



**REMARKS BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF SACU,
MS PAULINA M. ELAGO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
13TH STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING
WCO-SACU CONNECT PROJECT
10 MARCH 2015, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA**

The SACU Executive Secretary, Ms. Paulina M Elago thanked the Steering Committee chairperson, Mr Bevan Simataa, the Commissioner of Customs and Excise in Namibia, for the opportunity of meeting the Steering committee members. The ES indicated that she has longed to attend some sessions of the Steering committee in the past and appreciated the opportunity to be part of the discussion on the Steering Committee. She alluded to the fact that she is looking forward to meet and work with the members of the Steering Committee and be part of the discussions. She noted that the customs development programme is important to the SACU region and contributes to the effort of modernisation of customs and enhancing trade facilitation as well as economic development in the region.

The ES further highlighted that for the Secretariat this is a flagship programme that indicates that the region upholds SACU inter-regional trade. The ES informed the meeting that she attaches great importance to the Trade Facilitation (TF) initiatives towards reducing transaction costs and speedy delivery of goods across the borders. It also supports Member States compliance with international obligations. She emphasised the important role of the Steering Committee in the programme in providing the leadership and vision and directing the programme delivery. She thanked the WCO and Sida for the support to the region through the programme. The ES alluded to the fact that while the region implements phase 2 of the project, it is important to draw lessons from the first phase.

She further highlighted that with the recent development on WTO TF agreement, there is need for alignment in the region in order to respond to requirements arising out of the agreement. She indicated the need to coordinate with all partners. She shared with the meeting the discussion of the SACU Senior Trade Officials in which STO directed that a joint meeting of the Customs and Trade Officials be convened as well as a common approach on the Trade policy in Geneva so that the views of the region are consolidated. She concluded by highlighting the importance of dialogue with the trade both at national and regional level to showcase the result of the good work that the region has been doing.

She indicated that communication and visibility of the result in Trade Facilitation will divert attention away from revenue sharing in SACU. This will showcase that the region is doing much more than revenue sharing. As such we need to accelerate delivery of the programme and communication of related achievements.

Also Present during the Official Opening was, Mr Erich Kieck, the Director for Capacity Building at the WCO Secretariat who in his remarks, congratulated the ES for her appointment as the Executive Secretary for SACU. He noted the linkage between trade policy discussion in the WTO and the work of customs in which customs implements the trade policies. He shared with the meeting the theme of the 6th meeting of the WCO Capacity Building Committee (CBC) which emphasises starting with the end in mind. This is part of the project delivery.

The Director also welcomed the new RPM to the region and to the project. He noted that the new RPM is tasked with the responsibility of accelerating the delivery of the project and that the support from the Steering Committee will be critical and the Steering Committee needs to determine the kind of delivery that is needed. He highlighted that the global environment is changing and the region needs to respond to these changes. He indicated that the TFA is not anything new from what Customs has been implementing for some time. However, he noted that TFA as a political directive gives visibility of Customs as Customs is at the centre thereof. However, he noted that the TFA as a political directive gives visibility of custom as customs is at the centre thereof. The Steering Committee needs to reflect on the implication of the TFA on the annual work plan in the programme and what does it mean for the programme. He concluded by introducing the new Sida Programme Director

Richard Chopra who is also the RPM for a project in the West Africa region. The programme director covers all the Sida funded projects at the WCO which includes projects in SACU, the EAC, West Africa as well as a project that deals with wildlife protection. He also wished Steering Committee a fruitful meeting.

Mr. Gene Ravele, the Chief Officer, South African Revenue Service (SARS) conveyed greetings from the SARS commissioner, Mr Tom Muyani to the Steering Committee and welcomed delegates to Johannesburg. He thanked Member States for choosing the location of the steering committee at the commercial hub of the Gauteng Province for the meeting. He noted with concern the recent media uptake and lobbyist pressure to discredit the work of the Customs Union, who view the union as the revenue sharing arrangement, despite efforts in the areas such as trade facilitation and protection of the region from illicit trade. With the customs programme there is an opportunity to demonstrate that TF is working in the region. The region needs to work closer together to protect the region from illicit trade showcasing these developments will lessen the pressure from these lobbyists groups. He concluded by acknowledging the Political tensions in the union which can be managed by showing the results from the work of the programme.