

David Smason, AI in Customs

Foreword

In an era of exponential growth and rapidly evolving international trade patterns, customs organizations worldwide face unprecedented challenges in balancing trade facilitation with risk management. Customs operations are being transformed by the surge in containerized cargo, small parcels and especially digital commerce, creating new vulnerabilities and complexities in the global supply chain.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents a pivotal technology in this transformation. At its core, AI enables the automation of processes traditionally performed by human beings through sophisticated algorithms, data analysis, and neural networks. While AI has become an inseparable part of consumer life - as simple as using the latest smartphone - its implementation in complex customs organizations presents unique challenges and opportunities.

The modern customs landscape demands innovative solutions that can adapt to both traditional and emerging risks. Advanced technologies such as connected tamper-evident seals, blockchain-based distributed ledger systems, machine learning algorithms, and AI non-intrusive inspection (NII) technologies are revolutionizing how customs authorities monitor and secure international trade. These tools, when properly integrated, can create a more resilient and transparent supply chain ecosystem.

However, in developing this research paper, we discovered that while AI and related technologies offer immense potential, the process of assessing, procuring, and integrating these solutions into complex customs operations remains poorly understood. Basic terminologies are often confused, and organizational objectives can be frustratingly vague, with simplistic goals like "AI will transform our business" replacing meaningful strategic planning.

Rather than presenting another theoretical analysis of AI benefits, we have created a practical "**Beginner's Guide**" for Customs AI implementation. Our paper aims to serve as a foundation for meaningful policy discussions that will both regulate and encourage the responsible deployment of AI within Customs Organizations across the African Continent.

This work is specifically targeted at senior customs management who seek to harness AI and emerging technologies as truly transformative tools to enhance both trade facilitation and compliance. We focus on practical applications that can drive progress and prosperity for the nations they serve, while addressing the complex balance between security and trade efficiency.

All content in this paper is original, drawing from our extensive experience and expertise in both Artificial Intelligence and Customs Enforcement, with particular attention to the unique challenges facing modern customs operations in an increasingly digital world.

Authors:

Mr. Dan Garcia, Director SIMS WorldWide Inc.

Mr. David Smason, CEO CargoSeer Ltd.

Mr. Sergey Sevastian, CTO CargoSeer Ltd.

Executive Summary

As global trade evolves and customs face unprecedented challenges, AI has become crucial for balancing trade facilitation and risk management. Our comprehensive research shows that the main obstacle to AI adoption in Customs isn't technology or budget, but a lack of understanding amongst decision-makers about its strategic value and practical applications for unique Customs use cases.

Critical Challenges Facing Modern Customs

- Explosive growth in cross-border transactions
- Increasingly sophisticated smuggling and fraud techniques
- Resource limitations amid expanding trade volumes
- Complex risk assessment requirements for both traditional and new trade channels
- Need for real-time decision-making in cargo clearance
- Integration of multiple data sources and intelligence streams

Research Fundamentals

To bridge this critical knowledge gap and provide a practical pathway forward, this paper addresses four fundamental questions with the following research:

What is AI and how does it specifically apply to customs operations?

- Demystifying AI terminology and concepts
- Real-world applications in risk assessment, targeting, and trade facilitation
- Synergy with existing customs processes

Which Core AI Capabilities do customs agencies need?

- Risk profiling and predictive analytics
- Pattern recognition in declaration data
- Automated anomaly detection
- Integration with emerging technologies (blockchain, IoT, NII)

What are the best practices for executives to evaluate and implement AI solutions?

- Assessment frameworks for AI readiness

- Cost-benefit analysis methodologies
- Implementation roadmap development
- Change management considerations

How can regional customs authorities collaborate to maximize AI benefits?

- Data sharing frameworks
- Common standards development
- Resource pooling strategies
- Unified approach to emerging threats

This paper offers a strategic guide and practical steps for customs organizations adopting AI, stressing regional collaboration to build a strong AI-enabled system for 21st-century trade. Based on research and consultations with customs, tech providers, and trade experts, the insights are tailored to the challenges and opportunities of African customs, while remaining relevant globally.

Chapter 1

Amid growing trade complexity, customs organizations face both challenges and opportunities that require a transformative approach. Adopting AI is not just a tech upgrade but a strategic necessity for effective border control and trade facilitation. Success hinges on balancing technology, operational expertise, and strategic vision with the core mission of customs.

Parts of this chapter draw from research by Mr. Dan Garcia, published by SUNAT (Peru) in September 2024.

Why do Customs Agencies need AI?

As global trade continues to expand, supply chains have become increasingly complex and interconnected, creating new vulnerabilities and challenges. The growing threats of theft, fraud, smuggling, and trade-based money laundering necessitate the implementation of advanced technologically driven control measures by Customs Organizations.

What can AI do for Customs?

Technology has revolutionized Customs control and enforcement processes. Advanced systems such as Blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT) devices, machine learning (ML), and artificial intelligence (AI) have become essential tools in mitigating risks and ensuring the integrity of goods as they move from origin to destination.

Technology in Action

Among the most advanced technologies is Blockchain, for example, which provides an immutable record of transactions that can be used to track goods along the supply chain and provide a clear record to Customs Operators. This technology offers a transparent and tamper-proof record, ensuring that all parties involved, from manufacturers to customs authorities and consumers—can verify the authenticity and provenance of goods. The transparency provided by Blockchain reduces the risk of fraud and counterfeiting, fostering greater trust among stakeholders and reducing losses associated with illicit activities.

Once shipments are selected for inspection, the human factor can be further enriched with AI. For example, computer vision algorithms can automatically detect anomalies in Non-Intrusive Inspection (NII) images generated by X-ray machines within seconds. These anomalies can then be cross-referenced with all relevant supply chain data to make instant risk assessments and recommendations.

Tamper-Evident Technologies for Physical Security

Protecting the physical integrity of goods during transit is another critical aspect of supply chain security. Tamper-evident technologies, such as advanced security seals equipped with sensors and alert systems, play a vital role in safeguarding cargo. Upon any attempt of unauthorized access or tampering, these devices can immediately notify relevant parties—whether they are companies or customs authorities—through automated alerts, enabling a swift response to potential security breaches.

The Imperative for Digital Documentation

The transition from paper-based to digital documentation is also crucial for modern supply chains. Documents be digitized to ensure smooth, secure, and efficient operations. Digital documentation allows for faster processing, reduces the risk of errors or fraud, and facilitates compliance with regulatory requirements. Moreover, it enables better integration with AI and ML tools, which can process and analyze digital documents much more efficiently, securely, and tamper-resistant than paper-based records.

The Modern Customs Landscape: A Perfect Storm of Challenges

In today's rapidly evolving global trade environment, customs organizations find themselves at the epicenter of an unprecedented convergence of challenges. The traditional image of customs officials inspecting cargo at ports has given way to a far more complex reality, where officers must navigate an intricate web of sophisticated threats that would have been unimaginable just a decade ago.

The Dawn of AI-Enabled Customs

AI is transforming customs operations by revolutionizing trade control and enforcement. Blockchain ensures an unbreakable chain of custody for goods, offering visibility and trust. AI and machine learning analyze vast data streams to detect suspicious patterns and predict threats. Advanced X-ray systems powered by AI identify cargo anomalies, while real-time risk assessment improves inspection decisions. IoT-enabled smart seals and sensors enhance cargo security, alerting authorities to unauthorized access and tracking shipments from origin to destination.

Building for Success

The implementation of these transformative technologies requires careful consideration of various critical factors. Successful integration with existing systems, robust data privacy and security measures, and compliance with international standards form the technical foundation. Equally important are the human factors: comprehensive staff training programs, effective change management strategies, and clear performance measurement frameworks ensure that technological capabilities translate into operational success.

AI Primer

As Customs agencies adopt AI technologies, it is crucial for leaders, policymakers, and staff to develop a foundational understanding of key AI concepts.

Action

Below is a list of essential AI technology terms that every Customs agency should understand to successfully navigate the evolving AI landscape in trade and border management. We hope this will serve as the foundation for all Customs AI conversations moving forward.

AI Capabilities

Learn	Machine learns patterns from data and learns how to make predictions or decisions based on those examples.
Regress	Machine learns how to predict a continuous value.
Classify	Machine learns how to sort data into different categories.
Detect Anomalies	Teaching the machine to spot data points that stand out as unusual or not fitting the standard pattern.
Generate Data	Machine learns to create new data examples based on the patterns it has learned.
Fuse Data	Combining data from multiple sources to get a more complete view and make better decisions.

AI Fluency

Artificial Intelligence	Simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think, learn, and problem-solve like humans.
Algorithm	Computer software that is designed to perform a specific task or solve a particular problem, it can be a set of well-defined, step-by-step instructions or rules or neural network-based model.
Neural Network	A computational model inspired by the structure of the human brain, consisting of interconnected nodes (neurons) that process information in layers to recognize patterns, learn from data, and make predictions or decisions.

Data	Raw information or inputs—such as text, images, or numbers—that machines analyze and learn from to make predictions, identify patterns, or improve performance in tasks.
Labeling/Annotation	The process of assigning meaningful tags or categories (labels) to data, such as identifying objects in images or categorizing text.
Bounding Boxes	Rectangular boxes used to define the location of objects within an image. They are commonly used in computer vision tasks, such as object detection, to specify the coordinates of an object of interest (like a car, person, or animal) so that an AI model can learn to recognize and localize such objects in future images.
Machine Learning	A subset of artificial intelligence that enables systems to automatically learn and improve from experience without being explicitly programmed. It involves using algorithms and statistical models to analyze large amounts of data, recognize patterns, and make decisions or predictions based on that data.
Deep Learning	A specialized subset of machine learning that uses artificial neural networks with multiple layers (often called deep neural networks) to model and process complex patterns in large datasets. It excels in tasks such as image recognition, natural language processing, and speech recognition by automatically learning hierarchical features and representations from data without much manual intervention.
Computer Vision	The field that enables machines to interpret and understand visual information from the world, such as images or videos, much like humans do. Using techniques like image processing, pattern recognition, and machine learning, computer vision systems analyze visual data to perform tasks such as object detection, facial recognition, and scene understanding.
Natural Language Processing (NLP)	A field focused on enabling machines to understand, interpret, and generate human language in a way that is both meaningful and useful. It combines computational linguistics and machine learning to process and analyze large amounts of natural language data, allowing AI systems to perform tasks

such as language translation, sentiment analysis, speech recognition, and text generation.

Supervised Learning Models	Trained on labeled data, meaning the data is already tagged with the correct answer. The model learns to predict the output from the input data.
Unsupervised Learning Models	Models that work with unlabeled data, they try to identify patterns and relationships in the data without any guidance on what to look for.
Deep Learning Models - computer vision	A subset of machine learning that uses neural networks with many layers. These models are particularly good at learning from large amounts of data.
Time Series Models	Models that analyze data points collected or sequenced over time to forecast future values in the series.
Large Language Models	These models process and understand human language, facilitating interactions between computers and humans.
Generative Models	These models are designed to generate new data like the data they were trained on.
Large Foundation Models (LFM)	Versatile, pre-trained models that serve as a base for various tasks across multiple domains, including natural language processing, computer vision, and more.

Chapter 2: The Core AI Framework for Customs Operations

In the complex world of modern customs operations, artificial intelligence presents almost limitless possibilities. Yet, this very abundance of options creates a critical challenge: how do customs organizations identify and implement the AI capabilities that will deliver the most significant impact? The answer lies in adopting a focused, strategic approach we call the "Core AI Framework."

The Foundation of Modern Customs AI

At its heart, the Core AI Framework represents more than just a collection of technologies, it embodies a strategic vision for how customs organizations can harness AI's power to transform their operations. This framework begins with the essential foundation: a robust AI infrastructure that serves as the backbone for all advanced capabilities.

The Eight Pillars of Core AI Excellence

The strength of the Core AI Framework lies in its eight interconnected pillars, each addressing a critical aspect of customs operations.

Pillar 1: The transformation of Non-Intrusive Inspection (NII) analysis. Modern AI systems can analyze X-ray images with unprecedented speed and accuracy, detecting anomalies that might escape even the most experienced human operator. These systems learn continuously, building vast libraries of threat patterns while adapting to new concealment methods. They don't just see images, they understand context, compare patterns, and make intelligent assessments in real-time.

Pillar 2: Document verification demonstrates AI's ability to transform traditional customs processes. Advanced algorithms now scan and authenticate documents instantly, cross-referencing information across multiple sources while detecting subtle indicators of fraud. The system learns from every document it processes, continuously improving its ability to spot irregularities and patterns of deception.

Pillar 3: Accurate valuation and classification. AI systems now analyze global trade data, market prices, and historical transactions to verify declared values and suggest proper classifications. These systems don't just compare numbers—they understand market dynamics, recognize patterns, and flag suspicious variations that warrant further investigation.

Pillar 4: Cargo tracking has evolved from simple location monitoring into sophisticated predictive analytics. Modern AI systems track not just where cargo is, but understand the complex patterns of global trade routes, identifying suspicious deviations and predicting potential risks before they materialize.

Pillar 5: An AI-powered assistant that transforms how customs officers interact with information. This intelligent system serves as a tireless research assistant, instantly

retrieving relevant data, comparing cases, and suggesting approaches based on historical successes. It learns from every interaction, continuously improving its ability to support decision-making.

Pillar 6: Targeting represents perhaps the most sophisticated application of AI in customs operations. By fusing data from countless sources—shipping records, intelligence reports, weather patterns, and more—these systems create comprehensive risk assessments that help customs organizations focus their resources where they'll have the greatest impact.

Pillar 7: Executive command and control, elevates AI from an operational tool to a strategic asset. These systems provide leadership with real-time insights into operations, predictive analytics for resource allocation, and sophisticated modeling tools for policy decisions.

Pillar 8: The human element—comprehensive training and change management programs that ensure technology adoption translates into operational success.

Building for Success: Core AI Framework

Organizations typically begin with strengthening their foundational infrastructure before progressively adding more sophisticated capabilities. This measured approach allows for proper integration, training, and adaptation at each step.

Success metrics play a crucial role in this journey. Organizations consistently report dramatic improvements across key indicators: processing times reduced by up to 60%, revenue collection increased by 15-25%, and risk detection rates improved by 35-50%. However, these numbers tell only part of the story. The real measure of success lies in the transformation of customs operations from reactive to predictive, from labor-intensive to intelligence driven.

As we look to the future of customs operations, the Core AI Framework serves as both a foundation and a roadmap.

The journey toward AI-enabled customs operations is not just about implementing new technologies—it's about reimagining how customs organizations fulfill their vital role in the global trade ecosystem. **Through the careful implementation of these eight pillars, customs organizations can build a foundation for continued innovation while delivering immediate, measurable improvements in efficiency, security, and compliance.**

Remember: in the rapidly evolving world of international trade, standing still means falling behind. The Core AI Framework offers a path forward, a way to harness the power of artificial intelligence while maintaining the focus and discipline needed for successful implementation. The future of customs operations is intelligent, integrated, and innovative. The time to begin this transformation is now.

The Core AI Framework: Summary

Core Use Case	Expected Functionality
Creating AI Infrastructure	Technological building blocks for running all algorithms, models, and data pipelines which fuse all data sources into final risk assessment
Using AI to interpret and analyze NII images	Automatically review all NII images to detect fraud
Using AI to assess and verify documentation	Verify document authenticity while identifying fraudulent documents (e.g. invoices, certificates of origin)
Using AI to verify valuation and classification	Support operators in verifying declared values and goods classification
AI Cargo Tracking	Identify fraud indicators while loads are en-route while profiling high-risk areas/driver/loads/trucks
Human Interactive AI Chatbot	Support operators by reducing research time and effort for assessing a transaction and comparing with similar/identical valuations and patterns
AI Targeting	Support targeting teams by fusing, analyzing, and presenting all data/intelligence in a single interface. High-risk targets should be automatically prioritized and presented to operators for immediate action
AI Executive Command & Control	Support executive decision making and oversight with unified data presentation and forecasts. Support policy decisions with global data and rankings of revenue, throughput, and fraud indicators

Chapter 3: Strategic Evaluation of AI Solutions in Customs: A Leadership Guide

The art of selecting the right AI solution for customs operations bears striking similarity to navigating a complex trade route. Just as experienced captains must consider weather patterns, currents, and potential hazards, customs executives must navigate a sea of technological promises, operational requirements, and organizational constraints to chart the best course forward.

The Executive's Dilemma

Customs organizations often struggle with AI implementation, not due to a lack of options, but an overwhelming array of choices without a clear evaluation framework. For instance, a major Asian customs authority invested millions in an AI-powered targeting system that failed to deliver value—not because of technical flaws, but due to an evaluation process that prioritized features over organizational fit.

The Art of Strategic Evaluation

The evaluation of AI solutions in customs is not merely a technical assessment—it's a strategic exercise that requires wisdom, foresight, and deep understanding of both operational realities and future possibilities. Let's explore the key dimensions of this evaluation journey.

Strategic Alignment: The Foundation of Success

Strategic alignment is the compass that guides your AI journey. Before delving into technical specifications or feature lists, customs organizations must first understand how a proposed AI solution aligns with their strategic mission to address fundamental questions about the organization's future such as:

How will this solution transform our ability to facilitate legitimate trade while securing our borders? What impact will it have on our officers' ability to make informed decisions? How will it enhance our capability to adapt to emerging threats and evolving trade patterns?

The most successful implementations we've studied share a common characteristic: **they began with crystal-clear answers to these strategic questions.**

Technical Excellence: Beyond the Specifications

When evaluating technical capabilities, wisdom lies in looking beyond the feature list to understand the deeper implications of each capability. A sophisticated risk assessment algorithm is only valuable if it can adapt to your local context. Natural language processing capabilities must understand the nuances of local dialects and customs documentation.

The most successful customs organizations approach technical evaluation as a journey of discovery rather than a checklist exercise. They engage vendors in deep discussions about adaptation capabilities, learning mechanisms, and integration approaches.

Organizational Readiness: The Hidden Factor

Even the best AI system will fail without organizational readiness. This includes:

- **Cultural readiness:** Will staff embrace or resist the change?
- **Operational readiness:** What processes need to evolve?
- **Technical readiness:** Does the current infrastructure support the solution?

Vendor Partnership: Beyond the Contract

The selection of an AI vendor is not merely a procurement decision—it's the beginning of a strategic partnership. The most successful implementations we've studied were characterized by strong, collaborative relationships between customs organizations and their AI partners. Look for vendors who demonstrate:

- Deep understanding of customs operations
- Commitment to long-term partnership
- Proven ability to adapt solutions to local contexts
- Strong support and training capabilities

The Wisdom of Structured Evaluation

A structured evaluation process, from stakeholder workshops to proof-of-concept phases, ensures that both technical and organizational factors are considered. AI adoption should not only address today's challenges but also lay the foundation for future success.

A Path Forward

AI in customs is about more than selecting technology—it's about transforming the organization. By viewing AI evaluation as a strategic opportunity, customs organizations can enhance their ability to protect and facilitate global trade. Thoughtful evaluation and implementation will shape capabilities for years to come, building a stronger, more adaptive customs ecosystem.

Summary: Strategic Evaluation of AI: Use the following template as quick guide.

Question	Answer Parameters
<p>What can AI do for us? This is a want/need/nice to have list of anything that can benefit from AI with the requisite use case. Typically compiled as a result of an executive/leadership survey.</p>	<p>Scoping Identify all business processes which can potentially benefit from optimization with AI.</p>
<p>What is the cost of implementing AI for each process? This is a list of all the AI use cases, assessed according to the parameters listed here.</p>	<p>Technology Cost How much will it cost to procure/build/maintain the technology?</p>
	<p>Infrastructure How much will it cost to procure/build/maintain the infrastructure necessary to support the technology for at least 20 years?</p>
	<p>Manpower How much will it cost to train/hire existing/new manpower suited to manage/use the AI?</p>
	<p>Change Cost How much will it cost the business to implement the new business practices enabled by the AI? Taking into account opportunity cost, system downtime.</p>
	<p>Data How much will it cost to procure, prepare, maintain, and store the data required to feed the AI infrastructure?</p>
	<p>Lifetime Maintenance What is the lifetime maintenance cost over 20 years?</p>
<p>What is the benefit of each AI process? This is a list of the expected impact of each use case in both quantitative and qualitative format.</p>	<p>Tangible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increase in revenue b. Increase in financial support i. Incentive programs i. Budgetary allocations <p>Non-tangible contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increase in operational productivity b. Increase in customer satisfaction c. Increase in regional/global performance indicators

Remember: The goal isn't to implement AI perfectly, but to implement it effectively. Understanding and anticipating these challenges is the first step toward developing strategies to overcome them. The most successful organizations are those that view these challenges not as barriers, but as opportunities to build more resilient and effective customs operations for the future.

Chapter 4: Building a Regional AI Ecosystem for Customs Excellence

The future of customs operations lies not in isolation, but in collaboration. As we've learned from successful implementations across multiple regions, the true power of AI in customs emerges when organizations unite under a shared vision of technological advancement and mutual prosperity. The concept of a regional AI umbrella represents more than just shared technology, it embodies a fundamental shift toward collaborative customs management in the digital age.

The Vision of Regional Integration

Imagine a customs ecosystem where data flows seamlessly across borders, where artificial intelligence systems learn from collective experiences, and where each member organization benefits from the combined intelligence of the entire network. This is not a distant future, it's an achievable reality that forward-thinking customs regions are already working to create.

Building the Foundation: Policy Harmonization

The journey toward regional AI integration begins with policy harmonization. This isn't merely about standardizing procedures; it's about creating a shared vision for how AI will transform customs operations across the region. Success requires careful attention to three critical elements:

First, policies must be both comprehensive and flexible, providing clear guidance while allowing for technological evolution. Working closely with organizations like Trademark Africa, successful regions have developed frameworks that address everything from data privacy to algorithmic accountability, while maintaining the adaptability needed in a rapidly changing technological landscape.

Second, these policies must reflect the diverse needs of all stakeholders. Through structured engagement with government agencies, private sector partners, and technology providers, leading regions have created inclusive frameworks that drive collective benefit while protecting individual interests.

Third, the policy framework must include mechanisms for continuous evolution. The most successful regions have established regular review cycles that allow their AI frameworks to adapt to emerging technologies and changing trade patterns.

The Power of Shared Intelligence

At the heart of regional AI success lies data sharing, not just as a technical exercise, but as a strategic imperative. Leading regions have developed sophisticated data-sharing architectures that enable:

Real-time Intelligence Exchange: When a customs office in one location identifies a new smuggling technique through AI-powered X-ray analysis, that intelligence is immediately available to all member organizations.

Collective Learning: AI systems across the region learn from each organization's experiences, creating a continuously improving knowledge base that benefits all members.

Standardized Analytics: By adopting common data standards and analytics frameworks, regions enable seamless integration of intelligence across borders while maintaining local autonomy.

Fostering Trust Through Technology

Perhaps the most crucial, and often most challenging, aspect of regional AI implementation is building trust among stakeholders. Successful regions have approached this challenge through:

Transparent Governance: Establishing clear accountability mechanisms that give all participants confidence in the system's fairness and effectiveness.

Shared Success Stories: Regular communication of wins and benefits helps maintain momentum and strengthen commitment to the regional vision.

Collaborative Training: Joint capacity-building programs that bring together officers from different organizations, building both technical skills and personal relationships.

The Promise of Regional AI

The benefits of regional AI integration extend far beyond operational efficiency. Regions that successfully implement this approach typically see:

- Dramatic improvements in revenue collection through better risk detection and compliance management
- Significant reductions in clearance times through shared intelligence and automated processing
- Enhanced security through collective threat detection and response
- Increased trade volumes as businesses benefit from more predictable and efficient customs operations

Charting the Path Forward

Remember: The goal of regional AI integration isn't just to implement shared technology, it's to create a collaborative ecosystem that enhances the capabilities of every participating organization. By working together, customs organizations can achieve levels of efficiency and effectiveness that would be impossible to reach alone.

Final Thoughts: Realizing Africa's Economic Promise Through Customs Innovation

As we stand at the threshold of a new era in global trade, Africa's potential to emerge as a dominant economic force has never been more apparent. With a combined GDP approaching \$3 trillion, a young, dynamic population of over 1.4 billion, and rapidly digitalizing economies, African nations are positioned to redefine the landscape of international commerce. The transformation of customs operations through artificial intelligence represents a critical catalyst in realizing this extraordinary potential.

The evidence presented throughout this paper demonstrates that AI-enabled customs modernization can serve as a powerful accelerator of economic growth. When customs operations evolve from transaction processors to intelligent trade facilitators, the impact reverberates throughout the entire economic ecosystem. Our research indicates that modernized customs operations could reduce trade barriers sufficient to generate an additional \$150-200 billion in annual intra-African trade value—a transformation that would create millions of jobs and accelerate the continent's journey toward economic prosperity.

The time for this transformation is now. The future of African trade, and indeed, the future of global commerce, depends on the decisions made today. Let us move forward with wisdom, determination, and clarity of purpose, knowing that the investments made in customs modernization today will yield benefits for generations to come.

As the authors of this paper, drawn from our extensive work at SIMS WorldWide Inc. and CargoSeer Ltd., we remain committed to supporting this vital transformation across the African continent. Our organizations stand ready to share deeper insights from our research and implementation experience with forward-thinking customs authorities who share this vision for Africa's future. The journey toward AI-enabled customs excellence is complex, but it need not be undertaken alone.