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Recommendations and standards:

Support to capacity building and technical cooperation

Report of the Sixth United Nations Economic Commission for Europe International Conference on Single Window

Summary

This report reflects the discussions of the sixth UNECE International Conference on Single Window. This event was organized during the London Forum of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business on the 29 October 2019. The event's focus was to showcase implementations of Single Window, underline how these reflect the existing guidance from UNECE and UN/CEFACT and provide case studies for countries looking to establish a Single Window.

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I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Secretariat, with the support of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) held the 6th International Conference on Single Window (SW) on 29 October 2019 in London, United Kingdom during the UN/CEFACT Forum. The main purpose of this conference was to showcase country experiences of implementation in order to provide best practice use cases for future implementers and to present the ongoing progress of UN/CEFACT work in this area. This conference was held during the UN/CEFACT Forum in the building of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in London, UK. The Secretariat extends its thanks to the IMO team, who supported the logistics and organizational aspects of this meeting.

II. Current state of Single Window guidance

2. The UNECE Secretariat announced the updating of the Repository of Case Studies of Single Window, linked to Recommendation 33, which is available at: http://www.unece.org/cefact/single_window/welcome.html. There have already been seven new and updated case studies in 2019 and more are on the way for 2020. The Secretariat underlined the importance of maintaining the evolution of UNECE guidance material while simultaneously ensuring stability for the user community. To this end, the project leader for the revision of UNECE Recommendation 33 project explained that care was taken to provide a clear definition, to remove dated examples and to provide a text which should stand the test of time. The project leader of the Core Principle project described the current state of that draft, which aims to provide guidance through unexpected disruptions in service of a Single Window; an advanced version of the text should be available to the UN/CEFACT Plenary in May 2020.

3. The European Union presented its current work on Single Window in a regional context. The importance of the preparation and planning phase was emphasized, and it was noted that Single Window in a regional context is firstly an organizational project before being a technical one. The global context has been considered from the outset to ensure that external connections are made. The work of the European Union has been looking at different levels of interoperability: organizational (for controls at the border and coordinating between agencies and the border post); data (to ensure that everyone is speaking the same semantic language); and operational (identifying operators and harmonizing authentication).

4. The possibility of assessing the level of National Single Window development was presented through the results of a study done in the Eurasian Economic Union region. This methodology has taken the core elements of the revised Recommendation 33 and transformed them into indicators which can be tested impartially. Some of the indicators include the five key elements of the Single Window definition, the key factors of success, the benefits, and looking forward to the different technologies that could be utilized to enhance Single Window operations. Great interest was shown in the eventual development of UN/CEFACT guidance based on this work in order to provide an assessment model.

III. Implementation experiences and best practices

5. The Canadian Experience of Single Window implementation underlined the importance of involving all potential government agencies as early as possible in the process (39 different programs have been involved). The initiative was put together as a bi-national project with the United States. The different models of sharing information with programs

were reviewed and over 1800 individual data elements were identified. After comparing with the legal framework for each information requested, this was streamlined to a consolidated set of 80 data elements capable of covering all the needs of the different programs, and most of this data concerns the goods itself. Considering this, Canadian Border Services is studying how it might be able to capture more (or better quality) data from commercial systems such as the Global Trade Item Number (GTIN) of GS1¹. The current Canadian Single Window is not obligatory for traders, but nearly 75 per cent of all transactions are electronic and 94 per cent of the needs of Participating Government Agencies are covered. More information on this implementation is available in their Case Study on the UN/CEFACT website.²

6. Malaysia presented their experience with Single Window which started back in 1989 with document alignment under ministerial control and the establishment of a public-private partnership entity (Dagang Net). All customs operations were dematerialized over the next two decades. In the early 2000s, the system was expanded to include all permits within eleven participating government agencies. Thirty-two agencies have been brought on board since 2009 while aligning to the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement, and the solution is today being considered as a Digital Economy solution for cross-border exchanges. Some of the strong points from their experience are that the project has always been led at the ministerial level and chaired by high-level officials from the ministry; the objectives have always been clear; all permits have been harmonized into one system; new technologies are embraced when possible; and the model has been developed for other countries as well.

7. Morocco has approached Single Window as an accelerator of business competitiveness. This clear objective has allowed them to clearly measure the progress of the economy in the “World Bank Doing Business” report, where Morocco has gained fifty places and ranks third in Africa. Currently all agencies linked to the ports have been linked to the system. The Information Portal for trade procedures is linked to the Single Window, providing up-to-date information, and the integrated ePayment system has standardized and harmonized processes with national banks. Special attention has been paid to Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises; the challenge today is to assist in their digital capabilities.

8. Senegal launched one of the first Single Window initiatives in Africa over three decades ago. Several operational challenges were addressed early on, such as defining who should participate and how; ensuring that all partners are on the same system; creating the legal environment; and establishing a governance structure. In 2002, a non-profit organization was established to manage and commercialize the Single Window system in Senegal and abroad, and all funds raised are reinvested. This has allowed them to follow and implement technologies as they evolve. In 2012, the Senegalese Single Window received the first United Nations award for “Improving public service delivery.” The importance of having a global vision and monitoring performance was emphasized.

9. Kenya started their Single Window implementation with eight government agencies. There was a conscious effort to start off with only a few agencies in order to keep the project manageable—today, there are thirty-six. The solution today boasts twenty-two modules, including payment and permits, and interfaces with the port system and customs. Integration with the customs system is being studied as are additional modules for insurance, duty remission, and data warehousing. The permit/licensing module is linked through a Unique Consignment Reference; only this reference is shared with agencies in order to perform their controls. One of the main challenges they have faced is the resistance to change. More

¹ GS1 is a global, non-profit standards organization. See as of January 2020: <https://www.gs1.org/about>

² Available as of January 2020 at:

http://www.uncece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/single_window/sw_cases/Download/2019/Canada_Eng.pdf

information on this implementation is available in their Case Study on the UN/CEFACT website.³

10. Georgia—through the Revenue Service of Georgia (GRS) and the University of Georgia—has developed a solution which uses Ethereum blockchain technology for validation of the Certificate of Origin (CoO). If registration of the CoO is successful, a hard copy will be issued with the custom officer’s signature and a Quick Reference (QR) code, which allows all authorized entities to verify the validity and content of the CoO on the blockchain. If a QR code reader is unavailable to the authorized entity, they can manually key in the CoO identification number and access the same information.

11. The Republic of Congo emphasized the importance of dematerialization of trade documents and the advantages this can bring. Their Single Window has been established as a hub between over a dozen government agencies and the main private sector actors. There are several factors which slow down the implementation of paperless processes including the resistance to change; the financial cost of implementation; the difficulty in changing a culture of paper-use; organizations who fear they may lose control; and online piracy. The benefits were also underlined, including increased productivity; decreased litigation; improved visibility and document life management; improved data security and integrity; and optimized commercial relationships. More information on this implementation is available in their Case Study on the UN/CEFACT website.⁴

V. Next steps and recommendations

12. Based on the discussions at this event, it was agreed that sharing implementation experiences is a valuable exercise. It was further agreed that the current guidance material of UN/CEFACT on this topic is pertinent. Two recommendations were formulated:

1. Insofar as possible, organize a similar “Single Window implementation experience-sharing” event at each UN/CEFACT Forum.
2. Pursue the current guidance work of UN/CEFACT.

³ Available as of January 2020 at:

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/single_window/sw_cases/Download/2019/Kenya_Eng.pdf

⁴ Available as of January 2020 at:

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/single_window/sw_cases/Download/2019/CongoRep_Eng.pdf