

**Experience feedback of the first season of work
of the Maintenance Team**

Creation of the Maintenance Team

The creation of the Maintenance Team and the definition of its mission was decided by the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group Annual Meeting in 2018.

I was honoured to be solicited by the Secretariat to join the Maintenance Team as co-convenor representing the private sector.

SUN Wenfeng from CNIS quickly joined the team as co-convenor representing the public sector.

I dare say that, together with Yan Zhang from the UN Secretariat, the three of us have done a good job during the first two review periods of UN/LOCODE DMRs which took place after the creation of the Maintenance Team, spring and autumn 2019, and gathered a significant experience that we shall use in the current work of re-engineering of the UN/LOCODE system.

From the feedback we received, this is a feeling which seems to be shared by many parties which have attended the Maintenance Team conference calls, DMR requesters, focal points, experts. Obviously, there are always improvements to come from the experience, *I am sure this Advisory Group meeting will help us to identify some and support us to further progress.*

Programme of work

- Rec 16 support

While inventing meeting after meeting how to work efficiently with this new set-up, the biggest challenge we had to face was that the Maintenance Team had been launched in an interim period, under the rule of the current ageing version of the recommendation 16 and before the publication of new one scheduled to be enforced end of spring 2020.

The revision work realised by the Group of Revision of the Recommendation 16 under the clear-sighted leadership of Alper Keçeli in 2018-2019 had highlighted the many confusions created by the current version on the maintenance of UN/LOCODE. Consequently, the Maintenance Team decided to refer to the provisions of the future version to support the review of the DMRs without waiting for its official publication.

This new version had been finalised after its public review period earlier this autumn, but no final draft had been made available to the Maintenance Team.

The absence of final draft to put on the table during our meetings as minimum evidences to substantiate decisions we made, sometimes in contradiction of the current version, has been a real

difficulty in our discussions with requesters, while we were basing ourselves only on the memories of our discussions during the revision works to validate and reject DMRs.

- IT solution support

In the present times, our work is supported by a solution based on the use of a shared Excel Google sheet. The updated database is published twice a year, beginning July and end December. Our team used to gather on a fixed day once a week through conference calls (using the UN Webex solution) between the two dates of publication, basically from February to May and September to November, endeavouring to organise the conference calls alternatively in the morning and in the afternoon, Geneva Time, to accommodate the participation of users from the Western and Eastern hemisphere.

The period following the end of the Maintenance Team conference calls and until the date of publication is used by the secretariat to prepare the final file which is recognised as a heavy and cumbersome time-consuming task.

One can acknowledge that this is the best we can do with the tools we have currently, however all the expectations expressed during Advisory Group meetings make clear that this setup does not give satisfaction to the stakeholders involved, requesters, focal points and experts during the Maintenance Team conference calls as well as end user's in the Trade, because :

- The screen sharing of the Google sheet which lists all the DMRs received since the previous closing, plus all DMRs pending which at that not been processed during the previous period , is very un-ergonomic, slow and providing only a very partial view on screen of the data of the DMR being discussed. This is also true when working alone to review the DMR's.
- There is no support to help overviewing the situation of an area when analysing a request, ie map with pre-existing UN/LOCODE around, possible duplicates with same or alternative spelling of the name of the location, etc ...
- All DMRs, already approved or rejected and pending, remain on the list in the file permanently, which doesn't allow to have a real-time appreciation of the task already achieved and remaining to be done
- the distribution of the work to be done between National Focal Points, DMR requesters, should they be requester for a single DMR, or big organisation centralised or decentralised posting several hundred of DMRs per period is uneasy and inefficient.
- the system does not provide for any possibility to exchange information and status on a DMR at any time, which means that the requester is left totally in the blue as far as the development of his request is concerned.
- once posted, a DMR becomes invisible and cannot be accessed online
- when a requester posts a DMR, it is not in anticipation of a need he could have in three months, best option today, or eight months, worse option, - some DMR's also remain pending for several periods without information to requester – from now, he or she posted it to satisfy an instant need, and for this reason I imagine that in many occasions he or she will start using the codes he or she has proposed right away.

This is the very need which have to be taken into account in the current re-engineering works undertaken with the support of CNIS.

Support of Focal Points

With the experience of the two 2019 DMR's reviewing periods, it turns out that the support of a professional and dedicated focal point in each country is instrumental for the processing efficiently and in time of the DMR.

Our conference calls gave us the opportunity to identify persons who were good potential candidates to be nominated as Focal Point in countries where we were missing one, the Maintenance Team will continue to try to identify committed people who can support locally the maintenance of the UN/LOCODE database. In these occasions, the Secretariat had taken over to contact and finalise an agreement with the related country.

The advisory group should discuss this issue and request the secretariat launches an action toward contracting parties and delegations in order to make them fully aware of the absolute need for them to nominate a focal point for their country.

Many times, during our maintenance team conference calls, we had to hear that in "such" country, there is a focal point nominated, and listed, but who is never present, neither supporting, and absolutely useless.

I do not consider that we have to focus on one person here, what we have to do is to highlight with the contracting parties the importance of this function to have the UN/LOCODE properly maintained in their country which will benefit to the international trade activity, and convince them that they not only have to nominate a competent person, but also to clearly define his or her mission and make sure he or she has the necessary available resources to fulfil his or her duty.

Nevertheless, considering our responsibility to have the Maintenance Team coping properly, efficiently and in time with his or her mission of coordination of the processing and validation of UN/LOCODEs, considering that the Maintenance Team cannot achieve this goal without the proper support of National Focal Points in all countries of relevance, I will, when appropriate, officially inform the Secretariat with the issues we could meet with non-supporting focal points and request that the problem is properly addressed with the involved country and/or delegation.

Support of expert

I must say I was not expecting anything precise there, but we have enjoyed the participation of many experts, who for some, not being a requester, nor directly involved by specific needs, but interested somehow in the proper development of the UN/LOCODE registration, and eager to stay in touch with the work done in that respect, have maintained a regular participation at the Maintenance Team conference calls and brought their experience and knowledge in our discussions.

This stands as a very valuable contribution during this initial period where we were jointly learning and discovering how to best achieve our new task.

I suggest that the Secretariat and the Advisory Group look into how to extend this contribution to other experts from the public and private sectors.

support of requesters

In the current system, prior to the creation of the Maintenance Team, when posting a new DMR, the requester received a confirmation by mail, then he or she was left indefinitely in the blue regarding the fate reserved to his request.

Now, when the Maintenance Team starts its half-year periodic review of the DMRs, so between three and eight months after he or she has posted his DMR, the requester receives emails inviting him or her to participate in the next conference call to support his or her request.

I think that the all involved has to be really aware that requesting and following the creation of new UN/LOCODE is not central in the daily occupation of requesters (with the exception of more global organisations as per below bullet point), so the email will fall upon him or her unexpected, as a burden, on a subject he or she has deeply buried since long, maybe already using the requested code not giving it an afterthought, taking for granted that it could not be rejected.

For this kind of user profile, to be involved again is just a waste of time, the detail knowledge of Recommendation 16 and its requirements cannot be fully apprehended and memorized.

The motto is: I need it, I request it, that's my part, do your part now, and I concentrate again on my real daily money earning job.

During the Maintenance Team validation process, we have progressively improved our communication tools and drafted an invitation email which clearly explains to receiver why he or she is receiving it and why his or her attendance is necessary to his or her benefit.

The weakness of this invitation is that it is a generic email and the specific DMRs which have justified the sending of the email to this requester are not mentioned for easier reference. He or she will consequently have to dig again into old files, or no file, or memory, to check that he or she had indeed made a request and to identify exactly what his or her request was and why he or she requested it.

At one point we have also decided to dispatch this invitation email every week, rather than once at the beginning of the period, to make sure that receivers realise that the conference call is held weekly and that they can attend on a following week if not available for that one, and we have enjoyed an acceptable level of contribution.

However, some requesters never showed up, and the corresponding DMRs were not processed and remained pending. I consider this an issue for the Maintenance Team, once the need has been expressed, the organisation in charge of the UN/LOCODE should be in a position to handle it, even without the requester, until the validation or rejection, *the support of the focal point being central in that respect and the defection or absence of focal point contributes to the fact that we are not able to meet correctly Trades' needs.*

Support of global private organisations

We had to face the difficulty of handling significant volume (several hundreds) of DMRs, posted by multiple requesters coming from a single organisation/company but involving potentially any country. It proves extremely complicated to contact all requesters and have them attending our conference calls, and we had the feeling that a lot of requests were not relevant with the provisions of the future Recommendation 16.

Attending experts made a good use of their network and we have been able to initiate relationships with the persons in charge in the involved central department in these organisations/companies and made them aware of the difficulty that the dispersion of the requests coming from their side was creating, on our side to review the requests, as well as on their side to post receivable requests and get a fast and efficient feedback on UN/LOCODE creation.

This evolution was extremely positively received by these organisations/companies and we shall build on this initial experience to further improve the handling of voluminous requests with all major global organisations/companies.

In that respect I want here to thank for their tremendously positive support Schenker, Hapag Lloyd and INTTRA whose representatives may be present in this room, and, who not only have taken the

role of private focal point for their organisations with the greatest understanding and efficiency, but also taken the role of expert to support our work during many conference calls and brought into it there considerable experience and vision.

I suggest that the Advisory Group consider this evolution and decide on how to handle in the future this activity of private focal point which has no official existence today.

Child codes

As mentioned above, even in the absence of any concrete evidence of this future version, the Maintenance Team had decided at the beginning to implement the provisions of the project of Recommendation 16 due to be published next year to support its work.

This has applied also for what will be called Child Codes in this new version.

In many occasions we had to reject UN/LOCODE creation requests for terminals or facilities and reorient the need of an identification code for these places toward the organisations in charge of the relevant code systems, currently SMDG, IATA, IMO, BIC (BIC Facility Code), whose representatives were of a permanent support as experts during most of our conference calls.

The Maintenance Team has taken here a global pivot position to facilitate sharing of knowledge and network among stakeholders which seemed to be missing until now.

I am aware that there are currently discussions for extending the child code status to other code systems. This would be for me a major sign of the vitality of the UN/LOCODE system.

Thank you for your attention.

Bertrand GEOFFRAY