

# Strengthening Customs and the Cold Supply Chain during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has put unprecedented pressures on international trade, with a knock-on effect on agencies operating at ports, airports and land borders.

Customs operations around the world have been massively affected through increased electronic document submission, considerations for officer safety and enhanced border management coordination requirements, particularly with public health authorities. Many governments have taken bold actions to curb the effects of the virus by closing external borders and restricting movements within countries. These measures have exacerbated the pressures on global supply chains.

New challenges are emerging as rapid progress is being made in terms of vaccine development. Already fragmented supply chains are under extreme pressure to cope with vital needs related to the distribution of vaccines, medicines, and essential medical supplies such as personal protective equipment. Central to these needs is the ability to ensure efficient and secure cold supply chains that can facilitate the storage, transport, and preservation of cargo that needs to be maintained within acceptable temperature ranges.

## What is the role of Customs?

Customs administrations play a key role in the vaccine distribution chain, particularly in terms of facilitation and security. In December 2020, the World Customs Organization (WCO) encouraged its members to facilitate the cross-border movement of time-critical medicines and vaccines, ensuring supply chain security.

Regional Economic Communities have used the WCO lead to produce regional guidelines that consider the implications of transit corridors and cross border challenges. As the key agency at borders, Customs plays a pivotal role in ensuring cold supply chain continuity and security for vaccines and critical medical supplies. Implementation of the WCO's Immediate Release Guidelines can strengthen the ability of Customs to address the following critical areas:

- **Rapid clearance of COVID-19 related goods**

Customs facilitates the pre-arrival processing and risk management of consignments to streamline and expedite handling on arrival.

- **Coordination of agencies**

Customs acts as the focal point at borders and can ensure that inspections of vaccines are coordinated with other government agencies and, if possible, carried out at the same time.

- **Protection against harmful and fake items**

Customs takes the lead in preventing criminals from exploiting the pandemic situation, by addressing the threat posed by movement of illegal products such as dangerous, sub-standard or counterfeit medicines and vaccines.

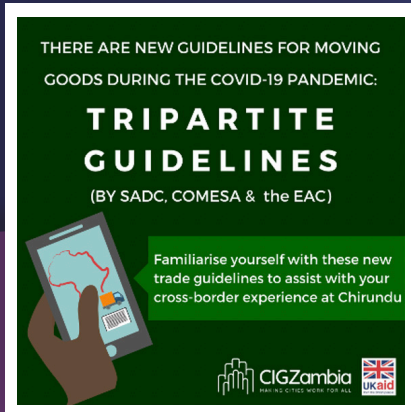
- **Transit Corridors**

Coordinated border management and cross border transit corridor management have proven to be major challenges in facilitating the movement of goods during a pandemic. It is essential that Customs Administrations improve their approach to information sharing to build efficient trade corridors.

## Our impact: Zambia

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Cowater International supported Zambian Customs in the following key areas:

- Fast-tracking of priority COVID-19 related goods.
- Creation of the COVID-19 Chirundu Inter-Agency Technical Coordination Committee (IATCC). IATCC brought together 11 agencies to improve coordination and cooperation at the border with Zimbabwe.
- Adopting the Tripartite Guidelines on Trade and Transport Facilitation Guidelines for Safe, Efficient and Cost-Effective Movement of Goods and Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Development of COVID-19-related communication materials (radio adverts, social media content) to improve checks and procedures at borders.



## Our Results:

**62%** of truck drivers saw the videos on social media.

**70%** of drivers now have a better understanding of pre-clearance and the Tripartite Guidelines.

**74%** of truck drivers heard the radio adverts.

## About Cowater International

Founded in 1985, Cowater International is a leading global development consulting company. Headquartered in Ottawa and with corporate hubs in London, Brussels, Montreal and Nairobi, Cowater International has successfully delivered a portfolio of over 2500 projects and assignments in more than 95 countries.

Our mission is to contribute tangibly to overcoming the challenges facing developing and emerging economies and supporting inclusive, sustainable growth for all. We are a leading provider of customs and trade facilitation technical assistance, delivered through strengthening policy, legislative and governance frameworks, adopting modern risk management practices, simplifying processes and supporting automation. Our support to customs and trade facilitation during COVID-19 includes:

- **Algeria, DRC, Uzbekistan:** COVID-19 trade impact assessment studies.
- **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS):** Studying the impacts of COVID-19 on trade corridors as part of a regional response strategy.
- **Ethiopia:** Facilitating the rapid flow of COVID-19 relief consignments along the Berbera Corridor.
- **Somalia:** Streamlining Customs procedures to allow for the entry of humanitarian aid consignments.

For further information, please contact :

**David Turney**

Vice President Customs, Trade and Investment Climate

[david.turney@cowater.com](mailto:david.turney@cowater.com)