedures and formalities. Ms Mundia also emphasizes the benefits of implementing one stop border posts. She also recalled that Single Window implementation provides a great opportunity to implement CBM solutions. She concluded by stressing that the NTFC has many times contributed to the establishment of the CBM.

Ms. [Rosine Uwamariya](#) (Commissioner General at the Rwanda Revenue Authority), stressed that the biggest challenge when starting the CBM implementation was to bring all agencies together. She mentioned the different steps taken in Rwanda including regrouping the agencies into three sub-categories: Regulatory Agencies, Private sector and Security organs, and establishing three areas of cooperation: harmonization of processes and procedures, enforcement and control and Information and Technology. Ms. Uwamariya also shared examples of implemented measures including developing border processes and procedures to minimize duplication between different agencies, harmonizing working hours, conducting joint controls, implementing a single window and a trade portal. Ms Uwamariya concluded by stressing that CBM is a stepping stone for TFA implementation and important for succeeding with the implementation of several TFA measures.

Mr. Reuben Kunda (Zambian Revenue Authority), mentioned that the reason they started implementing the CBM in Zambia was to address challenges including duplication of interventions and inspections at the border, poor coordination and lack of organized border control processes, resulting in long clearance times and delays. Mr. Kunda also mentioned the importance of WCO instruments and tools in implementing the institutional framework in managing the NTFC as well as the establishment of a national bill taking into consideration all elements including border infrastructure and management, the establishment and functioning of the NTFC, the implementation of the one stop border post and simplified trade regimes.

Mr. [Melvin Spreij](#) (Standards and Trade Development Facility, WTO), emphasized that trade facilitation provides an opportunity to improve health, sanitary and phytosanitary border control. Ineffective Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) controls, he said, disrupt trade more than necessary and sometimes result in poor health protection. Mr. Spreij brought up several SPS procedural obstacles

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including limited information, multiple inspection, lack of coordination at border, complex and lengthy procedures etc. Mr. Spreij concluded by mentioning opportunities including using international standards, improving transparency, harmonizing and streamlining SPS processes, using risk-based approaches, connecting with customs and SPS authorities. He also mentioned the need to enhance the understanding of the link between SPS measures and trade facilitation and to collect examples of good practices.

Ms. [Melina Budimirovic](#) (Senior Technical Officer, WCO), presented several WCO tools developed to support the implementation of TFA Article 8 including the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC), the SAFE, CBM Compendium, the Single Window compendium, the Time Release Study guide, the Data Model, the NTFC Guidance, and invited members of the National Committees to use them. Regarding the Time Release Study, Ms Budimirovic stressed that it is a good opportunity to bring different stakeholders together and explained that this tool can be used for a diagnostic, as well as for monitoring progress of TFA implementation.

XII. Session 10: Donors' support for the implementation of trade facilitation reforms and South-South Cooperation

Donors provide continuous efforts to support and implement trade facilitation across the region through a broad range of assistance programmes. In this regard, participants heard from donor organizations about the different types of assistance that are available and have the opportunity to discuss the challenges faced in identifying and sourcing necessary funding.

Mr. Rajesh Aggarwal (Chief, Trade Facilitation and Policy for Business ITC), opened the session emphasizing the importance of donor support in the implementation of the TFA at national level, particularly as the TFA provides some flexibility in its implementation process, with a technical assistance and financial support for the category C measures. He said the regional and sub-regional dimensions should also be highlighted in trade facilitation reforms.

Mr. Philip Parham (Commonwealth Envoy), recalled the longstanding role of the UK as advocate for the TFA through different capacity building programmes, building upon the objective of adding value starting by a comprehensive needs assessment to respond to the needs of the countries. He mentioned projects such as the Empowerment Programme for the NTFCs, customs clearance in Sudan, advance rulings in Ethiopia or customs cooperation and said the purpose of this support is to unlock the potential of African countries as trading partners.

Mr. Sune Krogstrup (Deputy Head of Mission, embassy of Denmark), emphasized the support of Denmark to EAC and countries in transition from LDCs to middle-income countries such as Ghana, Egypt and South Africa. He highlighted the need to increase access to markets and breaking down barriers to trade. In that regard, he invited participating countries to replicate the successful experience of TradeMark East Africa in the ECOWAS region.

Mr. Eugene Torero (TradeMark East Africa, TMEA), presented the work of TMEA in the development of corridors, the role of regulatory agencies such as the standards regulatory bodies and the need for simplification of the legal environment of trade facilitation. He said the US Government has been the donor of the TF implementation work in East Africa, concretely on the support to NTFCs and Trade Portals, both projects implemented by UNCTAD. He further mentioned the need for ownership when empowering NTFCs and political commitment at the highest level.

Mr. Paul Fekete (USAID), talked about the role of USAID for several decades in stimulating economic growth and trade on the continent through their support to Aid For Trade and capacity building programmes. He said USAID has three tools to support trade facilitation: traditional programmes at bilateral and regional levels with the USAID TradeHub, assistance to the World Bank TF programme and the support to the Global Alliance for TF. He stressed that the USAID focused on donor support programmes for the private sector in which the private sector has a big role and highlighted that there is a need to comply with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness to ensure national ownership of TF reforms. He then concluded by revealing that the USAID strategy is of self-interest to create future trading partners in Africa for the US.

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XIII. Session 11: Available Technical assistance and Capacity Building in Africa for the implementation of Trade Facilitation reforms

International Organizations delivering technical assistance to support the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement introduced their relevant programs and projects in Africa in this session providing some context on best practices from beneficiary countries, representatives of the WTO, UNCTAD, World Bank Group and WCO provided overviews of their available technical assistance provision on TFA implementation in African countries.

Mr. Jonathan Werner (Moderator, Enhanced Integrated Framework), opened the session by briefly introducing the various international organizations of the panelists and the technical assistance programmes being delivered by them to support the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in Africa. He further complemented the donor organizations and provided context on best practices from beneficiary countries. With this, he quickly set the stage for the interventions of the representatives of the various organizations to provide overviews of their own technical assistance programmes in the various African countries.

Mr. [Mark Henderson](#) (Economic Affairs Officer, WTO), presented his organization's new grant programme² aiming at facilitating matchmaking between beneficiaries, donors and development partners and answered delegates' questions on how to maximize the full potential of the facility.

Mr. [Poul Hansen](#) (Chief, Trad Facilitation Section, UNCTAD), took the opportunity to introduce the ongoing programmes of his organization in the area of trade facilitation and strengthening of National Trade Facilitation Committees. He specifically mentioned the UNCTAD's capacity building programmes which includes the Empowerment Programme for National Trade Facilitation Committees, but also, assistance to the ratification and notification of WTO TFA provisions, ASYCUDA, trade portals, as well as the national transit coordinators' training.

Ms [Brenda Mundia](#) (Deputy Director, Capacity Building Directorate, WCO), presented on the technical assistance and capacity building support provided to WCO members in Africa to support the implementation of their trade facilitation reforms under the framework of the WCO Mercator Programme. She stressed that the Mercator Programme is composed of two tracks; the overall track covering development of instruments, tools and WCO's work with accredited Customs experts, as well as the tailor-made track providing customized national support to countries. She concluded by mentioning some of the collaborative efforts between WCO and other donor organizations such as UNCTAD.

Ms. [Victoria Tuomisto](#) (Associate Expert, ITC), started her presentation with an overview of her organization's (ITC) trade facilitation-related technical assistance in Africa in the key areas of enhancing transparency, support for effective participation of private sector in NTFCs, improving business compliance, and assisting countries in the implementation of selected TFA measures. She mentioned that throughout its trade facilitation projects, ITC has always promoted business perspectives at all stages from diagnosis, design to implementation of reforms. She said ITC also aims to address non-tariff barriers to trade using a *whole of the supply chain* approach comprising trade facilitation as well as quality for trade (SPS, TBT) and logistics services. She concluded by mentioning ITC's recent work that builds upon regional integration dynamics through its support for the development of a regional roadmap to TFA implementation in the West African Economic and Monetary Union region (WAEMU)

XIV. Session 12: Best practices, challenges and lessons learned in seeking TF technical assistance

Donor support is integral in ensuring reforms can be implemented and sustained by developing countries. What are the best practices in successfully coordinating such aid and making sure that the progress it achieves lasts? Planning strategically to ensure donor contributions are managed in the best way possible would not only help achieve the results on the ground but also help to build donor's confidence in the country. In this session, participants learned from the experience of countries in the region in obtaining and overseeing donor aid for trade facilitation reforms and overcoming challenges that this process entails.

² <http://www.tfafacility.org/grant-program>

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Mr. Manuel Henriques (Senior Private Sector Development Specialist, WBG), moderated the event and opened the session by setting the stage for the various countries to share experiences and lessons for the benefits of their peers who are members of other countries' NTFCs.

Mr. Wilson Mazimba (Trade Facilitation Specialist, Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Zambia) took the opportunity to present some examples of implementation and funding matrices that outlined her country's needs and sources for support. He also emphasized the need for an investment in time and effort in communication and outreach. Other best practices he shared where, having the NTFC Secretariat identify gaps in funding needs following the articles of the TFA after consultations with all agencies. And he concluded by showing an implementation matrix on notified measures her country has made known to cooperating partners through donor coordination meetings.

Ms. Gugu T. Zwane (Manager, Customs Modernisation, Reform and International Liaison, Eswatini Revenue Authority) spoke about the need for alignment of national trade facilitation priorities with technical assistance offerings. She said that through the NTFC, they can better align and sequence the technical assistance to be a true agent of trade. She further mentioned that key success factors included: embracing project management approaches - integrating principles of stakeholder analysis, results-based management, performance measurement and continuous learning while recognizing that individual activities are part of the wider TFA agenda. She concluded by admonishing participants to ensure strategic alignment and not to waste time and resources on initiatives that are not part of national strategic frameworks.

Mr. Edwin Starch (Deputy Commissioner, Customs and Excise Business Analysis, Malawi Revenue Authority) begun by sharing some extensive trade facilitation projects that the country was actively engaged in, but that more was still to be done and technical assistance required. He further gave some sound advice to the participants such as the need to adhere to the Monterrey Consensus and the five pillars of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Ownership, Alignment, Harmonisation, Managing for results and Mutual Accountability. He concluded by adding that strategic adoption, implementation & stakeholder coordination through National Trade Facilitation Committees are key to the success of trade facilitation projects and that Malawi was a great example in this.

XV. Session 13: New opportunities and challenges: Transit coordination at the heart of the NTFC

Transit is not only by nature multi-country, but it also involves numerous procedures and several public and private players. Having in place an efficient and sustainable transit system requires good coordination of transit activities. The WTO TFA stresses the importance of that coordination in Article 11.7, which requires countries to establish a national transit coordinator to respond to the enquiries of other members and make proposals for a good functioning of the transit system. However, it does not specify the role of transit coordinator. This session discussed issues relating to the definitive role and function of National Transit Coordinators; whether or not Transit Coordinators should be part of the NTFC; from which authority they should be selected from; and how the coordination will be amongst each other

Mr. Poul Hansen (Chief, Trade Facilitation Section, UNCTAD) opened the session, by stressing that transit is a key trade and transport facilitation instrument for the African continent, both for landlocked LDCs and for transit countries as it an important cost component in the competitiveness of countries. The issue of coordination of transit at national and regional levels is a key element in the implementation of transit procedures. This includes targeted approaches such as transit coordinators, transit corridors, cross border exchange of transit data and transit automation, a focus on providing robust guarantee systems for Customs transit. Proving such solutions in a public private partnership framework like the NTFCs will address many of the reoccurring transit issues such as extortion, rent seeking or corruption during the transit operation.

Ms. Milena Budmirovic (Senior Technical Officer, Compliance and Facilitation Directorate, WCO) opened her statement by highlighting that multiple requirements for transit procedure and transit fraud can be addressed from a regional perspective. She said, the WCO transit guidelines, launched last July, discusses what efficient transit systems are and how they are developed. She further emphasized the 150 guiding principles laid down in this instrument which are based on existing agreements and conventions such as the TFA, the Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. She continued to discuss specific guidelines within the instrument such as those on Information, Communication Technology, efficient information management, use of customs envoy and escort and coordination of border management. Regarding their capacity building portfolio, she said, the WCO already has 10 accredited experts from member customs administrations that they have trained and

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that there are regional workshops on transit, which includes discussing transit guidelines, sharing experience to members and developing action plans and list of priorities.

Ms. Rosine Uwamariya (Commissioner of Customs, Revenue Authority, Rwanda) started by saying Rwanda is a transit country and that although landlocked, they prefer to see it as land-linked. She said, this is mostly because of the trade facilitation initiatives that they have already put in place and gave an example on the port of Mombasa or Dar es Salam on how goods are already cleared from the ports and the goods can move freely without a bond. She said the country has developed a cargo tracking system at these ports where they monitor from point of departure to final destination. And used the opportunity to emphasize that Article 11.17 of the TFA is relevant and that, to implement the measure, Rwanda appointed a National Transit Coordinator and with the help from the Empowerment Programme for National Transit Coordinators organized by UNCTAD in April 2018, different countries shared experiences in transit, developed terms of references for national transit coordinators, as well as action plans. She concluded by saying, for Rwanda, the role of the transit coordinator is to coordinate, receive enquiries and propose amendment of procedures to facilitate transit cargo. It is very important that the coordinator is a member of the NTFC because transit is a key topic of the NTFC and this increases collaboration of the transit coordinator with other agencies.

Mr. Yves Christian Edoa Effa (Attaché, Prime Minister Service, Cameroun) used the opportunity to highlight the situational reality in Cameroon with regards to transit. He stressed that, as a sea-bound country, Cameroon has access to the port and is a key transit country for landlocked countries of Central Africa, most especially Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR). He said that they share borders additionally also with Nigeria and three other countries and that they have also developed a cargo tracking system to monitor cargo movement. He further shared the different issues encountered in transit of goods such as that of security and that people have been lost before in the Central African Republic. And concluded by adding that another issue is that of infrastructure and transport costs along the main transit corridors to Chad and the Central African Republic.

Mr. Salahadin Kelifa (Ethiopian Freight Forwarders and Shipping Agents Association, FIATA), started his statement by indicating that members of FIATA cover national and regional organizations and that they are the voice of a global industry. He said they have position papers on various subjects and assist members in addressing issues on national legislation. He further underscored their various activities to harmonize the use of information technology as well as the implementation of the TFA. He used the opportunity to strongly encourage the WTO signatory countries and their NTFCs to engage with FIATA and that they make a great contribution to facilitation in cutting trade times and costs by making information flows more efficient and streamlining trade procedures. He concluded his position by stressing that there is lack of consolidation on the multilateral levels and that customs policies can help fuel e-commerce.

Mr. Poul Hansen (Chief, Trade Facilitation Section, UNCTAD) brought the session to a close by summarizing all positions and interventions as follows: tracking as a tool and corridors are an essential issue, infrastructure is a returning issue, importance of e-commerce and transit, and the significance of public-private partnership are critical issues that form the core message on transit coordination.

XVI. Session 14: NTFC experiences in a digitalized trade facilitation world

Digitalization is an undeniable ally of trade facilitation, but the application of technology across the African continent and inside National Trade Facilitation Committees remains uneven. This session brought together NTFC representatives to share their experiences on the application of new technological tools, including the promotion of the adoption of relevant international codes and standards, to support trade facilitation in their respective countries. This panel also took the opportunity to share best practices and discuss lessons learnt from their experiences.

Ms. Daniela Zehentner-Capell (Moderator, Head of Division, Trade Related Development Corporation, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany) opened the session by observing that technological progress has been a key driver of international trade throughout history. She said that inventions such as the compass, steam engine, the internet and others have all spurred growth in trade between nations. Ms. Capell then turned the focus toward the current 4th industrial revolution which is again ushering in new technologies that will further facilitate trade. She concluded by mentioning Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence, the Internet of Things and other emerging technologies as areas for the discussion.

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Mr. [Jan Hoffmann](#) (Chief, Trade Logistics Branch, UNCTAD) opened his presentation with a touching quote: *technological progress will never be as slow as today*. He said, though technology is moving at a seemingly unprecedented pace today, the pace will only continue to accelerate in the future. Mr. Hoffmann further emphasized three key stages of technological progress, namely optimization, extension, and transformation and that navigation through these stages can bring challenges, of which the three key issues of interoperability, competition and development stand out. He said, overall, we must build the rules of the future today and that the TFA captures the dynamism of technological development; that it is a continuous process through which all must learn and adapt.

Mr. Saïd Maghraoui Hassani (Coordinator of the NTFC, Morocco) highlighted the trade facilitating role of digitalization of information, which has been very relevant to port operations in Casablanca. He said in 2006, the port was rife with bottlenecks and container congestion due to inadequate flow of critical information related to entry clearance. But that, through the creation of Portnet, an electronic window system, the port management team was able to effectively streamline the access and communication of key information at the port. He said Portnet is a public-private joint effort touching upon all stakeholders within the trade community and that this collaboration yielded such positive results that it inspired a new partnership in which Morocco has now undertaken a project with the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation which is an international public-private partnership.

Mr. David Ocholi (Commercial Manager, Maersk TradeLens, A.P. Moller Maersk), brought the private sector's perspective to the discussion by highlighting inefficiencies in supply chains with a specific focus on transfer of information. Using the example of a shipment of avocados from Mombasa to Rotterdam, Mr. Ocholi demonstrated a Maersk study's findings, that the shipment was subject to 30 parties, 100 actors, and 200 information exchanges. As a solution to this highly inefficient status quo, according to Mr. Ocholi, there is the introduction of a digital platform, underpinned by blockchain technology, which would ensure efficient exchange of information and documents in real time. He, however, stressed that such a solution will meet significant hurdles such as internet connectivity, human capacity, and others.

Mr. Reuben Kunda (Deputy Commissioner, Revenue Authority, Zambia) addressed the trade facilitating effects of digitalization with an example from his home country Zambia. He said, in Zambia, the customs broker licensing process was manual and paper-based, which required excessive time and resource allocation both on behalf of Customs as well as prospective brokers. As a solution to this costly and inefficient situation, he said, Zambia implemented an online application and processing website which enabled faster and simpler application and processing of licenses. Furthering his statement, he said, licensed brokers credentials are published online, and importers/exporters can designate specific operators. Mr. Kunda then highlighted that Zambia intends to magnify the benefits reaped by this digitalization with a project aimed at broker formalization with the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation.

XVII. Closing Session: Closing Remarks

The session opened with co-organisers (ITC, UNECE, the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, WBG, WCO, and WTO) thanking UNECA for hosting the event and UNCTAD for leading the organization of the African Forum for NTFCs and putting together the efforts of the different organizations and all participants for their efforts and inputs over the course of the forum.

Ms. Shamika Sirimanne (Director, Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD) then presented the main highlights from the Forum as in the following, saying:

A. The key points

As all speakers highlighted, NTFCs are key for the success of trade facilitation and it is becoming evident that NTFCs are critical to the success of trade facilitation reform. It means that ineffective NTFCs may have the opposite effect. Trade facilitation is complex by nature as it spans across sectors and government ministries. Countries recognized the need for an effective coordinating mechanism to ensure a holistic implementation of the TFA agreement in a structured and coordinated way. NTFCs are not new – in many countries they existed already before the WTO TFA, but the TFA has added motivation and momentum to their creation and roles, and even more now with the launching of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. We have seen that the NTFCs in Africa have made great progress over the last years. Although important progress has been made, many challenges remain. The Forum has been a success in helping all of us to learn and share experiences and good practices.

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B. African Integration

Many trade facilitation measures involve regional collaboration and collaboration with neighbouring countries. The WTO TFA helps regional integration in Africa, without adding to the spaghetti bowl of regional agreements. In practice, the AfCFTA and Regional Economic Communities (REC) provisions on trade facilitation are WTO TFA plus. The requirements for NTFCs in the annex on trade facilitation to the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods are exactly the same as those in the WTO TFA. Yet, emerging conflict environments, particularly in West and Central Africa present serious challenges to the successful implementation of trade facilitation measures. There is need to pay closer attention to these conflicts. The AfCFTA implementation will require a great deal of coordination among different public and private stakeholders at the national and regional level, ensuring coherence with other relevant instruments. The AfCFTA took inspiration from already existing international trade treaties such as the WTO TFA. The Annex on Trade Facilitation is largely inspired by the WTO TFA.

C. How to make NTFCs work

According to the NTFC Repository maintained by UNCTAD with UNECE and ITC, as of 2018, more than 110 countries have either formally or de facto set-up of their committee, and about 20 countries are in the process of doing so. However, although so many countries have a committee in place, it seems much harder to maintain and make them work. Though many countries in the region have already established well-functioning NTFCs, others are still facing multiple challenges. It appears that it is often easier to set up a body than to make sure it works well and that it continues its long-term operation through secure funding and firm political commitment.

The broad nature of the role of NTFCs requires multi-stakeholder approach with transparency, inclusivity and resources adequacy at its core. Only 21% of NTFCs claim to have an allocated budget for their activities. A robust legal backing, a strong structure, an inclusive composition and adequate financial resources have been essential for the sustainability of committees. This is important to secure funding for the proper functioning of these bodies, to be provided not only by donors but also through government budgets. NTFCs should work beyond compliance with the TFA and high-level political support and continued capacity building is key to their continuation.

Women empowerment is a key driver of economic and social development and is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Only 35% of members of NTFCs in Africa are female. Not only are Committees not gender-balanced, but they are usually chaired or co-chaired by men. Only 27% of the African NTFCs are led by women, while many SMEs in Africa are women owned, and 85% of women owned SMEs have women executives. The Forum made a call for strengthened capacity building on the subject of gender for NTFCs

D. The private sector

To the private sector - this is no time to remain passive. Please rise to the challenge and be part of the solution. The time is now. The first key roles highlighted for the private sector is to 1) identify the trade facilitation reforms that will yield maximum results. 2) partner with the government to implement these identified reforms. And 3) provide the feedback loop that monitors whether the reforms are functioning as intended. The combination of these three roles will ensure that the private sector reaps maximum benefits from the implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement. Private sector also highlighted that trade facilitation does not compromise revenue collection or controls done by border agencies. But rather, concrete TF reforms help improve controls and enhance revenue collection. Additionally, trade facilitation does not inhibit industrialization by promoting imports only. But rather, trade facilitation can make intermediate good imports cheaper for manufacturers, thereby enhancing integration into Global Value Chains and increasing volumes of exports.

The private sector can play the role of a technical expert, an end-user or a reform partner. To unlock maximum benefit from trade facilitation reform, there must be a mix of political will, trust building and capacity building emanating from both private sector and government.

We must note that the private sector includes different players, including users and providers of services, large and small companies, importers and exporters, all with different interests. At national level, the private sector can struggle to find a coherent message and communicate constructive criticism for trade facilitation reforms. To achieve this, a good practice can be that the Chamber of Commerce set up working teams to focus exclusively on cross-industry trade facilitation issues. Same mechanism should be held at regional levels to reduce costs.

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E. Concrete solutions and Performance

Trade facilitation provides an opportunity to improve trade performance, revenue collection, as well as health, sanitary and phytosanitary border control. Ineffective Sanitary and Phytosanitary controls disrupt trade more than necessary and sometimes result in poor health protection. Countries can maximize the benefits by using comprehensive risk assessment through integrated risk management and thus reducing trade-transaction costs and delays.

Just as NTFCs, Single Window solutions need inter-agency cooperation. Single Window system can lead to wider utilization of ICT innovations to provision increased accessibility to regulatory information, functions and services and to promote paperless processing of goods across borders in the African region.

Key for regional integration are transit coordination and customs cooperation. Especially in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area and the Blockchain technology can be a useful tool for the exchange of information, mutual recognition of controls, inspections, standards conformity and can generate savings for both trade and governments and help ensure security, safety and protection of society. We could also add the role of information and transparency in trade facilitation reforms through the Trade Portals.

Customs are the drivers for many concrete solutions. These include Coordinated Border Management solutions and coordinated interventions which have proved to be very good solutions for TFA implementation.

Transit is a key trade and transport facilitation instrument for the African continent, both for Landlocked developing countries and for transit countries as it is an important cost component in the competitiveness of countries. The issue of coordination of transit at national and regional levels is a key element in the implementation of transit procedures. This includes targeted approaches such as transit coordinators, transit corridors, cross border exchange of transit data and transit automation, a focus on providing robust guarantee systems for customs transit. Providing such solutions in a public private partnership framework like the national trade facilitation committees will address many of the reoccurring transit issues such as extortion, rent seeking, corruption during the transit operation.

The TFA requests all national border authorities/agencies to cooperate with each other and coordinate border control and procedures to facilitate trade. Such cooperation and coordination may include concrete improvements such as the alignment of working days and hours, alignment of procedures and formalities, development and sharing of common facilities, joint controls and establishment of one-stop border post control.

Just as for setting up and running an NTFC, many TF solutions require cooperation among different agencies. The NTFCs should have a strategic coordination role with a strong focus on performance targets and results. NTFCs can help the governments in Africa to ensure that all border stakeholders are best positioned to adapt to technological and associated procedural and management changes.

F. Tools and funding available

Participants learned about numerous available tools, including the TFA Facility, the TFA Data Base, the Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide, the Repository on NTFCs, The Revised Kyoto Convention and the SAFE framework, the Time Release Study guide, and numerous learning tools on Customs and for other border agencies. Different donors presented their programmes and priorities, with a rich discussion on needs and priorities. The WTO TFA Facility is available when other support mechanisms have proven unsuitable and is administered in collaboration with Annex D Organizations.

G. The final goal: Facilitate international trade, regional integration and sustainable development

Building on this first African Forum for NTFCs, we will continue to grow jointly from this collective experiences and partnerships and expand our community of beneficiaries for a sound, fair and transparent trading system. Political commitment is key for NTFCs to be real agents of change and advance trade facilitation reforms that can help countries better integrate in the international trading system and achieve relevant targets under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As was highlighted in our last session, digitalization provides new opportunities but also new challenges. As stated in Article 10.1 of the TFA, we must continuously reform and improve and simplify processes and procedures. The NTFCs will have the responsibility to continuously monitor progress made in trade facilitation and promote the necessary solutions. We need strong and sustainable NTFCs to perform ever more important and challenging tasks, and we are confident that this Forum has helped all of us to live up to this responsibility.

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XVIII. Evaluation

At the end of the Forum, participants were distributed a link to an online evaluation form to share their impression about activities during the forum. A total of 100 people provided responses. The evaluation outcome shows very positive results: according to participants, the Forum met the expectations of 94% of participants and 84% considered that they had enough instances to express their views and interact with other participants.

As observable in the table below, respondents believed the top five most useful sessions were:

- Session 5 - How to make an NTFC sustainable and ensure political will: best practices, challenges and lessons learned
- Session 4 - The role of NTFCs in the implementation of trade facilitation provisions in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)
- Session 8 - Involvement and role of the Private Sector in NTFCs
- Session 11 - Available Technical Assistance and Capacity Building in Africa for the implementation of Trade Facilitation reforms
- Session 10 - Donors' support for the implementation of trade facilitation reforms and South-South Cooperation

1 What is in your opinion the most useful aspects of the

Participants were also invited to give their opinion on the knowledge they acquired during the Forum. Their responses were consolidated into the graph below.

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| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|--|-----------|
| ▼ Session 1 – Trade Facilitation efforts and prospective in Africa / Progrès dans le domaine de la Facilitation des échanges et prospective pour l'Afrique | 40.82% 40 |
| ▼ Session 2 - The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement - Status of ratification, categorisation and notifications in Africa / Accord sur la Facilitation des Échanges de l'OMC - État des ratifications, catégories et notifications en Afrique. | 30.61% 30 |
| ▼ Session 3 - The role of the African regional organisations in implementing Trade Facilitation reforms / Le rôle des organisations régionales africaines dans la mise en œuvre des réformes en matière de facilitation des échanges | 43.88% 43 |
| ▼ Session 4 - The role of NTFCs in the implementation of trade facilitation provisions in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) / Le rôle des organisations régionales africaines dans la mise en œuvre des réformes en matière de facilitation des échanges | 57.14% 56 |
| ▼ Session 5 - How to make an NTFC sustainable and ensure political will : best practices, challenges and lessons learned / Comment rendre un CNFE durable et garantir la volonté politique : meilleures pratiques, défis et leçons apprises | 58.16% 57 |
| ▼ Session 6 - Mainstreaming gender equality in trade facilitation / Intégration de la parité homme-femme dans la facilitation des échanges | 27.55% 27 |
| ▼ Side Event - Trade Portals for Trade Facilitation : How to succeed / Evènements parallèle - Portails commerciaux pour la facilitation des échanges : comment réussir | 40.82% 40 |
| ▼ Session 7 -The role of the NTFCs in the establishment and operation of the Electronic Single Window and other paperless initiatives / Le rôle des CNFE dans l'établissement et le fonctionnement du guichet unique électronique et d'autres initiatives du commerce électronique | 44.90% 44 |
| ▼ Session 8 - Involvement and role of the Private Sector in NTFCs / Implication et rôle du secteur privé dans les CNFEs | 52.04% 51 |
| ▼ Session 9 - How to engage effectively with other border agencies in a coordinated border management context / Comment s'engager efficacement avec d'autres agences frontalières dans un contexte de gestion coordonnée des frontières | 36.73% 36 |
| ▼ Side Event - Unleashing Africa's economic integration potential : The case of Trade Facilitation Reforms under the AfCFTA / Evènements parallèle Libérer le potentiel d'intégration économique de l'Afrique : le cas des réformes axées sur la facilitation des échanges dans le cadre de l'AfCFTA | 25.51% 25 |
| ▼ Session 10 - Donors' support for the implementation of trade facilitation reforms and South-South Cooperation / Soutien des donateurs à la mise en œuvre des réformes en matière de facilitation des échanges et de la coopération Sud-Sud | 46.94% 46 |
| ▼ Session 11 - Available Technical Assistance and Capacity Building in Africa for the implementation of Trade Facilitation reforms / Assistance technique disponible et renforcement des capacités en Afrique pour la mise en œuvre des réformes en matière de facilitation des échanges. | 52.04% 51 |
| ▼ Session 12 - Best practices, challenges and lessons learned in seeking Trade Facilitation technical assistance / Meilleures pratiques, défis et enseignements tirés de la recherche d'une assistance technique en matière de la facilitation des échanges. | 45.92% 45 |
| ▼ Side Event - The Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation in Africa / Evènements parallèle: L'Alliance mondiale pour la facilitation des échanges en Afrique | 24.49% 24 |
| ▼ Session 13 - New opportunities and challenges: Transit coordination at the heart of the NTFC / Nouvelles opportunités et nouveaux défis: la coordination du transit au cœur du CNFE | 28.57% 28 |
| ▼ Session 14 - NTFCs' experiences in a digitalized trade facilitation world / Session 14 - Expériences des CNFEs dans un monde numérisé de facilitation des échanges | 43.88% 43 |
| ▼ None of the above / Aucune de ces réponses | 2.04% 2 |
| Total Respondents: 98 | |

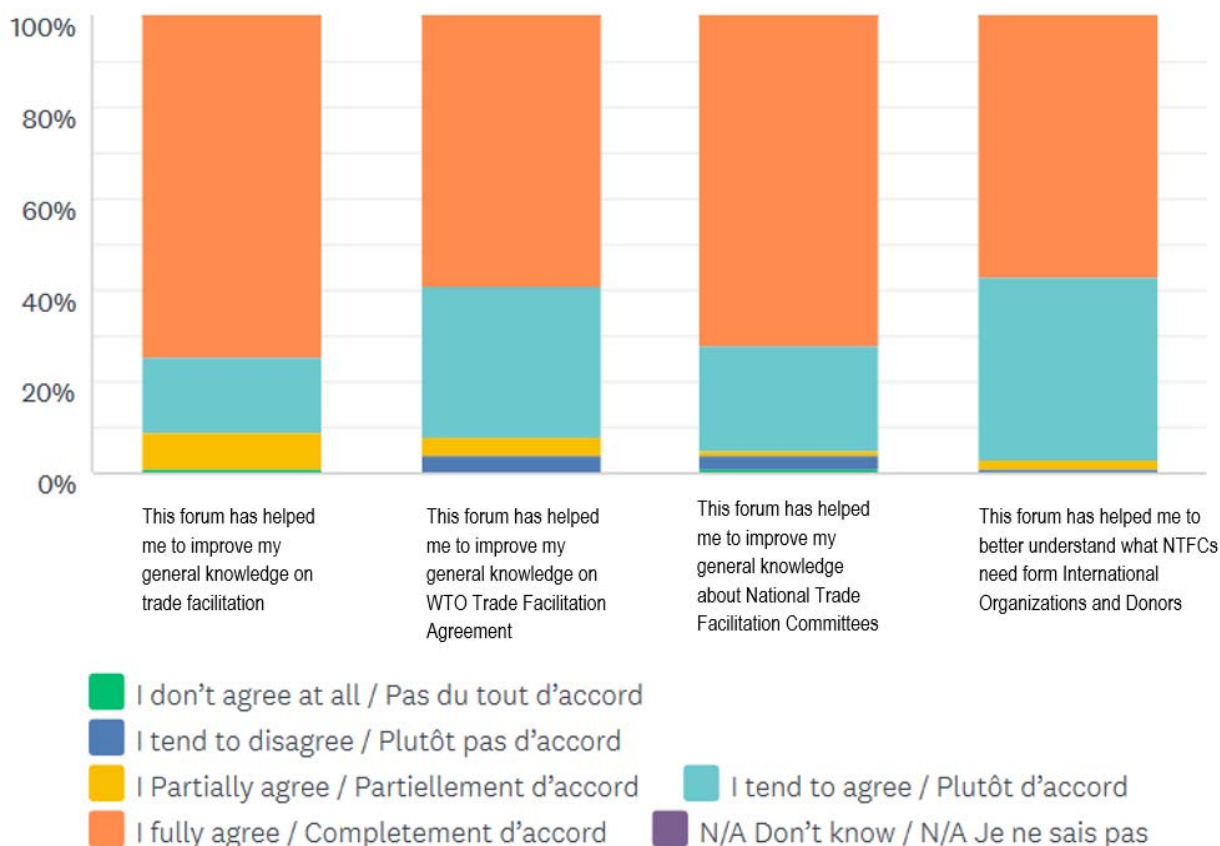
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2 How much do you agree with the following statements?



Participants were requested to make some final comments on the Forum. Here are some comments provided that was gathered:

- "A great event with opportunities for networking amongst the NTFC representatives"
- « Le forum a été très utile. Merci aux organisateurs pour leur investissement personnel dans le succès du forum. »
- « Le Forum est réussi. S'il y'a une recommandation à faire pour un prochain forum, c'est de donner plus de temps aux experts reconnus lors des présentations pour aller en profondeur dans les sujets d'intérêt pour les participants »
- "The forum was very helpful and helps to increase our knowledge on trade facilitation"
- « Satisfaite du forum. Je souhaite que pareille initiative se renouvelle. »
- "Provided me with a lot of insight on the TFA, implementation, challenges and the way forward in achieving the desired results to anchor with best practice".
- "The forum was very informative and will assist me as a member of the NTFC especially the need to have it formalised and the aspect of monitoring and evaluation as my country implements its roadmap."
- «Pour le deuxième forum prévoir une demi-journée dédiée spécifiquement aux échanges francs entre bénéficiaires et donateurs »
- « Le forum nous a permis d'avoir un large aperçu des champs de l'AFE et de savoir les opportunités disponibles pour la mise en œuvre de l'accord et l'importance et le rôle du secteur privé dans la mise en œuvre ».

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- « Ce Forum m'a été très utile. Il a renforcé mes connaissances sur le rôle des comités nationaux sur la facilitation des échanges. Le partage des expériences des autres nous permettront d'améliorer la conduite des activités de notre comité »
- "This was a very informative workshop, an eye opener, encouraging especially from success stories and how to tackle challenges facing the implementation of the TFA. Excellent. Maybe the Programme should be given more days, it was so packed and was made worse by the absence of tea break, one end up dozing and missing out on important issues."
- "The Forum was well organised and covered relevant topics on Trade Facilitation issues with a clear link on the role of NTFC on the same. There is need for UNCTAD to continue organizing this kind of forums at regional level also."
- « Un forum très intéressant. Je souhaiterais qu'il soit organisé plus régulièrement et dans d'autres régions. Félicitation et merci »
- "It was very good informative workshop, it helped a lot to understand the importance of NTFCs".
- "The Forum was an enriching experience for me personally and has broadened my knowledge and experience of trade facilitation".
- « Je parfaitement satisfait de l'organisation de ce forum et je souhaite qu'il se tienne plus régulièrement de manière tournante sur d'autres continents, et surtout faire des visites des mécanismes de Facilitation des Échanges mis en place dans le pays d'accueil si cela est possible. Je vous félicite pour ces brillantes présentations. Je souhaite participer à tous les forums et surtout faire écho chez moi dans mon Comité. »
- « Donner plus de séances de renforcement de capacités pour le secteur privé et les femmes entrepreneurs »
- "This Forum should be held on a yearly basis"

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