

FS: Why is Customs Day celebrated internationally?

CEO: International Customs Day is celebrated around the world every year on 26th of January. It is celebrated to commemorate the very first official conference of the Customs Co-operation Council which is now known as the World Customs Organization, WCO.

World Customs Organization, having over 180 custom administration members, is called as the only intergovernmental organization which solely highlights on the customs matters. World Customs Organization was established in the year 1952 as an independent body to enhance the efficacy and effectiveness of the customs administrations all across the world.

FS: What is the theme for this year's International Customs Day?

CEO: This year's theme is "Data Analysis for Effective Border Management." The theme is not only important for Customs but the strategic positioning of FRCA in its leadership role in Fiji, the Region and the globe – our world class journey. Given the free flow of trade cargo and passengers due to globalization, there definitely needs to be more targeted risk management strategy for effective border management. Therefore effective 'Big-Data' analysis is critical for effective Risk Management.

FS: Please elaborate more on the theme?

CEO: Customs has a substantial amount of data at its disposal, such as data submitted for the Customs clearance process. Customs can also tap data from other government agencies, commercially available databases, and open source information platforms such as digitized global public records and multilingual news sources.

Moreover, physical objects are nowadays embedded within electronics, software, sensors and network connectivity, which enables these objects to collect and exchange data, a phenomenon known as the 'Internet of things'.

FS: What does the theme means for FRCA?

CEO: At FRCA we need to be smarter. To remain attractive destinations for trade, we must personalize our services and provide more engaging user experiences—making life easier for the trading community, other border agencies and FRCA. By mastering our data, we will be able to provide actionable insights to prevent and tackle fraud and risks. It will also promote legitimate trade and also create more personalized experiences for our users. Data only has value when it is used effectively and efficiently. It is critical, therefore, that Customs administrations leverage data to make informed decisions, especially given the sophisticated and evolving challenges that Customs administrations face every day.

FS: What is the role of technology in regards to data storage?

CEO: Across the customs supply chain, traders, agents, freight forwarders, carriers and border agencies are embracing new digital technologies. Also new waves of innovation are driving an urgent need for a common digital platform across the customs supply chain. Using well-defined architectures, governance and services, new digital platforms are accessible by the entire trade ecosystem, as well as third party service providers.

FS: How can FRCA benefit from the proper analysis of data?

CEO: Data analysis can propel Customs to new levels of success in both compliance and facilitation, by enabling it to:

- improve risk management which supports enhanced detection of irregularities, illicit consignments, the suspicious movement of people and financial flows, and the facilitation of legitimate trade and people;
- learn from historical activity to predict trader or passenger behaviour;
- engage with other government agencies to leverage their experience and expertise;
- conduct quantitative research for purposes of building knowledge;
- enhance performance measurement to improve officer practices and integrity. Data analysis thus can greatly support the core Customs' objectives of revenue collection, border security, collection of trade statistics, and trade facilitation.

FS: How can we achieve these benefits?

CEO: To achieve these benefits, Customs administrations should make data analysis a strategic priority and acquire cutting-edge technology, establish appropriate automation policies, and recruit expertise to collect and analyse data, and act upon the data-driven insights.

FS: How can FRCA improve its services by collecting timely data?

CEO: The data collected can be used to measure our clearance time at the border. It can also be used to compare the imports and exports of the country to get a fair idea of our trading partners. Real time data can also be utilized to detect gaps in terms of fraudulent flows or practices; the use of performance measurement to improve Customs procedures and integrity.

FS: What are some of the obstacles of collecting correct and quality data?

CEO: There are of course potential obstacles to an optimal use of data, such as the lack of qualitative data, data that has not been integrated or merged, lack of harmonization of data across border agencies, lack of skilled resources, IT infrastructures and cultural challenges. In addition, it is vital that appropriate privacy and confidentiality laws be respected.

FS: What are some of the challenges face by Customs organizations in the 21st century?

CEO: Customs has been faced with considerable and at times contradictory demands arising from the globalization of trade. On the one hand, there is a need for effective security and control of international supply chains while on the other hand, there are increasing demands for greater facilitation of legitimate trade.

The new challenges of the 21st Century demand a new concept of Customs-to-Customs cooperation. There is a need for closer real-time collaboration between Customs administrations and between Customs and business in facilitating legitimate trade and undertaking Customs controls. The new requirement is to create, in partnership between the various stakeholders of the public and the private sectors, a global Customs network in support of the international trading system.

FS: How do you intend to celebrate this year's International Customs Day?

CEO: We will have guest speakers and invited guests at our respective ports to celebrate the event. A number of customs officers will be also receiving Certificates of Merit from the World Customs Organization for their outstanding performance and contributions in 2016.