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Activities of the Rapporteur for Africa

Report of the UN/CEFACT Rapporteur for Africa, Mr. Ibrahima Nour Eddine Diagne (Senegal)

I. Introduction

1. The period 2009–2010 has signalled a new phase of maturity for Africa in electronic trade facilitation. It has also seen increased momentum for the new African Alliance for e-Commerce, launched in Addis Ababa in March 2009.
2. The following is a summary of the Rapporteur's activities.

II. General Assembly of the African e-Commerce Alliance (www.aace-africa.net)

3. The second General Assembly of the African e-Commerce Alliance (AACE) was held on 1 June 2010 at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Ibrahima Diagne, Chairman of AACE, and Mr. Joseph Atta-Mensah, Head of the Regional Integration, Infrastructure and Trade Division of ECA.
4. The Alliance was established in March 2009 with the following members: Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Morocco, Senegal and Togo.
5. At the meeting of the Executive Committee held in Accra in December 2009, the following projects contained in the workplans of the Alliance's various commissions were approved:

Projects Commission

- Pilot projects (exchange of electronic documents) among members
- Interregional pilot projects (ECA and other regional economic commissions around the world)
- Technical and financial partnership agreements with donors (to support projects and technical assistance)

Standards and Technology Commission

- Standards implementation guide
- Dematerialization project implementation guide
- Agenda for workshop on capacity-building in standards implementation and in interoperability

Organization and Promotion Commission

- Organizing an international Alliance event (International Single Window Conference)
 - Worldwide promotion of the Alliance
 - Cooperation agreements with other organizations
6. The following key areas were identified for consideration in carrying out pilot projects on dematerializing trade procedures:
- Electronic certificates of origin
 - Electronic invoicing
 - Online declarations
 - Mutual recognition of electronic signatures
 - Certification of digital documents
 - Certification of enterprises
7. With regard to capacity-building, the following measures were proposed:
- Preparing guidelines for implementing projects on the dematerialization of trade procedures
 - Preparing guidelines for establishing single windows
 - Organizing technical workshops
 - Creating common infrastructure for paperless trade
 - Establishing a common resources centre to promote local expertise
 - Sharing experiences and spreading best practices
8. The General Assembly received new applications for membership from Mali and Kenya. These were applications to be confirmed and ratified at the next General Assembly.

III. Organization of the first technical workshop on international trade norms and standards

9. The first technical workshop organized by AACE was held on 1 June 2010 in room 11 at ECA, in parallel with the Expert Group Meeting and Workshop on Aid for Trade. The workshop, which covered exchange of standard trade documents and data, began at 9 a.m.

Introduction and context

10. The meeting was introduced by the Chairman of AACE, Mr. Ibrahima Diagne, and was attended by ECA representatives.

11. The workshop was organized within the framework of a project to build member countries' capacity by improving the technical competencies of those involved in trade facilitation in those countries. It dealt with simplification and harmonization of documents, codes and standards for electronic business. The objective was to enable participants to align the various solutions developed in their respective countries with international standards, thereby facilitating their integration into international business transactions.

12. The expert leading the workshop addressed the following points:

1. Common technical platform for documents and forms based on UNLK

13. The expert presented the United Nations Layout Key (UNLK) for designing and handling forms and data. The guidelines covered both paper documents and electronic forms.

2. Trade element directory, code lists and box completion guidelines

14. Once the concept underlying the forms had been introduced, the expert highlighted the United Nations recommendations on how the forms should be filled in. The United Nations Trade Data Elements Directory (UNTDDED) was described.

3. Future prospects: Preparation of standardized electronic documents

15. The expert outlined the standards that should be taken into account for data modelling, syntax and printing of the data.

4. Interoperability with foreign countries

16. In the last part, the expert gave a broad outline of what factors should be taken into account in exchanging trade data between countries. He highlighted the need to harmonize documents and underscored the importance of data exchange formats, of which the most widespread were still EDIFACT (the United Nations Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport) and XML (Extensible Markup Language) (which was being used more and more), and the need to put in place one of the platforms capable of communicating (exchanging data).

17. The expert concluded by recommending that participants take all those concepts into account in the different single window projects undertaken in their countries, which would help avoid the risk of having to completely redesign systems for the purpose of cross-border trade.

18. The following countries participated in the workshop: Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Mali, and Senegal.

IV. Progress on single window projects in Africa

19. A workshop on facilitating trade, held in Addis Ababa in April 2010, allowed various countries to report on the progress they had made in that area. In the report of the workshop:

- **Senegal** informed the workshop that it had started the pilot phase of its project on the dematerialization of foreign trade procedures. The project involved using recommendations made by the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) and applying specific standards for international document exchange. Senegal had signed agreements with France and Malaysia to allow for document and data exchange with those countries. It had also begun to implement the Import Control System (ICS) for exports to the European Union. The project was supported by the Investment Climate Facility (ICF) for Africa, and the pilot phase should end in June 2011.
- **Madagascar** highlighted the importance of standardization for customs risk assessment, and gave some specific examples. It also outlined some of the difficulties encountered in exchanging manifests with certain neighbouring countries, where electronic manifests were sometimes transferred 48 hours after a vessel actually arrived.
- **Côte d'Ivoire** described the single window model it had adopted. A platform had been created for data exchange where customs and port procedures were taken into consideration only in exchanges of data with persons involved in foreign trade. Côte d'Ivoire also hoped to benefit from AACE recommendations on how its project should be taken forward.
- **Cameroon** gave a brief presentation on the process of establishing a single window, which had begun life in physical form but was becoming progressively more electronic. With regard to standards-related projects, the External Trade One-Stop Shop (GUCE) was currently working on various projects involving international exchanges, including electronic certificates of origin and cargo manifests. In those activities, it followed United Nations recommendations.
- **Mali** said that it had two single windows:
 - A single window for customs
 - A single window for enterprise creation

It hoped to use the experience of other AACE member countries to develop an integrated and automated single window.

- **Ghana** briefly described some successful projects that had been implemented as part of its single window. The project on single identifiers was of particular interest, and the chairman suggested that AACE should organize a special session to address that subject. Ghana's experience with the single window was already widely known, and its presentation highlighted the modernization activities under way with a view to expanding its range of services.
- **Congo** gave an extensive presentation on its initiatives to implement the Maritime Single Window (GUMAR), including a progress report on the GUMAR project. Currently, of the four project phases initially planned, three were already operational and had been welcomed by operators.
- The **Libyan Arab Jamahiriya** said that it had begun to implement its electronic single window as part of a technical partnership with the Republic of Korea. The

work, which should cover the whole trade sector, was progressing well, but a timetable for commencing operations had not yet been set.

V. Regional initiatives

A. West Africa

20. **ECOWAS Aid for Trade Meeting (Abuja, 27–28 January 2010):** High-level delegates from various member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), development partners and specialized technical institutions participated in the meeting, which covered the following topics:

- Global and regional approaches
- From theory to practice
- Examples of regional implementation
- Considering trade in national and regional strategies
- Role of the private sector
- Measuring the effectiveness of aid for trade
- Partners' viewpoints
- Future prospects

21. Each session included high-quality reports and presentations by high-level experts. In general, it was observed that development partners were prepared to provide significant support to the ECOWAS region through aid for trade, with a view to concluding an agreement under the auspices of the World Trade Organization. It should be noted that the region, through ECOWAS and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), had a significant number of projects under way or awaiting funding.

B. Central Africa

22. The Rapporteur for Africa did not carry out any activity in or receive any information from the region.

C. Southern Africa

23. The Rapporteur for Africa did not carry out any activity in or receive any information from the region.

D. East Africa

24. As part of a project focusing on improving trade flows in the East African Community (EAC) region, the Commonwealth, in collaboration with the East African Business Council (EABC), planned a series of trade facilitation programmes.

25. A workshop was set up as a high-level forum bringing together participants from the private sector and the principal decision makers responsible for reforming logistical services and facilitation policies in the region. In particular, it targeted decision makers in a range of sectors, including transport, customs and ports, along with those responsible for

infrastructure in EAC partner countries. It also brought together international experts from the Commonwealth, the World Trade Organization, the Simplification of International Trade Procedures Board (SITPRO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

E. North Africa

26. The Rapporteur for Africa did not carry out any activity in or receive any information from the region.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

27. In the months ahead, the main task will be to consolidate the African Alliance and set up viable pilot projects in the African economic regions.
