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The Role of Regional Organizations in the Implementation of Trade Facilitation Reforms

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1. Most regional Organizations especially in Africa are primarily focused on Integration. Integration through Trade is viewed as the most effective way in which countries can achieve this goal.
2. It is in this regards that for Africa in particular, Integration is championed by Regional Economic Communities and almost all of them have formed Free Trade Areas (FTA). As literature on regional Integration instructs, FTAs fundamentally have resulted into removal of tariff barriers. However, it is the persistence of Non-tariff Barriers that requires much attention in these regional arrangements.
3. Trade Facilitation offers a suite of tools and measures that if effectively deployed, can result into the removal of major non-tariff barriers and usher in a great deal of economic potential of countries involved in regional integration programs. It is in this regard, that Trade facilitation is of fundamental importance to Regional Organizations

Roles of Regional Organizations in Trade facilitation

Given the background above, there is indeed a potential role for Regional Organizations in the implementation of Trade facilitation Reforms. We detail some roles below:-

4. **Championing regional Approach to Trade facilitation Reforms.** There are a number of Trade facilitation measures that can be well implemented through a regional approach. From the WTO Trade facilitation Agreement, most measures enumerated under articles 7, 10, 8.2, 11 and 12 are very prime for a regional approach. Regional organizations therefore can play a crucial role in implementing reforms of this nature. At the African Union Commission, for example, with support from UNCTAD, we are in the process of finalizing a Trade facilitation Strategy for Africa based on this model.
5. **Facilitating the exchange of information.** Peer to peer learning in the implementation of Trade facilitation reforms is one of the most cost effective way of implementing reform. Regional organizations can play a crucial role of establishing platforms that can serve this purpose. Such platforms can bring together all the major actors in trade facilitation and afford them an opportunity to exchange notes on how to go about the reforms. It is in this regard at the African Union Commission we established an Annual Trade facilitation Forum, especially for Customs Administrations.
6. **Rationalization of resources/economies of Scale.** Implementation of Trade facilitation reforms can at times be costly. However, a regional Approach would ensure that countries can seek assistance as a region thereby avoiding

duplication of efforts. Regional organization can therefore play a crucial coordinating role in such efforts plus others like capacity building and resource mobilization.

- 7. Promoting collaboration for effective implementation of reforms.** As stated in 4 above, there are some Trade facilitation measures whose implementation requires collaboration and coordination. Regional Organization can successfully take up this role to ensure that their respective regions are moving as one in this respect. A good example here would be the support that Regional organizations can offering the establishment, coordination and monitoring of the national Trade Facilitation committees (NTFCs) with the region. In this regard, regional organizations can also coordinate the establishment of **REGIONAL TRADE FACILITATION COMMITTEES**