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UN/CEFACT Prospective Directions

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Submitted by the UN/CEFACT Bureau

Summary

This document provides a strategic framework of key activities in support of the mandate of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT).

It is consistent with the streamlined project-oriented management approach adopted at the eighteenth session of the Plenary in February 2012 and the associated revised foundation document, “UN/CEFACT structure, mandate, terms of reference and procedures” (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2010/15/Rev.5).

This strategic framework sets the stage for drafting and implementing the biennial Programme of Work which is approved by the Plenary and the UNECE Executive Committee.*

This document is submitted for approval to the Plenary and replaces “A strategic framework for UN/CEFACT activities” (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2015/7).

* ECE/EX/2015/L.14



I. Strategic Framework

1. UN/CEFACT supports activities dedicated to improving the ability of business, trade and governmental administrations from developed, developing and transition economies, to exchange products and relevant services effectively. The principal focus is on facilitating national and international transactions through the simplification and harmonization of processes, procedures and information flows, and so contributing to the growth of global commerce.
2. The framework within which progress is made toward achieving the UN/CEFACT vision and fulfilling its mandate is based upon the following strategic activities.

A. Progressing trade facilitation and supporting its implementation

3. UN/CEFACT's definition of trade facilitation,¹ and its work, covers the entire trading process from the time of purchase through the delivery and payment for goods. This focus on the entire trading process implies the active participation of both the public and private sectors in developing UN/CEFACT's deliverables, ensuring that all aspects of the trade transactions are taken into account. UN/CEFACT shall actively continue to progress this mission through its trade facilitation recommendations, e-business standards, guidelines and other deliverables.
4. At the same time, cross-border standardization, simplification and harmonization are at the centre of the international trading process and have formed the key nucleus of UN/CEFACT's work for decades. This fundamental trade facilitation mission is also reflected within the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). As a result, UN/CEFACT's recommendations, standards and other deliverables can be used by governments and business to implement different aspects of this agreement. The TFA specifically encourages Member States to follow best practices in the form of international standards and to participate in the review and development of international standards.
5. In addition to contributing to the implementation of trade facilitation under the WTO TFA, UN/CEFACT deliverables can help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN).² Regional, national and local initiatives on trade facilitation can also benefit from UN/CEFACT deliverables, especially through the active participation of National Trade Facilitation Bodies in UN/CEFACT's work (see UNECE Recommendation 4).
6. UN/CEFACT will develop further deliverables to support implementation of the WTO TFA, help achieve the UN SDGs, and help advance trade facilitation in general.

¹ The simplification, standardization and harmonization of procedures and associated information flows required to move goods from seller to buyer and to make payment.

² SDGs: At the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030 - <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

B. Providing semantic interoperability

7. The semantics of business interaction, i.e. defining the basic, common and shared meanings for business terms and information, is essential to the standardization and harmonization of business interactions across the world. UN/CEFACT develops deliverables which support this harmonization such as its Core Components and Business Requirement Specifications (syntax neutral business processes). UN/CEFACT shall be the semantic hub for all of our internal deliverables and will also aim to coordinate and bring together the needs of other organizations.

C. Developing further guidance and standards

8. UN/CEFACT is structured in Programme Development Areas, each supported by a number of domains and focal points. These have a role in monitoring emerging business processes as well as new information and communication technologies. UN/CEFACT will provide guidance to governments, business and its experts on how to leverage the power of these new developments through the use of existing UN/CEFACT deliverables or the development of new deliverables. In addition, UN/CEFACT will, at the request of the user community, develop guidelines on how to use its deliverables in conjunction with specifications from other organizations.

D. Updating existing deliverables

9. UN/CEFACT will undertake periodic reviews of its deliverables through its domains and working teams. The objective of such reviews shall be to identify the continued relevance of these deliverables and their coherence with all other current UN/CEFACT deliverables. These reviews and the finalization of their results will be implemented following the Open Development Process (ODP) for UN/CEFACT.

E. Proposing comprehensive deliverables based on the Buy-Ship-Pay model

10. Efforts will be made to ensure that comprehensive end-to-end solutions based on the Buy-Ship-Pay model are freely available to the trade user community. Gap analyses can be conducted to identify areas where guidance or standards are needed in order to cover the full set of supply chain processes involved in cross-border and domestic trade for different sectors. Again, the implementation of these gap analyses and the finalization of their results shall follow the ODP process.

F. Improving communications and enlarging participation

11. UN/CEFACT will develop guidance material for the use of its deliverables, adapted to different target audiences. Particular focus will be placed on creating guidance material to make current deliverables more accessible, especially to non-technical audiences.

12. UN/CEFACT recognizes the importance and need to reach out to developing, transition economy and least developed economies in order to foster a better understanding of trade facilitation activities. UN/CEFACT will research methods to more effectively engage experts from these countries such as by facilitating remote participation, including conference calls, which could potentially benefit a wider body of experts from around the world.

13. Internal communication will be maintained to ensure that all delegations, domains and experts are up to date on internal developments and, to the extent possible, ensure that all relevant points of view are taken into consideration.
14. External communication shall be enhanced to encourage still greater participation in the development process (especially draft development and public review of deliverables), ensure consistent and coherent communications, and improve the visibility of UN/CEFACT and its deliverables.
15. UN/CEFACT will promote the use of deliverables for trade facilitation in sectoral, regional, country and sub-regional country initiatives.
16. Through the UNECE secretariat, UN/CEFACT will work together with other organizations of the United Nations system and relevant organizations to support developing countries in adopting its recommendations, standards and best practices.
17. All recommendations and standards can be downloaded free of charge from the UN/CEFACT website (www.uncefact.org).

G. Enhancing cooperative activities with other UN bodies

18. In order to ensure the coherence of guidance provided by UN bodies in the spirit of the “One UN” principle, UN/CEFACT works closely with the UNECE Executive Committee, the secretariat, and other bodies of the UNECE and the UN, such as: United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); International Trade Centre (ITC); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); International Telecommunication Union (ITU); Universal Postal Union (UPU); International Maritime Organization (IMO); and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).
19. In order to effectively fulfill its mandate of global outreach, UN/CEFACT will also seek to enhance, through the UNECE secretariat, collaboration with all of the UN Regional Economic Commissions.

H. Enhancing cooperative activities with other standards bodies through bilateral agreements

20. Since providing deliverables and assistance for implementation of the WTO TFA is one of the core strategic directions of UN/CEFACT, the UNECE secretariat shall continue to cooperate closely with and provide related support to the WTO.
21. UN/CEFACT has established and maintained relationships in recognition of the broad application that UN/CEFACT’s work has in areas beyond global commerce and the key objectives of interoperability between applications and the ability to support multilingual environments.
22. In support of this goal, the UNECE has established a number of Memorandums of Understanding and Cooperation Agreements with other international organizations.
23. UN/CEFACT will seek to engage actively with these other organizations through the UNECE secretariat in order to ensure the coherence of its work with that of other organizations, to announce its projects in a timely manner in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to find ways of further enhancing cooperation. An important vehicle for this will be the Memorandum of Understanding on e-business between the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), ITU and UNECE.

24. UNECE has established cooperation agreements with a wide range of other organizations as of January 2016; the most up to date list as well as the details of each agreement can be found on the UN/CEFACT website (http://www.unece.org/cefact/cf_mou_index.html).

I. Seeking new cooperation with other standards bodies without bilateral agreements

25. Cooperation with other standards bodies will be sought by encouraging them to join the development and review work within UN/CEFACT, establishing liaison or contact points and ultimately, where useful and appropriate, establishing new bilateral agreements through the secretariat.
