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Reports of rapporteurs

Report of the Rapporteur for Sub-Saharan Africa

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) Rapporteur for Sub-Saharan Africa has conducted several activities to promote the work of UN/CEFACT and e-commerce throughout sub-Saharan Africa. This report describes the activities that have taken place in the region since the twenty-fifth plenary session of UN/CEFACT in April 2019.

II. Activities organized in sub-Saharan Africa in the framework of the African Alliance for e-Commerce

A. Organization of a technical workshop for the development of two concept notes (April 2019, Dakar, Senegal)

1. Note on e-commerce in the African Continental Free Trade Area

2. Aware of the rapid evolution of e-commerce throughout the world and the launching of the operational phase of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the African Alliance for Electronic Commerce (AACE) brought together its experts on 21 and 22 April 2019 to reflect on the contribution of single windows to the development of e-commerce in Africa. Those discussions resulted in the drafting of a concept note on cross-border e-commerce. The final document has been sent to partners interested in the development of e-commerce in Africa.

2. The Single Window Evaluation Guide

3. Since the adoption of UN/CEFACT Recommendation No. 33, many publications have been produced by various organizations to assist countries in establishing single windows. Thus, many countries have set up a single window without having access to the relevant reviews based on evaluation methodologies provided by organizations such as the World Bank (“Doing Business”, Logistics Performance Index, etc.).



4. The intention of AACE in providing a reference document is to offer a standard methodology for assessing single windows in its member countries and elsewhere.

B. Organization of the tenth General Assembly and the eighteenth Executive Committee meeting (23–26 April 2019, Dakar, Senegal)

5. AACE held its joint tenth General Assembly and eighteenth Executive Committee meeting in Dakar from 23 to 26 April 2019. The mandate of the whole bureau was renewed for a period of two years.

6. These events in 2019 coincided with the tenth anniversary of AACE. To mark the occasion, AACE celebrated its first decade of existence and expressed its sincere thanks to its founder members and partners whose commitment and dedication had enabled it to realize its ambition of becoming a structure of reference in the field of single windows and trade facilitation.

C. Organization of a technical workshop on the finalization of procurement assessments (platform and equipment) and the development of detailed functional specifications and a communication plan for the Africa Trade Fund (AfTra) project

7. The workshop was held from 2 to 4 December 2019 in Casablanca, Morocco. It was an opportunity to exchange views on the detailed functionalities of the project components. These are:

Trade portal

- The AACE Information Portal brings together public information provided by national contributors through their representatives (single windows, ministries of trade or other authorized structures)
- It must be designed to allow the integration of information from the national portals via application programming interfaces (APIs) on the data exchange platform that make it possible to search the data collected in the different portals. This will allow multibase cross-searching and multidimensional searching

Trade document exchange platform

8. In summary, the platform will integrate the following modules:

- Electronic data interchange (EDI) module: will provide members with all the necessary functionalities to exchange trade data and documents.
- African trade database: contains real EDI data and is the basic storage structure for the trade information portal.
- Electronic document management: provides functionalities for the management of electronic data and documents in order to simplify the processing of data and documents exchanged between connected platforms.
- Administration: a graphical user interface will have to be set up for everything related to the management of users, components, workflows, transformations, connectors, monitoring, alerts, resumption of activities, processes and documents, internationalization, etc.
- Monitoring: the monitoring module gives visibility into all interactions and components involved in the data exchange bus. It makes it possible to highlight the state of the different components.
- Alerts and notifications: an alert and notification system will have to be established. It should be possible to configure alerts.

- Reporting: the solution should also have a reporting module. It will need to be flexible to allow the definition and automatic generation of reports.
- Reprocessing of messages: the system should include provision for a mechanism for the automatic reprocessing of messages in the case of errors in exchange.
- Security layer: this layer should cover the security of the system and secure data exchange.
- Component management: this module is designed to manage the components used in the platform.

9. A number of sub-Saharan African countries will participate in the pilot phase of the project: Central African Republic, Mauritius, Côte d'Ivoire, Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, the Niger, Kenya, Madagascar, Uganda and Senegal.

D. Organization of the seventh International Single Window Conference, September 2019, Yaoundé, Cameroon

10. AACE, in partnership with the Guichet Unique des Opérations du Commerce Extérieur GIE of Cameroon, organized the seventh International Single Window Conference, on the theme of “Unleashing the potential of e-commerce and optimizing the international logistics chain in landlocked countries”.

11. The Conference attracted more than 300 participants, including about 100 international attendees from 20 countries. The following organizations were also represented: the World Customs Organization, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Commission of the West African Economic and Monetary Union, the African Development Bank, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) and the Maritime Organization of West and Central Africa.

12. The outcomes are summarized below:

- Implement and optimize national single windows and bring them together in a regional platform to facilitate intra-African trade
- Develop regional agreements and/or strengthen cooperation and support for trade supply chains, including through the development of interoperable information technology systems and authorized economic operator systems, including mutual recognition
- Develop the regional electronic freight tracking system through close collaboration with the freight management agencies: the Bureau de Gestion de Fret Terrestre du Cameroun (BGFT), the Bureau d’Affrètement Routier Centrafricain (BARC) and the Bureau National de Fret Terrestre du Tchad (BNFT) in the case of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC)
- Implement steering and monitoring mechanisms for the recommendations made by national and regional bodies
- Encourage customs administrations to develop regional e-seals to be used for transit operations in the region, as replacing an e-seal with another seal at the border could cause delays
- Develop and modernize infrastructure, both hard (ports and airports, roads, railways and means of transport) and soft (information and communication technology infrastructure and services)
- Accelerate the take-up of the single form for foreign trade operations for the landlocked countries of the CEMAC zone
- Emphasize the maturation of e-business facilitation and single window implementation projects by ensuring that the facilitation objectives sought are consistent with the expected results

- Encourage commitment from public services to processing and delivery deadlines for trade-related administrative documents in performance contracts
- Build up local technical and technological competence in order to manage the implementation of information systems and trade in electronic services with a view to the emergence of the digital economy in African countries
- Propose projects that correspond to the real issues faced by stakeholders

III. Meetings on trade facilitation in sub-Saharan Africa

A. 2019 Annual Meeting of the Africa Transport Policy Programme (SSATP) (November 2019, Zimbabwe)

13. This event offered a unique platform for decision-makers from across Africa to come together and speak with one voice in support of policy and strategy reforms that will pave the way for safe, sustainable and efficient transport systems for all Africans. The group is working on a fourth development plan that will address critical transport policy issues in Africa.

B. Regional workshop on drafting texts on the dematerialization of customs and trade procedures and formalities in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) zone (December 2019, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso)

14. As part of the implementation of the regional trade facilitation programme, the Commission of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) organized a regional workshop in Ouagadougou, from 16 to 18 December 2019, to validate a study on the drafting of texts on the dematerialization of customs and trade procedures and formalities in the WAEMU zone.

15. The aim of the workshop was to give WAEMU Member States an opportunity to review and validate the draft report of the study, which had been conducted by a consultancy firm.

16. After discussions, the participants made the following recommendations:

- Hold consultations with national stakeholders on the study report and forward any additional comments to the WAEMU Commission
- Introduce the reforms needed to ensure actual implementation of dematerialization
- Share member States' experiences of dematerialization
- Develop an action plan for the implementation of the WAEMU regulation concerning the dematerialization of procedures, with a view to producing a timetable for actions to be implemented
- Accelerate the process for the adoption of a harmonized legal framework conducive to the dematerialization of customs and trade procedures and formalities.

C. Business Forum of the African Continental Free Trade Area (July 2019, Niamey, the Niger)

17. The 2019 AfCFTA Business Forum was organized on the sidelines of the Extraordinary Summit of African Heads of State in Niamey, the Niger, to launch the operational phase of the African Continental Free Trade Area. The Forum brought together a range of private sector operators in Africa, from African leaders and policymakers to the financial and banking sectors, think tanks and civil forum groups.

D. Fifth African Union Forum of Customs Experts on Trade Facilitation (August 2019, Accra, Ghana)

18. The objective of the Forum was to give participants an opportunity to share information on developments and efforts in the field of trade facilitation, as well as best practices in the implementation of single windows in Africa.

19. After the discussions, the following recommendations were drawn up:

- Member States that have not yet done so are invited to implement a single window in order to facilitate trade
- Member States are requested to guarantee the automation of trade-related procedures by other government agencies in order to enable the effective development and implementation of the single window
- Member States should consider introducing the coordinated border management concept in order to promote implementation of the single window with a view to ensuring efficient collaboration between all government agencies
- Member States should ensure the harmonization and standardization of data elements based on international standards to permit interoperability and interfacing of single window systems
- The African Union Commission, international organizations and partners should continue to support those member States that have not yet implemented a single window by means of awareness-raising, the provision of benchmarking materials and financial support.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

20. The establishment of AfCFTA is the flagship project for Africa in 2020, and there are several initiatives under way to raise awareness and set out the preconditions. We note, however, that the UN/CEFACT recommendations are not widely known. The UN/CEFACT Guides should therefore be disseminated to focal points and African countries should be invited to participate more in the Centre's work and forums.

21. AfCFTA has a very full calendar of events planned for 2020.

22. Ongoing work on, for instance, the establishment of smart corridors and data exchange projects between customs organizations in the region should also be monitored.
