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Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

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Reports of rapporteurs

United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business Regional Rapporteurs Reports

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

This report is an update for the Plenary on the activities of the regional rapporteur to United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) since their last reports. It provides an overview of meetings that took place in the respective regions and key projects that are of pertinence to UN/CEFACT.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2022/6 is submitted by the secretariat to the twenty-eighth session of the Plenary for noting.

1.   In 2021, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) Plenary session elected two regional rapporteurs (Plenary Decision 21-03): Mr. Mor Talla Diop as UN/CEFACT regional rapporteur for Africa and Mr. Hisanao Sugamata as the UN/CEFACT regional rapporteur for Asia-Pacific.

2.   The *Consolidated United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) Mandate and Terms of Reference* (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/15) outlines the role of the Regional Rapporteur in paragraphs 82-85.

3.   The mandate of Regional Rapporteurs shall be carried out, wherever possible, in coordination with the UN/CEFACT Bureau, the UN/CEFACT Heads of Delegation to from the region, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) secretariat and other regional commissions of the United Nations.

4.   Within their defined region, the Rapporteurs shall:

- Promote UN/CEFACT interests and activities among governments, intergovernmental organizations, relevant trade associations and business and trade facilitation organizations, with the assistance of the ECE secretariat, which is responsible for official communications;

- Encourage the participation of experts in UN/CEFACT's work programme and stimulate the implementation of UN/CEFACT's standards, recommendations and other deliverables; and

- Coordinate UN/CEFACT activities in the region.

5.   All Regional rapporteurs shall present a report at each UN/CEFACT Plenary. They may raise issues directly with the UN/CEFACT Bureau and have an open invitation to attend the Bureau meetings in a consultative capacity.

6.   This document consolidates the reports that were received in March 2022 for the twenty-eighth Plenary. Annex I presents the report of the Rapporteur for Sub-Saharan Africa. Annex II presents the report of the Rapporteur for Asia and the Pacific. No report was received for the Middle East and Northern Africa region.

Annex I

Report of Rapporteur for Sub-Saharan Africa

I. Introduction

1.   This is the report of the Rapporteur for Sub-Saharan Africa, covering the activities in the region since the previous Rapporteur report.

2.   Below activities have a direct link to deliverables of the UN/CEFACT, notably *Recommendation No. 4: National Trade Facilitation Bodies; Recommendation No. 33 on Establishing a Single Window; Recommendation No. 34: Data Simplification and Standardization for International Trade; Recommendation No. 35: Establishing a Legal Framework for International Trade Single Window; and Recommendation No. 36: Single Window Interoperability.*

II. Webinar on the role of single windows in the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (29 April 2021)

3.   The organization of a webinar by the African Alliance for Electronic Trade (AAET) confirms a willingness to work more to promote tools and good practices that allow our countries to make our borders more fluid for the movement of goods and people. This includes the effective use of single windows, which could promote growth and accelerate the effective implementation of continental free trade agreements by simplifying procedures and converting to electronic payment systems to enable economic operators to develop secure, sustainable value chains with good margins for growth.

4.   The webinar was attended by the AfCFTA secretariat, World Customs Organization (WCO), United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and eminent international experts from more than 50 countries. It focused on the following topics:

- An introductory presentation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement;

- The role of Single Windows in the implementation of the AfCFTA; and

- Panellist recommendations.

5.   This webinar was an opportunity for single window, trade facilitation, environment, and private sector experts to share their views on the role of single windows in the implementation of different areas, particularly trade facilitation, customs cooperation, transit, technical standards, electronic trade, etc.

6.   The following proposals were made by the panellists:

- Work towards a regional single window similar to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) single window;

- Strengthen digital infrastructure in government organizations, particularly for customs administration;

- Strengthen thinking around cybersecurity and data sharing;

- Create a regional regulatory framework to facilitate the circulation and mutual recognition of electronic documents;

- Strengthen dialogue and cooperation between the public and private sectors for the implementation of effective single windows and trade facilitation that can contribute to the implementation of AfCFTA;

- Strengthen the capacity of single window and trade players in the use of digital tools for the continuous process;

- Expand the parameters of the single window to cover regional transactions in cross-border exchanges;

- Encourage collaboration between the AACE and the AfCFTA secretariat;

- Reflect on the establishment of a work program on how to support the implementation of the AfCFTA;

- Establish a regional framework for data protection against cybercrime;

- Build an electronic certificate of origin based on existing best practices; and

- Renew the 2014 African Alliance for Electronic Commerce (AACE) peer review study to promote best practices.

III. 12th meeting of the AACE General Assembly and the 20th meeting of the Executive Committee (13 April 2021)

7.   On 13 April 2021, via the Zoom platform, The AACE held the 12th meeting of its General Assembly, and its 20th Executive Committee meeting during which the mandate of the entire office was extended for one year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing projects with closing date of 31 December 2022.

IV. Webinar on the dematerialization of the West African Economic and Monetary Union Certificate of Origin (12 October 2021)

8.   As part of the implementation of Phase 1 of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) project, an update meeting was held by the AACE and the Trade Directorate of the WAEMU Commission on 12 October 2021 from 15:00 to 17:30 via Zoom. This meeting was attended by experts from AACE, WAEMU and member State focal points from Togo, Niger, and Senegal.

9.   The meeting provided an opportunity to review the history of the project, to validate the focal points designated by the member States represented (Togo, Niger, and Senegal), to analyse the completed questionnaires and discuss the next steps of the project.

10.   Discussions focused on the presentation of the completed questionnaires and resulted in the following recommendations:

A. Analysis of the questionnaire completed by the Niger Ministry of Industry

Constraints mentioned:

- Integration problem (the current version of ASYCUDA++ software does not include the signature/visa exchanges on the certificate of origin)[1].

Recommendations for the case of Niger under the ECO project:

- Start the project by ensuring the paperless portal of the WAEMU certificate of origin (CO) can allow the operator to make their request, the Ministry of Industry to process the certificate and customs to proceed with the visa of the certificate
- Elaborate an action plan for the implementation of the project in Niger

Analysis of the questionnaire completed by the Ministry of Industry of Togo:

11.   The next steps will be for Togo to

- Make available to the project team all the necessary information (notes, decree, technical documents) that can facilitate the implementation of the project
- Conduct technical analysis of the existing platform for a better approach
- Elaborate a tripartite action plan (Department of Industry, Chamber of Commerce, AACE/WAEMU) for the successful implementation of the project in Togo

B. Case of Senegal

Constraints mentioned:

- Non-existence of community rules on the recognition of the electronic CO by destination countries

V. Meeting on trade facilitation

A. The third edition of the Congo Digital Forum (16-18 February 2022, in Pointe-Noire, Congo)

12.   The 3rd edition of the Congo Digital Forum (FNC) on the theme "Technological Innovation and Data at the Heart of Digital Transformations Challenges" was held at the Atlantic Palace Hotel of Pointe-Noire from 16 to 18 February 2022 under the patronage of His Excellency Anatole Collinet Makosso, Prime Minister, Head of Government.

13.   Organized to enrich the dialogue on the role of digitalization in the socioeconomic development of the Republic of Congo, this 3rd edition also saw the remarkable presence of several members of the government and the participation of several experts from different horizons, including the following:

- From Africa: Congo, Senegal, Morocco, Kenya, Cameroon, Ivory Coast;
- From Europe: Belgium, France, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Denmark, Finland; and

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[1] ASYCUDA is an automated system for customs data. It was developed by UNCTAD.

• From America: United States of America and Canada.

14. After three days of fruitful exchanges and debates, the participants of the forum formulated recommendations to serve as a strategic direction at the political level, and the general transformation of the international and Congolese digital ecosystem in particular:

1. Recommendations at the international level

• Distribute the GAFAM tax (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft) on all the countries concerned by the turnover of these digital giants;

• Promote the establishment of a certification authority at the African level to ensure trust in e-commerce; and

• Recommend to the other African States, the ratification of the African Union Convention (Malabo Convention) of 27 June 2014 on cybersecurity and the protection of personal data.

2. Recommendations at the national level

• Dematerialize administrative and commercial records to simplify procedures and to facilitate obtaining the following documents:

  • For the Department of Justice: criminal record, nationality certificate, registration in the commercial register;

  • For the administration of the territory: birth certificate, marriage certificate, death certificate;

  • For the Department of Health: patient medical records, birth certificate;

  • For the Department of Agriculture: fumigation/phytosanitary certificate;

  • For the Department of Transport: registration, driver's licence;

  • For the Department of Land Affairs: registration in the cadastral register;

  • For the department in charge of SMEs: registration with the Congolese Agency for Business Creation (ACPCE);

  • For the Department of Higher Education: online registration, online scholarship application, student housing application;

  • For the Department of Culture: registration of authors and composers, declaration of works;

  • Etc.

• Establish a national digital board comprising public/private actors to ensure collaboration among the various agencies and regulatory authorities and to avoid acting "in silos" on the transversal aspects of digitalization;

• Operationalize the National Agency for Security of Information Systems (ANSSI);

• Set up the Data Protection Commission;

• Adapt the penal code by integrating the use of digital technology;

• Create a cybercrime corps within the security forces (police, gendarmerie, Centre of Intelligence and Documentation) for defence (Directorate General of Strategic Affairs and Military Cooperation);

• Train digital law specialists, security force executives, and common-law lawyers to better assess cybercrime and other offenses committed in cyberspace;

- Promote research and development through the creation of large engineering schools in Brazzaville, Pointe-Noire, Oyo, and Ouesso, with the objective of encouraging the creation of digital islands with advantageous taxation;

- Promote the training of young people in advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain technology, the iInternet of Things (IoT), Big Data, etc.;

- Enable the training of young people to guarantee technological innovation;

- Work on the interoperability of the IT systems of actors involved in the Congolese economy;

- Coordinate the creation of digital projects in the Republic of Congo and identify the best and most effective technologies to be used;

- Promote technical innovations through the creation of digital start-ups;

- Create a copyright agency for software and databases; and

- Create a national funding agency for the Congolese digital ecosystem to strengthen the financing policy and to reduce the digital divide.

3. Activities the continental level

Ports Management Association of West and Central Africa (PMAWCA-AGPAOC) project

- The project, "Improving the Efficiency of Customs Procedures and Port Operations in Africa - OEAIC" aims to reduce the inefficiency of customs and administrative clearance procedures in ports through a bottom-up approach, developing policies and procedures based on the reality of day-to-day port operations.

- The best instruments to solve facilitation issues have been identified with the implementation of a single window: a trade facilitation instrument for the submission of regulatory documents (including customs declarations, import/export permit applications, certificates of origin, commercial invoices and other documents) through a single point. The single window is generally part of a national policy to facilitate all forms of trade. However, the development of a practical guide for the establishment of a maritime single window or a PCS to improve the efficiency of customs procedures and port operations in Africa was deemed appropriate, taking into account the African realities.

VI. Perspectives

15.   Despite the Covid-19 pandemic during 2020-2021, the AACE was able to mobilize its experts to finalize the African Trade Fund (AfTra) exchange platform. This is an important step in the project, which was launched on 31 March 2022 in Mombasa at the AACE annual conference. For the upcoming deadlines, as part of the activities of the AACE, the aim will be to popularize the AfTra platform and to make African actors and participants aware of the importance of such platforms.

VII. Other

16.   According to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) database, as of 2022, 38 WTO Members in Sub-Saharan Africa have ratified the agreement. Liberia became the 38th country in the Sub-Saharan Africa region to ratify the agreement on 29 April 2021.

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Annex II

Report of Rapporteur for Asia and the Pacific

I. Introduction

1.   This is the report of the Rapporteur for Asia and the Pacific, covering the Asia Pacific Council for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (AFACT) activities since the previous Rapporteur report.

2.   The main focus in the Asia-Pacific region is to ensure that data communication occurs smoothly, cost-effectively, and safely between trading partners and related stakeholders, especially given the growth of global supply chains utilizing e-business. There are many challenges in creating and developing the ICT infrastructures and networks that play an important role in governing high-level, transparent, global supply/value chains. The countries and regional bodies in the Asia-Pacific region continue their efforts to realize the potential of e-business and trade facilitation for regional development.

II. Activities conducted by the Asia Pacific Council for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (AFACT)

3.   AFACT is positioned to stimulate, improve, and promote the ability of business, trade, and administrative organizations in the Asia-Pacific region to exchange products and relevant services effectively using international standards and best practices—especially those developed and promoted by UN/CEFACT. Most of the active members of AFACT have continued to pursue joint activities, of benefit to all member countries, over the last year.

4.   All members look forward to facilitating international trade transactions and contributing to the growth of e-commerce in a non-political environment.

5.   A midterm meeting in the first half of the year and a plenary in the latter half of the year are held annually. All members are welcome to attend, share experiences and knowledge, and identify key strategic issues. Malaysia was the host country in 2021, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to face events, such as the eAsia Awards, were cancelled and the 2021 meetings of the AFACT plenary and Steering Committee were held online. The following meetings were held since the last report:

   • The 39th Midterm meeting was held on 15 July 2021 (online); and

   • The 40th AFACT plenary and steering committee meetings were on 8 November 2021 (online).

6.   The AFACT permanent secretariat was moved from Iran to the Institute for Information Industry (III) in Taiwan, Province of China.

7.   The Rapporteur provided a report on the activities of UN/CEFACT at the AFACT plenary meeting which detailed the forums, conferences and UN/CEFACT projects. Experts who participated in the relevant UN/CEFACT working groups reported in detail to the AFACT working group committees.

8.   The AFACT is proceeding with the following three projects in 2021-2022:

Interoperability among trade information platforms project

- Blockchain and distributed ledger technologies (DLT) have the power to bring the social infrastructure of the digital era to a whole new level. Now, several trade information platforms based on blockchain technology have been introduced in the world. The purpose of this project is to survey the trade information platforms based on blockchain technology in Asia and to look for a collaborative approach for interoperability.

Electronic negotiation use case project

- Recognizing the negotiation process is entering a digital transformation (DX) where both buyer and seller have developed electronic systems, UN/CEFACT launched the project "eNegotiation". The eNegotiation project is attempting to define the automatic negotiation protocol using electronic data interchange (EDI), based on the UN/CEFACT standard. The purpose of this electronic negotiation use case project is to introduce AFACT members to the electronic negotiation protocol and to develop the guidelines for several business domains in Asia.

Travel and tourism projects

- The UN/CEFACT travel and tourism projects (sustainable tourism, experience programs) in the Asia-Pacific region are being revitalized.

9. Japan is hosting AFACT meetings in 2022.

III. Other

10. According to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) database, as of 2022, 31 WTO Members in Asia and the Pacific have ratified the agreement. Solomon Islands was ratified on 14 April 2022 and became the 31st country in the Asia-Pacific region to ratify the agreement.

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