TRADE FACILITATION & THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Best Practices and Recommendations to Facilitate Trade and Support Business Continuity and Recovery

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Agenda

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Challenges Posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic

- The duration of the COVID-19 pandemic is **uncertain**.
- Although containment measures implemented by many countries may have provided some immediate reduction in the spread of the disease in the short term, they may undermine a country's recovery efforts in the medium and long term.

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Best Practices to Facilitate Trade

Facilitating Trade

- Enhance use of risk management; establish “green lanes” for emergency supplies
- Consider the enhanced use of pre-arrival processing and post-clearance audit methods in order to achieve higher level of release for low-risk consignments
- Establish accredited importers or exporters (such as Authorized Economic Operators) based on compliance records to allow critical products to be expedited
- Utilize Single Window to reduce face-to-face interactions and prevent backlog/congestion at the border
- Use Trade Information Portals to disseminate the latest information on changes to procedures related to facilitating trade and reducing risk of transmission
- Leverage the NTFC to develop communication strategies/ update TF action plans and to coordinate/consult with the private sector
- Increase internal and external border agency collaboration
- Establish joint customs and border operations COVID-19 support centers
- Develop COVID-19 customs and border operations emergency response manuals

Best Practices to Facilitate Business Continuity

Business Continuity

- Frontline workers at the borders should be protected through use of PPE while working on-site
- Ensure ICT readiness to support remote work where feasible
- Ramp up presence at enquiry points through distance communications (telephone, SMS, web-chat, etc.)
- Institute flexible working conditions
- Border agency operating hours and controls should be coordinated to minimize delays in meeting border processes and requirements
- Extend border agency working hours to accommodate social distancing among border officials to allow for increased trade flows of critical commodities and for logistics providers to more adequately manage cargoes

Recommendations for Sustainable Recovery

- Revise border agency working hours to align with neighboring countries to enhance cross-border cargo movement and clearance
- Revise or draft trade laws and implementing regulations to ensure alignment with the WTO TFA, including specific regimes for the facilitation of critical and emergency responses
- Simplify, streamline, and harmonize trade procedures and documents to reduce time and cost to trade, including the removal of hard copy documents
- Improve transparency and accountability measures related to trade practices
- Revise interagency coordination and design of institutional capacity building plans
- Prepare for the phased opening of borders
- Strengthen automation systems
- Enhance digitalization of border operations

Maintaining trade flows as much as possible is crucial for providing access to essential food and medical items and in limiting negative impacts on human health and the economy. Distribution of vaccines, when or if developed, will require careful storage, handling, and expedited delivery (i.e. simplified import, export, and transit processes and procedures) to ensure the unprecedented number of vaccination shipments remains viable during transportation across international borders.

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Thank you

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