Vanuatu

ASYCUDA World Project

Monthly Newsletter

ISSUE 1   **29TH APRIL 2016**

UPCOMING EVENTS IN MAY

1. Technical inception mission

2. Customs reform inception mission

ASYCUDA World Mobilisation seminar concluded in Santo

Vanuatu Customs has been using the ASYCUDA++ software since 1999 to support its Customs clearance operations. In 2013, Customs sought the assistance of UNCTAD for the deployment of the latest, web-based, ASYCUDA World version and a proposal to that effect was prepared. The project documentation was signed in Port Vila in October 2015. The corresponding budget was secured by the Vanuatu Government and the first installment paid to UNCTAD on 5th November 2015 thus paving the way for start of project activities.

To officially mark the start of the project in Vanuatu, two mobilization seminars were organized to discuss project arrangements and planning in both Port Vila and Luganville on 29th and 31st of March respectively. This is an attempt to reach out and engage all of Customs stakeholders in these two urban centres.

The participants at the mobilisation seminar on Santo

The acting Minister for Finance and Economic Management, Honourable Jean Pierre Nirua, formally launched the ASYCUDA World project during the mobilization seminar in Port Vila. During the same event, the Director of Customs and Inland Revenue, Mr. Benjamin Malas handed out the appointment letters of a three man Customs team who will be overlooking and managing this 20 months project, full time.

Customs being a hub for trade information, coordination between all stakeholders in international trade in Vanuatu is essential. The mobilization seminars were therefore essential to provide awareness and gain support to the Project.
Presentations were made by both DCIR and UNCTAD during the seminars and the queries raised were addressed during the seminar sessions.
Customs commitment towards the reform and modernization of its operations is clearly demonstrated by its management and the Government. With the mobilization seminars now behind us, the hard work now lies ahead for the next 20 months.

Mobilisation seminar in photos

First month of the Project

Project team at new office premises

- The Project team have settled well into their new office premises at the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO).

- The Project Detailed Work Plan & Logical Framework has been drawn up by the Team.

- Customs has submitted the second Project payment to UNCTAD.

- A Computer Supplier in Vila has been identified to supply the required equipments for the Project team.

- Both Customs and OGCIO have committed funds towards the SO-Class middleware software required for users to login to the ASYCUDA system. The provider of this software are Strategy Object.

- The Government Central Tender Board as approved Strategy Object as the sole provider for the SOClass middleware.

- To further modernize Customs operations in Vanuatu, the Project team have compiled a list of procedures to be automated. These procedures are outside of the normal scope of the ASYCUDA World system.

- The AW Prototype server was successfully installed with the operating system and database. Now waiting AW installation!

- The Project is well on schedule against the Work Plan.

New Server Technologies adopted

Since the introduction of the ASYCUDA system in Vanuatu back in 1999, Vanuatu Customs has always been using the Linux software for the servers Operating System and Oracle as the systems database software.

The Customs administrations of Fiji, Samoa and PNG who have adopted the new ASYCUDA World system have carried on this trend to continue using Linux and Oracle for their ASYCUDA servers.

However, during discussions with UNCTAD and the OGCIO, the Project team had to make the tough decision to adopt Windows server as the Operating System for the new ASYCUDA server and MS SQL as the database software.

The advantage of using these two new software is that the Vanuatu Government, through the OGCIO, already has the volume license with Microsoft to use these software. Furthermore, the expertise of using these software are already available at the OGCIO.

The decision to utilize these software means that Vanuatu now joins Solomon Islands to operate the similar environment for their ASYCUDA servers.

On their hardware front, for the first time since 1999, the Vanuatu ASYCUDA server will now be installed on virtual machines, as opposite to "bare metal". Again this is provided free of charge by the OGCIO. Thank you OGCIO!

Director appoints Project Committee members

To ensure good governance of the Project and a successful implementation, the signed Project document calls for the establishment of the following Committees:

1. Customs Reform and Modernisation (CRM) Committee.

2. Project Steering Committee (PSC).

On 27th of April 2016, the Director of DCIR, Mr. Benjamin MALAS issued the appointment letters of the members to these committees. The composition of the Committees are as follows: the CRM consists of the Director DCIR as the Chairman, the Acting Deputy Director Customs as the vice Chairman, the National Project Manager as the Secretary while the members are all Customs Managers, the Customs Technical Advisor, the UNCTAD Advisor(s) and the members of the National Project team.

On a higher level, the PSC consists of the DG Finance as the Chairman, the Director DCIR as the vice Chairman, the NPT Manager as the Secretary, while the members are DDC and the UNCTAD AP Coordinator, Finance, OGCIO and Chamber of Commerce. Other PSC Government reps which may be invited when required include the Deputy Director Inland Revenue, NSO, Bio-Security, Trades and Immigration, while reps from the Trading Community includes the Customs Brokers (& Freight Forwarders) and the Chamber of Commerce. RBV, the Stevedores and airfreight handlers are also included and will be invited when required.

The CRM Committee is required to meet once a month or as required, while the PSC is required to meet every three months during the first phase of the project and twice a year thereafter.

The ASYCUDA (Automated SYstem for CUstoms DAta) software, used by over 90 Customs Administrations around the World, was developed by the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD). An earlier version of ASYCUDA called ASYCUDA++ was implemented in Vanuatu in 1999.

ASYCUDA++ is a DOS based program with ICT limitations and therefore obsolete in this day and age. UNCTAD has therefore developed a web-based version of ASYCUDA known as ASYCUDA World. It takes advantage of the significant progress made in the field of ICT to provide improved automated support to the evolving requirements of both the Trading Community and Customs administrations.

Director urges Customs

Brokers and Freight Forwarders to get organised

The Revised Arusha Declaration considers that Customs should foster an open, transparent and productive relationship with the private sector.

The recently completed WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement Needs Assessment recommended *"Regulatory agencies and the private sector cooperate to identify consultation points and to develop a consultation strategy clearly identifying stakeholders, when consultation should take place, method of communication, recording of discussions and outcomes."*

The Assessment also considered that from a border agency perspective, Customs were compliant with many of the articles of the TFA. Additionally the private sector lacks a collective approach when it deals with issues relating to processing cargo at the border. Consequently traders have to individually deal with issues impeding trade facilitation that are perhaps common to all others.

An imperative exists for Customs and other border agencies to develop a vehicle for regular consultation with industry with a view of improving trade facilitation and creating a more productive relationship with stakeholders.

The first step is to encourage and assist industry in creating a representative body to contribute to such a forum. Now that the issues surrounding Customs broker licensing are largely resolved, the opportunity exists to resurrect the previously active, Customs Brokers Association for positive rather than negative purposes.

The current ASYCUDA World project also requires an industry representative to be part of the project steering committee. It is essential that there is industry contribution to this important project, and as a consequence you are requested to identify a suitable representative to contribute to the AW steering committee. While the formation of a peak body to represent brokers in the consultative process with Customs is important, identifying a suitable representative to be part of the AW project has to be done now.

After your internal consultations please advise the ASYCUDA World Project Team at awpnt@vanuatu.gov.vu of your representative.

Mr. Benjamin MALAS
Director