



CARIFORUM-EU EPA

A Partnership that Counts



Some Lessons from the Review of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement

Chapter 4, Title I of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA addresses Customs and Trade Facilitation, and in particular, Article 31 requires that the Parties' respective customs legislation and procedures draw upon international instruments and standards applicable in the field of customs and trade. Accordingly, CARIFORUM States and the European Union are parties to the World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). The TFA seeks to simplify, harmonise and modernise procedures to reduce the bureaucratic delays and red tape in moving goods across borders. The EU notified acceptance of the TFA to the WTO on 5 October 2015. To date, twelve (12) WTO-EPA CARIFORUM States have ratified the TFA. States have been implementing the necessary reforms and making the notifications required by the Agreement.

WTO members reviewed the TFA in July 2022. CARIFORUM States may wish to note the following revealed by the review as they continue implementation:

- The TFA accelerated **digitalisation** - because the provisions rely on automated processes that make customs procedures more transparent, efficient and effective. Key technological innovations came from the introduction of single window systems e.g. electronic documentation and data analytics. Challenges in the implementation of single window systems, such as financial outlay and the need to improve data interoperability were noted;
- Countries which implemented trade facilitation reforms built up **resilience** and were quickly able to adapt to changes in trade volumes and regulatory controls introduced during the pandemic which enhances their ability to respond to the next crisis;
- The extent to which all traders benefit from trade facilitation needs to be continuously assessed and more work remains to be done to ensure that processes are **inclusive**, particularly for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, which in many cases are operated by women; and
- Improving **coordination** of various national agencies responsible for border matters within and between countries is crucial. Technical, human, and budgetary challenges have affected coordination. The private sector should inform national trade facilitation committees about its experiences at the border as well as partner in designing and implementing trade facilitation reforms. Harmonisation of customs procedures across borders requires continuous collaboration between countries. Members were urged to support and assist each other in this regard.