



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
2 December 2011

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Trade

Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

Eighteenth session

Geneva, 15-17 February 2012

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Strategic directions

Strategic directions for UN/CEFACT 2012-2013

Submitted by the UN/CEFACT Bureau for discussion

Summary

This draft note on strategic directions provides a starting point for consultations leading up to and for discussion at the 18th Plenary. A revised version will be issued after the session to reflect the outcomes of the exchange of views among delegations and other stakeholders.

1. Within the United Nations framework of the Economic and Social Council, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) serves as the focal point for trade facilitation recommendations and electronic business standards, covering both commercial and government business processes that can foster international trade and related services. The goal is: simple, transparent and effective processes for global commerce.
2. UN/CEFACT is concerned with a broad range of intermediary business processes and administrative procedures associated with facilitating trade, particularly those associated with international supply chains. These chains typically involve, for example, commercial, transport and logistics, regulatory and payment domains.
3. Although there is a continuing need to take measures to reduce red tape, the requirements for additional processes and information from regulators, government bodies and the business community have intensified in recent years, especially as concerns advance (pre arrival and pre departure) details specified for security, health and Customs authorities. These developments have increased both the complexity and the geographic extension of international supply chains and represent an impressive challenge.
4. The general public, regulators and government bodies have increasingly asked for greater protection from the risks of terrorism, hazardous materials, fraud, mistakes and accidents. Translated to the trade sector this means participants need to be increasingly accountable for details associated with their transactions at any point in time. Traceability has become a major focus of attention and is seen as critical for consumer protection. The consequence is the necessity for international supply chains to be in compliance with local regulations for transactions and whatever may be required for crossing borders. Traditional control processes are based on analysis of risks at any given moment in the supply chain and do not guarantee full control throughout the business process. International recommendations and standards, however, can offer opportunities to maximize security along supply chains at each point in time.
5. Within this environment, UN/CEFACT has a specific objective to provide a coherent, standardized set of trade-facilitation instruments that help small and medium-sized enterprises as well as transition and developing economies, to engage more effectively and efficiently in international trade.
6. UN/CEFACT standards, recommendations and other instruments are of vital importance in the effort to stimulate the efficient allocation of production means and the flow of goods and services in the digital age. Meeting these challenges requires taking advantage of appropriate information and communication technologies.
7. Governments and regulatory agencies around the globe are increasingly (sometimes even exclusively) focusing on electronic business using international, open standards rather than domestic, national or proprietary standards. The constantly increasing growth of the Internet for online trade transactions also requires the use of efficient, trusted, reliable and secure information exchanges.
8. UN/CEFACT can support this requirement by providing the ability to standardize processes and communicate information in a completely unambiguous way. To achieve this globally requires the use of internationally agreed upon and standardized common libraries and directories. Organizations such as the World Trade Organization and the World Customs Organization have recognized that shared global libraries are of high importance and UN/CEFACT regards these, now and into the future, as key deliverables.

Key activity areas

9. To achieve its mission, UN/CEFACT undertakes activities in the following broad areas, in response to the needs of countries, regulators and international business:

- Identification and analysis of opportunities to simplify, align, and standardize international trade processes, procedures and information flows within and between countries.
- Development and maintenance of relevant recommendations, standards and instruments in support of international trade facilitation, in response to the needs of countries and other stakeholders in international trade.
- Working together with other key players involved in trade facilitation activities and organizations involved in standards development, with a view to avoiding duplication and to collectively building a global and consistent framework based on best practice.
- Outreaching to support capacity building that fosters implementation of UN/CEFACT recommendations, standards and instruments worldwide, with a special focus on transition and developing countries.

10. For 2012-2013, UN/CEFACT will operate in a new organizational structure where cross-collaboration on projects is encouraged. The focus will be on preserving investments in existing standards and recommendations while at the same time answering the challenges and opportunities posed by the requirements of new electronic business methodologies and technologies (and their associated standards) as they apply to world trade.

11. A continued increase is expected in the use of UN/CEFACT standards by governments and the private sector. With increasing adoption, the visibility of these standards will also increase.

12. Special efforts will be made over the period to identify priority areas and ensure close monitoring of targets, ensuring a positive and realistic management of expectations. In particular, consideration will be given to ways to support additional UN/CEFACT national experts.

13. As an example, continued strong developments in the Single Window area should see a further adoption of UN/CEFACT standards. The global movement towards Single Window is a strong catalyst for the broader implementation of the entire suite of trade facilitation instruments and constitutes a major opportunity for countries, especially developing and transition economies, to make progress in facilitating trade. In particular, UN/CEFACT plans to supplement the existing Recommendations 33, 34 and 35 by developing and publishing Recommendation 36 on Single Window Interoperability, supported by appropriate standard instruments.