



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
2 May 2024

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Executive Committee

Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

Thirtieth session

Geneva, 11 and 12 July 2024

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Review of the Bureau and Regional Rapporteurs' activities since the twenty-ninth Plenary

Report of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business Regional Rapporteurs

Submitted by the Regional Rapporteurs

Summary

This report aims to update the Plenary on the activities of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) Regional Rapporteur for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America since their last reports to the Plenary. It provides an overview of the meetings and activities that have taken place in the regions and the key projects that are of pertinence to UN/CEFACT.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2024/5 is submitted to the thirtieth session of the UN/CEFACT Plenary for information.



I. Africa

A. Introduction

1. This section of the report was prepared by the Regional Rapporteur for Africa.
2. In November 2023, during the twenty-ninth UN/CEFACT Plenary, Ms. Nogaye Toure Diagne was elected as the Regional Rapporteur for Africa.
3. Below is the summary of activities coordinated by the Regional Rapporteur for Africa.

B. Statutory meetings, conference and awareness

4. The African Alliance for Electronic Commerce (AAEC) held its twenty-third Executive Committee meeting on 24 September 2023 on the sidelines of the ninth edition of the International Single Window Conference at the Sheraton Hotel in Djibouti, Republic of Djibouti. The work resulted in the following recommendations:

- Strengthen collaboration with the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) Commission for the complete dematerialization of trade documents;
- Reintegrate Libya into the AAEC community;
- Promote the AFTRA (Africa E-Trade Hub) electronic document exchange platform in the Regional Economic Communities (RECs);
- Support the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) initiative; and
- Hold webinars to raise awareness of stakeholders on issues related to the development of single windows and trade facilitation in general.

5. The ninth edition of the International Conference on Single Windows was held by the Djibouti Ports and Free Zones Authority (DPFZA), DPCS and the AAEC on 25-26 September 2023 in Djibouti, Republic of Djibouti under the theme "Accelerating the implementation of the single window with the latest technologies for trade facilitation and smart logistics". This conference involved the participation of Djiboutian, South Sudanese and Ethiopian Ministers, including the following:

- H.E. Mr. Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed, Prime Minister, Republic of Djibouti;
- H.E Mrs. Mariam Hamadou Ali, Minister of Digital Economy and Innovation;
- H.E Mr. Dange Boru Kosi, Minister of State for Transport and Logistics of Ethiopia; and
- Mr. Simon Mijok Mijak, Minister of Roads and Bridges of South Sudan.

6. The active participation of these Ministers resulted in the signing of regional agreements aimed to facilitate subregional trade. The following points summarize the main recommendations arising from the discussions at this conference:

- Ensure the establishment of service level agreements (SLAs) for real-time data availability;
- Establish smart and environmental corridors, aligned with international standards;
- Encourage single windows to collect data on wait times and bottlenecks at borders;
- Promote cross-border interconnectivity and interoperability of single window systems in Africa to facilitate the move toward the establishment a regional single window;
- Utilize the national single windows to mitigate disruptions in the supply chain;
- Improve coordination and collaboration between different government agencies and stakeholders involved in trade facilitation, such as customs, port authorities, health agencies, transport and logistics operators and trade associations;

- Promote regional integration and harmonization of trade standards and regulations and support the implementation of AfCFTA initiative;
- Encourage states to focus more on the performance that single windows can bring and mandate more representation in the standardization work of international organizations such as UN/CEFACT;
- Use the single window as facilitation lever in the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area;
- Raise awareness among countries to join IPPC ePhyto initiative ;
- Encourage International Maritime Organization (IMO) member States to accelerate the implementation of a maritime single window;
- Strengthen the capacity of human resources in the port sector;
- Strengthen national regulatory frameworks to facilitate the integration of technologies into existing systems;
- Adopt blockchain technology to improve the reliability, traceability and security of data and commercial transactions;
- Use artificial intelligence to optimize resource allocation, predict and prevent potential risks and disruptions, and provide personalized and tailored services to stakeholders;
- Use the cloud to provide flexible platforms, capable of storing and processing large amounts of data and information, to facilitate the dematerialization of foreign trade procedures;
- Integrate the internet of things (IoT) for optimal monitoring and control of the movement of goods and vehicles throughout the supply chain and to provide real-time information to stakeholders (public and private sectors, etc.);
- Harmonize international standards and protocols to facilitate the interoperability of different systems and platforms involved in trade facilitation and to support the implementation of regional and international agreements, such as the AfCFTA initiative;
- Launch a capacity-building program for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and startups to boost innovation in the logistics chain; and
- Ensure the availability of data from AAEC members to facilitate research on e-commerce and cross-border trade.

7. Held on 14 December 2023, in partnership with the Pan Asian E-Commerce Alliance (PAA) and the Asia PKI Consortium, the webinar on “Electronic signature in the single window environment” allowed UN/CEFACT to share its work on international standards, and norms related to the subject. It was also an opportunity for countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to share their experiences. This event involved the participation of about a 100 stakeholders from diverse regions. Below are some key recommendations outlined during the webinar:

- Create a framework for consultation with state authorities and establish a technical committee to assess the feasibility of technical choices regarding electronic signatures;
- Promote mutual recognition of digital certificates;
- Encourage countries to update their legal framework on electronic transactions;
- Foster mutual trust among states regarding electronic signatures;
- Organize awareness sessions on electronic signature issues;
- Encourage experience sharing on electronic signature tools;
- Organize more information sessions on existing standards and norms regarding electronic signatures; and

- Involve more African countries in UN/CEFACT work to promote awareness among political stakeholders.
8. At the fourteenth General Assembly meeting on 19 March 2024 in Pointe Noire, the Executive Bureau of the AAEC was renewed. It is composed of the following:
- Mr. Warsama Mouhoumed Bouh Guirreh, Director General of the Djibouti Port Community System (DPCS), Chairman of the General Assembly, Republic of Djibouti;
 - Mr. Youssef Ahouzi, Director General of Portnet, Chairman of the Executive Committee, Morocco;
 - Mr. Jonathan Ofori, Vice-President, MCNet, Mozambique;
 - Mr. Mor Talla Diop, Vice-President, Gainde 2000, Senegal; and
 - Mr. Amadou Mbaye Diop, Treasurer, Gainde 2000, Senegal.
9. On 20 March 2024, the tenth edition of the International Conference on Single Windows was held in in Pointe Noire, Republic of Congo at the Atlantic Palace Hotel, organized alongside the Congo Digital Forum. The theme of this tenth edition focused on "artificial intelligence in trade facilitation" and the following points summarize the main recommendations arising from the discussions of this conference:
- Raise awareness about the importance of integrating AI into single windows for better performance;
 - Ensure quality data is used for optimal use of AI;
 - Foster political engagement of states to support AI initiatives;
 - Raise awareness among governments about the importance of taking measures to protect data and data sovereignty;
 - Adopt a strategic and gradual approach to implementing AI solutions that work and meet the needs of stakeholders;
 - Bring together regulation specialists and IT experts to adopt a mixed approach to reap the benefits of AI;
 - Raise awareness among stakeholders about the importance of collecting reliable data to succeed in AI;
 - Train business actors on existing technologies to facilitate the selection of suitable tools;
 - Educate business specialists about optimal use of AI;
 - Raise awareness among states about the importance of having a data culture;
 - Integrate AI to facilitate the implementation of interoperability projects between single windows;
 - Draw inspiration from international recommendations such as those formulated by UN/CEFACT; and
 - Promote the AFTRA platform for the exchange of commercial documents (CO, phytosanitary certificate, etc.).

C. Collaboration with international organizations

Partnership between AAEC and ITFC

10. Following several meetings with the trade department of the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC), the project proposal for the complete dematerialization of the Electronic Certificate of Origin (e-CO) in five West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) countries (Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Togo and Senegal,) was validated up to USD 240,000. The signing of this agreement will take place in Riyadh, Saudi

Arabia between 27-30 April 2024, on the sidelines of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Islamic Development Bank.

Discussion with the Pan African Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PACCI)

11. PACCI intends to sign an agreement with AAEC to strengthen collaboration between the two institutions. The purpose of this partnership is to strengthen the capacities of African private sector actors on trade facilitation issues.

D. Perspectives

12. The AAEC is planning to do the following:

- Start the activities of the agreement signed with ITFC of the Islamic Development Bank and the UEMOA Commission in May 2024;
- Integrate Cote d'Ivoire's foreign trade data into the commercial information portal hub;
- Support AAEC members without an ePhyto module in joining the Generic ePhyto National System (GeNS) initiative, an international platform for issuing and consulting phytosanitary certificates;
- Organize the second Executive Committee meeting of the AAEC in September 2024 in Casablanca, Morocco;
- Organize the eleventh Edition of the International Conference on Single Windows in Dakar in 2025;
- Organize a webinar on the maritime single window in partnership with IMO to raise awareness among AAEC members; and
- Organize a webinar on electronic data/document exchange (with PAA, AAEC and UN/CEFACT) about awareness raising on standards and norms.

E. Conclusion

13. For the period of 2024-2025, the Rapporteur for Africa will focus on the dissemination of UN/CEFACT international standards and norms among AAEC members by holding information and awareness raising webinars and by bringing the three regions closer together to engage in experience-sharing activities on issues related to international trade facilitation. These actions will allow the regions to assess their progress in implementing the UN/CEFACT recommendations to dematerialize trade procedures and to ensure systems interconnection.

II. Asia and the Pacific

A. Introduction

14. This section of the report was prepared by the Regional Rapporteur for Asia and the Pacific, covering the Asia Pacific Council for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (AFACT) activities since the previous Regional Rapporteur report.

15. In November 2023, during the twenty-ninth UN/CEFACT plenary, Mr. Hisanao Sugamata was re-elected as the Regional Rapporteur for Asia and the Pacific.

16. The main focus in the Asia and the Pacific region is to ensure that data communication occurs smoothly, cost-effectively, safely and sustainably between trading partners and related stakeholders, especially given the growth of global value chains utilizing e-business. There are many challenges in creating and advancing the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructures and networks that govern high-level, transparent, global

value chains. The countries and regional bodies in the Asia and the Pacific region continue their efforts to realize the potential of e-business and trade facilitation for regional sustainable development.

B. Activities conducted by the Asia Pacific Council for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

17. AFACT is positioned to stimulate, improve and promote the ability of business, trade and administrative organizations in the Asia and the 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.

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

19. 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 to identify key strategic issues. Japan and Taiwan Province of China hosted AFACT events in 2023 and 2024. The following events were held since the last report:

- The 41st AFACT Midterm meeting was held on 11 July 2023 in Kyoto, Japan;
- The 41st AFACT Plenary was held on 1 December 2023 in Taiwan Province of China; and
- The 2024 AFACT Joint Working Groups meeting was held on 20 March 2024 in Taiwan Province of China.

20. The Regional 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.

21. AFACT has reorganized the following three working groups:

- **Trade Facilitation Working Group:** The Trade Facilitation Working Group started the data pipeline project to study the possibility of establishing a data pipeline for trade facilitation in the Asia and the Pacific region in response to the UN/CEFACT project “Buy-Ship-Pay Data Exchange Structures for Trade Finance Facilitation”.
- **Sustainable Development and Circular Economy Working Group:** The Sustainable Development and Circular Economy Working Group introduced three projects as follows:
 - Carbon Footprint Verification and Tax project;
 - Agriculture ESG (environmental, social and governance) project; and
 - Mobility as a Service (MaaS) project.
- **Travel, Tourism and Leisure (TT&L) Working Group:** The purpose of this working group is to vitalize the UN/CEFACT TT&L projects (sustainable tourism, experience programs) in the Asia and the Pacific region.

22. AFACT held the eASIA Award event on 1 December 2023 and six significant projects were awarded as follows:

- Category 1: Smart Governance and Management:
 - Mobile E-Certified Notice Project for the Public Sector: Transformation for an Inclusive Society; and
 - New TaiPAY – to Connect, to Empower, to Transform.
- Category 2: Digital Transformation for SMEs:

- Digital Receipt Solution that uses Near field communication (NFC) Tags to Receive Information without Transmitting Personal Data; and
- Digital Trade Infrastructure “Trade Waltz” – Linking Japan and Asia Trade and Encouraging SMEs to Access Global Trade.
- Category 3: Sustainability and Circular Economy:
 - Mobility as a Service, Kaohsiung MeNGo – The Opportunities for the Digital Transformation of Public Transportation Service; and
 - Facilitating the Carbon Inventory to Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) Emissions with the Cloud Management System Vital NetZero.

III. Latin America

A. Introduction

23. This section of the report was prepared by the Regional Rapporteur for Latin America.

24. In November 2023, during the twenty-ninth UN/CEFACT Plenary, Mr. Eduardo Leite was elected as the Regional Rapporteur for Latin America. This report is the first report for the Latin America region.

25. Since the twenty-ninth Plenary, the rapporteur has been exploring possible interventions, reaching out to the heads of delegations (HoDs), and attending regional initiatives in coordination with UN/CEFACT and the HoDs.

B. Action plan

26. An integrated work plan is being jointly developed with UN/CEFACT and the HoDs to address the mandate and terms of reference and the objectives of UN/CEFACT, specifically the following:

- **To promote UN/CEFACT interests and activities among governments, intergovernmental organizations, relevant trade associations and business and trade facilitation organizations, with the assistance of the secretariat, which is responsible for official communications:**
 - To promote UN/CEFACT activities, a methodology is being developed to identify and contact relevant focal points in Latin American governments to carry out communication in promoting UN/CEFACT; and
 - Additionally, it is expected that this methodology will provide insights for governance and digital strategies to facilitate trade and electronic business.
- **To encourage the participation of experts in the UN/CEFACT programme of work and stimulate the implementation of data exchange standards, recommendations and other deliverables:**
 - To encourage the participation of experts in UN/CEFACT work, the Regional Rapporteur will work on identifying experts in the region that can contribute to UN/CEFACT activities and raise awareness on its work; and
 - An exploratory study is being considered to identify local obstacles to the participation of experts in the work of UN/CEFACT and the implementation of standards, recommendations and other deliverables.
- **To coordinate UN/CEFACT activities in the region:**
 - After developing an action plan and its methodology, it is expected that several activities will be carried out in the Latin American region to promote UN/CEFACT interests and to encourage experts to participate.

C. Activities and meetings

27. The Regional Rapporteur has participated in the following meetings:
- “Forum on Due Diligence in The Garment and Footwear Sector”, held on 19 February 2024, organized by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the ECE and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC);
 - “Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems”, held on 23 February 2024, organized by the World Trade Institute;
 - “Enhancing Impact through Collaborative Alliances: Engaging Public, Private, and Civil Society Stakeholders”, held on 28 February 2024, organized by the World Bank and The Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA);
 - “World Trade Organization (WTO) Joint Statement Initiative on Electronic Commerce: A Post-MC13 Dialogue”, held on 8 March 2024, organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP); and
 - “Extended Bureau Call - Planning of the 42nd UN/CEFACT Forum”, held on 19 March 2024, organized by the secretariat.
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