A joint report published by the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) presents the results of a survey launched in the period June 2019 - June 2020 by the two organisations to analyse practices and performances of 51 Customs in different regional areas of the world (mainly developing and less developed countries) to identify main areas for policy and administrative reforms, as well as possible technical assistance and capacity building support needs.

African Customs that participated to the survey are 18 and include Angola, Burundi, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Gabon, Guinea, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo and Zambia.

In particular, practices and performances of customs administrations in higher income countries are compared with those of lower income nations (according to World Bank categories), with results that, on one side, are not surprising (as they reveal less use of trade facilitation tools by lower income customs administrations), and on the other hand little meaningful, being the sample used in the survey highly unbalanced.

This because, as indicated, respondents to the survey were mostly from developing and less developed countries, and much less from high income countries. Accordingly, the results of the comparison between Customs in the two groups of nations are not of particular significance.

The study revels, for instance, a lower use of Single Windows, AEO programmes and advance rulings by Customs administrations in lower income countries, while the incidence of physical inspections in these nations is higher than documentary inspections or than clearance without inspection or examination (green channel).

A similar gap regards the use of modern control technologies and techniques, such as non-intrusive inspection, surveillance technologies, on-site detection kits, laboratory support, canine units, licence plate readers, frequency identification, biometrics and others. In lower income countries the use of such tools and methodologies of control is lower, except for surveillance technologies, that tend to be used in equal measure by customs administrations in both low and high income countries.

The survey also reveals a younger employment base in Customs from low income countries, mainly concentrated in the range from 25 and 44 years.

With regard to post clearance audits, the study shows a higher incidence of such control methodology in lower income countries, which tend to perform more audits at importer/exporter premises than higher income countries while the percentage of desk audits is similar between the two categories of customs, even though landlocked countries tend to perform more desk post clearance audits than audits at trader premises. Instead, an aspect that gives rise to strong doubts is the conclusion that use of automated Customs clearance systems is higher in lower income countries (100% of Customs in these nations responded to have adopted such systems), while in higher income countries these use of such systems is lower (98%).