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Reports of rapporteurs

Report of the UN/CEFACT Rapporteur for Africa (2012–2013)

I. Introduction

1. The period 2012–2013 was a time of consolidation in the work and initiatives of the African Alliance for e-Commerce (AAEC). Many events were held to support the development of the Single Window concept in Africa and to encourage the application of UN/CEFACT norms and recommendations in the continent.
2. The following is a summary of the UN/CEFACT Rapporteur's activities.

II. Fifth AAEC Executive Committee meeting, 3 and 4 May 2012, Abidjan

3. AAEC held its fifth Executive Committee meeting on 3 and 4 May 2012 in the Conference Room of the Autonomous Port of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.
4. The meeting was attended by representatives of Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Senegal and Tunisia, as well as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Apologies were received from Mali and Libya.
5. The meeting produced the following outcomes:
 - Consideration and approval of the application for membership from Kenya;
 - Endorsement of the action plan and budget for the period 2012–2014;
 - Choice of Madagascar to host the sixth Executive Committee meeting;

- Opening of candidatures for the organization of the Third International Conference on Single Windows: the terms of reference were transmitted to the candidate countries, with the precondition that an official letter of intent should be received from their Governments; the candidature of Madagascar was approved and the Conference will be held in September 2013;
- Convocation of the first meeting of the Task Force, which was held in Dakar in the first half of July 2012 to discuss the implementation of AAEC projects.

III. Task Force meeting in Saly, Senegal, July 2012

6. Following the recommendation in the conclusions of the fifth Executive Committee meeting, the AAEC Task Force, composed of representatives of Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Morocco and Senegal, met from 12 to 20 July 2012 in Saly, Senegal, to discuss:

- Finalization of the three guides designated by the General Assembly;
- Drafting of the terms of reference for two AAEC projects.

7. After four days of intensive work, the experts produced the following:

- A guide on Single Window implementation;
- A guide on paperless trade implementation;
- A guide on electronic document exchange;
- Terms of reference for a feasibility study on the setting up of a certification authority;
- Terms of reference for the electronic certification project for national and international documents (primarily the invoice and the certificate of origin).

8. The Executive Committee set the Single Window implementation guide as the priority, with publication planned for April 2013.

IV. Sixth AAEC Executive Committee meeting, 10 October 2012, Antananarivo, Madagascar

9. The sixth Executive Committee meeting was held on 10 October 2012 in Antananarivo, Madagascar. It was attended by 20 participants from AAEC member countries: Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Senegal and Tunisia.

10. The Committee adopted the following conclusions and recommendations:

(a) Draw up a business plan on strengthening the AAEC secretariat to produce a clearer picture of its main funding sources;

(b) Submit a project proposal for funding for the following activities to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa/Africa Trade Policy Centre:

- Finalization and publication of the Guide for Single Window Implementation in Africa;
- Organization of sensitization workshops on Single Window implementation;
- (c) Approve the application of Tunisia for full membership.

11. Alongside the sixth Executive Committee meeting, and in partnership with the Malagasy customs service, AAEC also organized a workshop on Single Window implementation in Africa entitled “Single Windows and Trade Facilitation: the Challenges Facing Africa”. The workshop was attended by 50 participants from 18 countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Tanzania and Tunisia.

12. The following issues were addressed:

- New stakes in trade facilitation;
- Single Windows in Africa: national experiences;
- Challenges in Single Window implementation;
- Funding sources for Single Windows;
- Lessons learned.

13. A round table on issues related to (a) consensus-seeking on the Single Window concept, (b) Single Window performance, and (c) developments needed over the coming decade, led to interactive and productive discussions.

V. Links with other international organizations

A. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa/Africa Trade Policy Centre

14. AAEC was invited, for the second time, to attend the annual meeting of the governing board of the Africa Trade Policy Centre in Debre Zeyit, Ethiopia, on 3 and 4 December.

15. At the end of the meeting, the Centre reaffirmed its continued support for AAEC, which it considered to be one of the most tangible outcomes of the Aid for Trade agenda. The Centre confirmed its financial support for AAEC in the 2012–2013 budget to a total of \$100,000 to fund activities promoting the Single Window concept in Africa. It will be used for the following projects:

- The production, publication and promotion of the Guide for Single Window Implementation in Africa;
- Five national and regional sensitization workshops in the different regional economic commissions on good practices in Single Window implementation in Africa;
- Pilot projects, involving volunteer countries in two regional economic commissions, on facilitating border crossings.

B. African Development Bank

16. The African Development Bank held a workshop in Tunis during the week of 10 December 2012 to improve its staff’s level of knowledge on trade facilitation. The Bank’s staff heard about the Single Window concept and its state of development in Africa. The many questions asked demonstrated the Bank’s interest in such issues.

C. Islamic Development Bank

17. AAEC visited the Islamic Development Bank on 19 and 20 December 2012 to present its projects and discuss partnership opportunities. The Bank was very interested in the Single Window concept and trade facilitation in general.

18. The presentation to the Bank's senior staff working on trade facilitation issues covered all the AAEC projects, as well as the examples of Senegal and Cameroon.

D. West African Economic and Monetary Union

19. To help improve the movement of goods within the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and make it more attractive, particularly to foreign investors, GAINDE 2000 visited UEMOA headquarters in Ouagadougou to present two projects:

(a) The setting up of the UEMOA foreign trade portal: the portal forms a business-to-business (B-to-B) marketplace for economic operators looking for practical information on services related to their activities. It includes a simulator for foreign trade formalities, duties and taxes, foreign trade figures and a directory of operators, as well as offering advertising services;

(b) The introduction of a certificate of origin trade platform in UEMOA: the project is intended to facilitate trade within the UEMOA zone through the free movement of goods of certified community origin. Authentication and issuance of certificates of origin in real time for all stakeholders will make it possible to reduce or even do away with the red tape that operators often have to deal with at borders.

20. The two projects were welcomed by the UEMOA Commission in the person of Mr. Christophe Dabire, commissioner for the regional trade market, competition and cooperation department. It was decided to deal with the projects in the framework of the regional facilitation programme to be discussed with the World Bank.

E. Pan-Asia e-Commerce Alliance

21. AAEC and the Pan-Asia e-Commerce Alliance (PAA) have agreed on more active collaboration since AAEC was set up in 2009. The Chairperson of AAEC was invited to attend the PAA Executive Committee meeting in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in September 2012. He gave a presentation on AAEC and the proposed areas of cooperation with PAA. A draft memorandum of understanding is currently under consideration by the two organizations. This cooperation should allow them to share experiences and solutions, and adopt pilot projects in the two regions.

VI. Ongoing and planned projects

A. Publication of the Guide for Single Window Implementation

22. With the drafting and publication of the Guide, those countries with Single Window implementation projects will be able to access AAEC technical assistance, including a knowledge base on best practice in Single Windows in Africa, and African skills will be mobilized to help them.

B. Organization of national sensitization workshops on Single Windows

23. The first two workshops will be held in Uganda, on 21 and 22 March 2013, and Burundi, on 25 and 26 March 2013. Further workshops will take place in June in Egypt, Niger and Zambia.

24. The workshops will promote:

- Sharing of good practices on Single Windows between Single Window operators and countries with projects in the area;
- Sensitization of pilot countries to the regional Single Window concept;
- The extension of AAEC to other countries through new applications for membership;
- The various regional economic commissions taking ownership of the regional Single Window implementation strategy.

C. Search for new donor partners

25. AAEC is looking for new partners to help fund the following activities:

- Extension of the workshops to other countries;
- A study on the infrastructure needed to pool public key infrastructure;
- Enhancement of AAEC secretariat capacity to organize information dissemination.

VII. African and regional meetings on trade facilitation and e-trade

A. Borderless Alliance Conference, Burkina Faso

26. The biennial Translog Africa Symposium was held in Ouagadougou from 25 to 27 September 2012. Addressing transportation and logistics in Africa, it was organized jointly by the Conseil Burkinabé des Chargeurs (CBC) and HAROPA, the economic interest group representing the ports of Le Havre, Rouen and Paris. The topic of this third symposium was "Transport in Africa: how to promote the supply chain in the current economic, financial and technological context". Its three subtopics were:

- (a) Economic, financial and technological environment: impact on transport in Africa;
- (b) Optimization of Africa's maritime and port services;
- (c) Logistics development for landlocked countries.

27. Attending for the first time, GAINDE 2000 had a stand in the exhibition area and made a presentation on Single Windows in Senegal, from automation to the dematerialization of foreign trade formalities.

B. High-level forum on trade facilitation and Single Windows towards better regional economic cooperation, Casablanca

28. The High-level forum was held in Casablanca, Morocco, on 25 and 26 February 2013. It was organized by the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation and the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade with the aim of bringing together the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to discuss the project to set up a regional Single Window for its member countries. The meeting was an opportunity for the various countries to present their national experiences and exchange ideas on the challenges and obstacles to facilitating trade between the Organization's Member States.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

29. 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.
