



Snapshots of IO Practices

WCO Mercator Programme

Organisation(s): World Customs Organization (WCO)

The Snapshots of IO Practices present examples of specific efforts undertaken by an international organisation to work towards more effective international instruments. They aim to highlight examples of practices within the five focus areas of the Partnership of International Organisations for Effective International Rulemaking (IO Partnership), namely the variety and development of international instruments, their implementation, evaluation, ensuring stakeholder engagement, and co-ordination among IOs. The snapshots are submitted by the secretariats of the relevant international organisations implementing the relevant practice. The practices were compiled by the OECD Secretariat and focal points of the IO Partnership (UNCITRAL, OIE, WHO, ISO, WCO, BIPM, and SIECA), with a brief review to ensure consistency and comparability of the information provided within the snapshots. The inclusion of a practice in these snapshots implies no endorsement or assessment of that practice on the part of the OECD Secretariat or the focal points of the IO Partnership.

1	Overview of the Practice	Answers	Comments and intersections
1.1	Organisation	World Customs Organization (WCO)	
1.2	Area of relevance among the IO partnership focus themes (variety of instruments, implementation, stakeholder engagement, evaluation, co-ordination)	Implementation of international instruments	
1.3	Name of the Practice	WCO Mercator Programme	
1.4	Name of person(s) completing the template	Milena Budimirovic Özlem Soysanlı Jonathan Fellows	

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2	Description of the Practice	Answers	Comments and intersections
2.1	Please describe the practice shortly, providing information on its core features.	<p>Through the Mercator Programme, the WCO offers technical assistance and capacity building to its members to help them implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) expeditiously and in a harmonised manner by using core WCO instruments and tools.</p> <p>The WCO Mercator Programme has two tracks, under which the WCO co-operation with other IOs takes different forms:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overall track which focuses on raising awareness at global, regional and national levels and updating and developing trade facilitation standards and tools on overall requirements of Members in implementing the TFA (including development of guidance tools). Under this track, the WCO co-operates with the WTO and other standard-setting organisations of relevance to border agencies and other partners, namely by inviting them to participate in WCO working groups and contribute to development of tools, taking part in the WTO Trade Facilitation Committee, holding regional workshops, co-ordination of technical assistance and capacity building, as well as regular meetings among the Organisations.; and 2. Tailor-made track is anchored on the WCO capacity building principles of ownership, needs-based support, partnerships, results-based management and sustainability and focuses on the specific needs of Member countries by taking into account local conditions and environments for implementing trade facilitation measures. A growing proportion of TFA related support under the tailor-made track is now being delivered under multi-year (MY) Mercator engagements based on medium to long-term partnerships that employ a project-based approach. 	

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		<p>This operating model consists of an initial diagnostic assessment that includes the development of a multi-year Implementation Plan against which, in collaboration with beneficiary administrations, overall progress and implementation maturity can be effectively monitored.</p>	
2.2	What are the objectives of the practice?	<p>To develop relevant guidance instruments/tools to support implementation and to ensure Members receive adequate technical assistance and capacity building.</p> <p>To ensure TFA implementation is carried out in a harmonised and collaborative manner, to encourage the use of WCO instruments relevant to the WTO TFA, and to ensure consistency across international instruments related to customs procedures.</p>	
2.3	What have been the key results of the practice?	<p>Increased compliance with the TFA and enhanced trade facilitation at global level, in particular in developing and least-developed countries.</p> <p>Reports summarising the results of the programme are available in the two reports:</p> <p>Mercator Programme Report 2014-2018 and Mercator Programme Report June 2020</p>	
2.4	In what year was the practice introduced?	<p>The Mercator Programme was launched in 2014. However, co-operation amongst the international organisations involved in trade facilitation has been ongoing for many years, in particular since the launch of the WTO trade facilitation negotiations in 2004.</p>	

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2.5	Has the practice been updated/reformed since then? If yes, when and how has it evolved over time?	Yes, it has been improved continuously. This includes the development of new tools and guidance instruments in response to the expressed needs of Members, the on-going review of existing guidance and the on-going refinement of implementation support.	
2.6	What do you consider to be the primary strengths of the practice?	<p>Opportunity to avoid duplication of efforts of individual organisations in providing harmonised and consistent technical assistance and capacity building.</p> <p>Leveraging the collective experience when developing tools to support TFA implementation and in provision of technical assistance and capacity building.</p>	
2.7	What do you consider to be the main challenges faced during the implementation of the practice?	<p>The following Member-related challenges can exist during both the design and implementation phases;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of sustained political will / buy-in / commitment - Lack of effective stakeholder engagement (see 4.3) - Ineffective planning and co-ordination - Unavailability of reliable IT infrastructure and overall connectivity - Paucity of competence in some cross-cutting and technical areas - Integrity concerns / Gender and inequality concerns 	



2.8	<p>Does the practice have a formal/normative basis within the organisation or is it conducted informally? Does this basis make the practice mandatory or voluntary?</p> <p>If there is formal basis, please provide the relevant link or documentation.</p>	<p>Management of the Mercator Programme is under the responsibility of a number of staff members internally. In terms of involvement of other IOs in the practice, it is mainly on a voluntary basis. An exception are projects where participation of different organisations is contractual. The Mercator Programme reports provide more information (see 2.3).</p>	
2.9	<p>At what frequency is the practice applied? i.e. is it conducted once or on an iterative basis?</p>	<p>The practice is applied continuously in different forms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TFC meetings take place at least once or twice a year; - Meetings of the WCO Working Group on the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement used to take place twice a year from 2014, until the closing of the group in 2021; - Co-ordination meetings amongst IOs supporting TFA implementation are held on a regular basis (a few times a year); - Co-ordination on the TFA Grant Programme is taking place continuously throughout the year; - Provision of technical assistance and capacity building is taking place throughout the year. 	
2.10	<p>Is this practice applied systematically, (e.g. with respect to every normative instrument, according to specific criteria or on an ad hoc basis)?</p>	<p>The practice is applied on an ad hoc basis, upon request by WCO members.</p>	
2.11	<p>Please provide specific details or examples to illustrate the practice (including supporting links and documents).</p>	<p>Members contact the WCO to request either holistic or specific support under the Programme. The WCO responds depending on the nature of the request and conducts either a diagnostic assessment to identify and address implementation gaps or delivers individual support in relation to a specific technical measure.</p>	

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3	Design of the Practice	Answers	Comments and intersections
3.1	Who designed the practice (e.g. Was it developed internally, in collaboration with other organisations, etc?)	The Mercator Programme was designed internally by the WCO, and in co-operation with the WTO. The WTO Director General Azevedo provided support to the Mercator Programme during its launch in June 2014.	
3.2	Which stakeholders were engaged with in the design of the practice?		
3.3	How long did it take to design the practice?	The start of the Mercator Programme design was after the conclusion of the TFA in December 2013 and was launched in June 2014, which signifies a total of seven months. However, it is continually revised, refined and redesigned over time.	
3.4	What resources were needed to design the practice initially (i.e., staff, budget etc.)?	<p>Internal resources included staff from a number of WCO units, primarily the Procedures and Facilitation Sub-Directorate who took the lead in the design and in the overall track. Once a large portion of the tools were updated or developed under the overall track, the Capacity Building Directorate took the lead, as focus was turned to the implementation under the tailor-made track.</p> <p>At the start at least ten colleagues were actively involved at WCO level in the design of the Mercator Programme, while maintenance of the programme is managed by up to five colleagues and many others are involved its execution.</p> <p>In terms of budget, donors contributed to the tailor-made track in particular, while the overall track was funded mainly from existing WCO resources.</p>	

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3.5	What challenges were encountered during the design of the practice and how were they overcome?	(see 2.7 above).	
3.6	Has the practice been tested before implementation (i.e. pilot phase)? If yes, please describe.	No. However, it is built on the experience gained through the execution of the WCO Columbus Programme, a similar development initiative for Members.	
4	Implementation of the Practice		Comments and intersections
4.1	Which units are responsible for implementing the practice within your IO?	Overall implementation of the Mercator Programme is managed by the Capacity Building Directorate from the strategic and planning perspectives of the tailor-made track, but in collaboration with the Procedures and Facilitation Sub-Directorate who generally provide the required technical expertise and manages the overall track. Implementation support is also provided by formally accredited Member experts.	
4.2	Are IO members involved in implementing the practice? If so, how?	Yes. Many Members have adopted a multi-year approach to implementation under the Mercator Programme that involves developing a holistic Implementation Plan based on the diagnostic recommendations. The Plan, that contains Activities and KPIs, is developed in collaboration with Members who are expected to take ownership and responsibility for its delivery.	
4.3	Are external actors beyond the organisation or its membership involved in implementing the practice? If so, how?	Yes, effective stakeholder engagement is crucial. Many of the TFA provisions are dependent on the on-going collaboration other government border agencies and private sector trade representatives.	

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4.4	Which resources are needed to implement the practice (e.g., staff and budget)?	The multi-year approach promotes the establishment of a Project Management Office to oversee delivery and to monitor implementation progress. These Units should effectively co-ordinate donor activity and liaise with internal colleagues on specific Customs areas, where appropriate .	
5	Outputs and Evaluation of the Practice	Answers	Comments and intersections
5.1	Has the practice been evaluated or reviewed?	Effective monitoring and evaluation of activities under the Mercator Programme is a crucial component of the overall development cycle and implementation progress should be monitored on an on-going basis at national level which then provides inputs for further improvements of the programme at central level.	Intersection with area of IO Partnership on “Developing a greater culture of evaluation of IO rules and standards”
5.2	If yes, who carried out the evaluation (please specify whether it was done internally or externally)	It is expected that overall monitoring should be managed by the Member PMO in consultation with relevant internal sections, and in collaboration with the IO. In general terms evaluation/monitoring should be against the KPIs contained within the implementation plan. Regular feedback is received from Members commenting on how the Mercator Programme is assisting them with regard to their TFA commitments.	Intersection with area of IO Partnership on “Developing a greater culture of evaluation of IO rules and standards”

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<p>5.3</p>	<p>If yes, please describe the evaluation methodology? (e.g. were any quantitative or qualitative indicators/criteria used to measure/assess the outcomes of the practice?).</p>	<p>In general terms it can be difficult to measure short-term impact when adopting a multi-year Mercator Programme approach to delivery and overall development.</p> <p>Plans contain a mixture of measures both quantitative and qualitative (see 5.2).</p> <p>In addition, the IO has developed two specific performance measurement mechanisms that all Members are expected to utilise;</p> <p><u>TFA Maturity Model (MM)</u></p> <p>A means of assessing baseline status on a progressive scale that assists Members determine the degree to which each article of the WTO TFA has been implemented. This methodology provides an assessment of implementation maturity and provides a report of a point-in-time snapshot that can be used to measure progress and improve activities.</p> <p><u>Time Release Study (TRS) Guide</u></p> <p>This Guide is known as an internationally accepted strategic tool to measure the actual time taken for the release and/or clearance of goods, from the time of arrival until the physical release of cargo. It allows for the objective identification of bottlenecks in border-related procedures and addressing them in an efficient and effective manner along with monitoring and reporting of overall progress.</p>	<p>Intersection with area of IO Partnership on “Developing a greater culture of evaluation of IO rules and standards”</p>
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5.4	If yes, what were the conclusions of the evaluation, and has the practice evolved subsequently? If possible, please attach related documents or provide a link.	Whilst feedback from Members on the strategic achievements derived from the Mercator Programme (in relation to reducing trade costs to boost economic growth) remains positive, it is important that all related policies and procedures and subject to a responsive on-going review process to ensure the overarching aims of the TFA can be fully realised.	
6	Additional comments and information	Answers	Comments and intersections
6.1	Is there any more information or documentation that would be valuable to share in relation to the practice (e.g. links, reports, meeting minutes, supporting documents)?	N/A	
Sources			