



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2007/18
22 March 2007

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON TRADE

Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)

Thirteenth session
Geneva, 14-16 May 2007
Item 8 of the provisional agenda

REPORTS OF THE UN/CEFACT RAPPORTEURS

Report of the Rapporteur for Africa*

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The African region is just beginning to become involved with trade facilitation and electronic business. Although the parties concerned still show interest in trade facilitation issues, concrete initiatives are rarely implemented at the national and regional levels. This report will consider isolated initiatives. It is not intended to give an overview of everything that has been accomplished in Africa in 2006 with regard to trade facilitation. The idea is simply to highlight key initiatives in which the Rapporteur for Africa was privileged to participate and to which he made a contribution. The following is a summary of those activities.

* This document was submitted on the above-mentioned date indicated because of limited resources.

II. AFRICA IN THE WORLD OF TRADE FACILITATION

A. Participation in the third ASEAL summit

2. The third summit of the Asia-Europe Alliance for Paperless Trade (ASEAL) took place in Paris from 9 to 11 January 2007. Seven new countries, including two from Africa, joined the Alliance.¹ The original members of the Alliance are: France, Germany, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom and the Chinese province of Taiwan. For the two African countries present, the meeting was an occasion for sharing their experience with Asian and European countries and discussing prospects for the organization of pilot projects on electronic business.

B. Participation in the Symposium on Single Window Standards

3. The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) held a symposium in Geneva from 2 to 5 May 2006 on Single Window standards and their interoperability. Participants included Ghana, which made a presentation, as well as Morocco, Mauritius, Senegal and Cameroon, which took an active part in the work.

4. This was the first time that Africa was so well represented at an international meeting on single windows. Its presence is important because such meetings offer an alternative to national approaches that may not take the international context and international standards into account.

C. Participation in the work of UN/CEFACT

5. Senegal participates in UN/CEFACT forums on a regular basis. It is active in working groups TBG 2 and TBG 15. Nigeria also made its reappearance with a strong delegation at the last forum in Delhi. It is regrettable, however, that Africa is not more widely represented. This is no doubt due in part to the language barrier.

III. AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

6. From 14 to 16 March 2006, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) organized a forum to launch the African initiative on New Information and Communication Technologies (NICT), Trade and Economic Growth. ECA had designated the general manager of GAINDE 2000 (UN/CEFACT Rapporteur for Africa) as a resource person during the forum and had asked him to make a presentation on Senegal's experience in facilitating electronic business. In his presentation the Rapporteur referred to the work of UN/CEFACT, in particular with regard to UNeDoc. The absence of a framework for regional cooperation in trade facilitation was also stressed.

¹ Luxembourg, Malaysia, Morocco, Senegal, Spain, Thailand and Viet Nam.

IV. AT THE SUBREGIONAL LEVEL

A. West Africa

7. The Commission of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), supported by International Lawyers and Economists Against Poverty (ILEAP), conducted three studies on services, concessions and trade facilitation. The Rapporteur for Africa took part in the study on trade facilitation. An analysis and needs assessment for the region have made it possible to formulate concrete proposals for the implementation of single windows in the subregion, thereby promoting trade facilitation. The studies were presented to experts at a seminar held in Dakar in October 2006. The Commission is currently involved in promoting the implementation of the recommendations.

B. Central Africa

8. On 27 and 28 September 2006, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) organized a regional forum in Yaoundé, Cameroon, on trade facilitation entitled “Maximizing the Developmental Benefits of Trade Facilitation”. The objectives of the forum were to:

- (a) Exchange lessons learned from practical experiences with reforms and official assistance relating to trade facilitation;
- (b) Foster a national and regional dialogue around core policy and operational issues related to negotiations and, more generally, to reforms and donor assistance relating to trade facilitation;
- (c) Discuss completed and ongoing OECD activities with non-member countries.

9. The forum brought together key public and private sector stakeholders involved in trade facilitation in Western and Central Africa. Having been invited to present a paper at this forum, the Rapporteur for Africa related Senegal’s experience with trade facilitation and spoke of the work of UN/CEFACT.

C. Southern Africa

10. The Southern Africa Trade Hub, which was established under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), organized a workshop on trade facilitation on 19 and 20 September 2006, on the topic of “Recent developments, best practices and tools” for the 14 countries of the subregion. The event was organized together with the Washington Office of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

11. The seminar brought together 80 private and public sector representatives from Africa, particularly Southern Africa, and the United States of America to discuss trade facilitation initiatives and best practices in the area of customs and transport.

12. Presentations by experts from various fields were followed by lively discussions on the subregion’s prospects in terms of trade facilitation, as well as on future trade facilitation activities of the Southern Africa Trade Hub.

D. East Africa

13. The thirty-second Meeting of the Port Management Association of Eastern and Southern Africa (PMAESA) took place in Khartoum, Sudan, from 6 to 8 November 2006. GAINDE 2000 was invited and presented a paper on the topic “Single windows and port efficiency: business process, technology and international alignment”. Emphasis was once again put on interoperability and the work done in that area by UN/CEFACT.

E. North Africa

14. The Rapporteur for Africa is not aware of any meetings on trade facilitation or electronic business in the subregion in 2006. He does know that Tunisia is making progress with its Single Window and that Morocco has finished the study phase and is starting consultations on the implementation of its Single Window.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

15. The African region clearly has the most to gain from the implementation of advanced trade facilitation measures. Yet, it would seem to be the region that attaches the least priority to this issue. This is due to a lack of resources, a lack of vision regarding this issue and a lack of local expertise. Paradoxically, some countries are making progress on the issue and have had positive experiences.

16. Accordingly, the Rapporteur for Africa believes that in the course of the coming year emphasis should be placed on the establishment of a framework for cooperation, trade and dissemination, along the lines of the joint Pan-Asian e-Commerce Alliance (PAA) and the Asia-Pacific Council for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (AFACT) model. Such an initiative could be the direct consequence of Single Windows which exist with the support of regional bodies like ECA and the African Union. In order for this initiative to have an impact on the greatest number of African countries, donors could agree to hold as many awareness-raising workshops and forums as possible in Africa.
