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Committee on Trade

Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda
Bureau overview of developments

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Submitted by the UN/CEFACT Bureau for noting

Summary

This document provides a summary of key developments since the eighteenth session and outlines the range of topics that could be discussed during the nineteenth session.

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. This note provides a summary of key developments since the eighteenth session. It also outlines a number of topics that could be discussed at the nineteenth session.

2. Revised documents to establish a more streamlined project-oriented management structure were approved at the eighteenth session.

3. Under the new organizational arrangements, the Bureau and the UNECE secretariat have given priority to fostering closer collaboration.

II. UNECE Executive Committee

4. The Bureau responded to the recommendations of the Executive Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (EXCOM), which included:

    (a)   information-sharing and communication;

    (b)   governance;

    (c)   balance in programme activities;

    (d)   enhanced involvement of countries with economies in transition;

    (e)   capacity-building;

    (f)   cooperation with other institutions.

5. In December 2012, the Bureau presented its final report and in his summary, the Chair of EXCOM stated that EXCOM had "noted with satisfaction that its recommendations have been implemented".

6. At its session in February this year, as part of its review of UNECE reform EXCOM recommended to the Economic Commission for Europe that UN/CEFACT begin to report directly to EXCOM. EXCOM also recommended that staff engaged in capacity-building be reallocated to other areas of the UNECE.

III. Priorities

7. The restructuring within UN/CEFACT that has taken place over the past many months has proceeded within the framework of the Plenary approved Programme of Work for 2012-2013 (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2012/11) and Addendum (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2012/11/Add.1). As envisaged, priorities have included:

    (a)   Maintenance of existing recommendations and standards, e.g. UN/EDIFACT;

    (b)   Continuity, review and completion of active projects;

    (c)   Consideration of strategic issues and formulation of new projects;

    (d)   Communication and outreach.

IV. UN/CEFACT Forums

8.   Participants in the Forums are nominated by their heads of delegation and contribute their skills and experience as experts in their own right - not representing their delegations or institutions. They come from a wide range of domains, including accounting/audit, agriculture, customs, finance/payments, government, insurance, international trade procedures, procurement, supply chain management and transport and logistics. These activities involving experts are conducted throughout the year and each Forum provides an opportunity for participants to work together on various aspects of projects - including those which are cross-domain - and to collaborate in strategic discussions concerned with the formulation of new projects within the UN/CEFACT Programme Development Areas:

- Trade and Transport Facilitation

- Supply Chain

- Regulatory

- Sectoral

- Methodology and Technology.

9.   Experts also participate in Bureau Programme Support activities, which involve a wide range of library maintenance and other key developments in support of UN/CEFACT recommendations and standards, e.g. outreach, liaison, communication.

10.   The 19th Forum took place in Geneva from 16 to 20 April 2012. Participants included more than 90 business and technology experts from 31 Member States, the United Nations and other international organizations, such as UNESCAP, ITC, ISO, EU and other stakeholders. Experts from various locations around the globe also contributed through teleconferencing. The Forum advanced projects-in-progress and plans for future developments as well as maintenance of existing recommendations and standards. In particular, these efforts focused on business processes both for governments and for the private sector in the field of electronic business and trade facilitation.

(a)   The Supply Chain Programme Development Areas (PDA) focused on a number of current projects, such as migration to the Core Component Library (CCL) version 3.0, encompassing Cross Industry Invoice, eTendering, Contract Financial Execution Management and eNotification;

(b)   The Methodology and Technology PDA and the Bureau Programme Support team agreed to continue support for both CCL version 2.01 and 3.0 libraries—on the basis of the good practice precedence established some years ago for UN/EDIFACT—as long as there were change requests for Business Standards that depended on them. That made it possible for stakeholders to use either the library based on CCTS 2.01 or the library based on CCTS 3.0;

(c)   To continue encouraging cross-domain activities, the Supply Chain and Trade & Transport Facilitation PDAs held joint meetings to develop a strategic plan for Procurement-Shipment & Payment, based on UN/CEFACT's Buy-Ship-Pay model. Other supply chain models such as the Supply Chain Council's Operations Reference Model (SCOR), the GS1 supply chain and aerospace were reviewed;

(d)   Detailed discussions were held to ensure the technology framework underpinning UN/CEFACT's deliverables was simple, pragmatic, facilitative and achievable. This focused on foundational libraries, coordination with ISO (and other standards development organizations) to provide supporting methodologies and technologies as well as strengthening maintenance for UN/EDIFACT;

(e)   The Core Component Library 12A was ready for publication. XML Schema for the Core Component Library 11B was sent for validation. Data maintenance requests for EDIFACT Directory 12A were resolved and changes to the EDIFACT production process introduced by revisions to the publication format of UN/EDIFACT (R.1023) were implemented, enabling EDIFACT 11B to be sent for validation;

(f)   A session was held on "Reliable message exchange between communities". It included experts from the Russian Federation, the European Commission, Pan-European Public Procurement Online and OASIS, who presented requirements and approaches to the secure cross-community exchange of electronic business documents;

(g)   The Agricultural Domain made progress in several projects and introduced new projects for the exchange of data in the agro-industry;

(h)   The enhancement of UN/CEFACT communications was also an important topic. This included improving the circulation and exchange of information inside the UN/CEFACT community through a new online forum.

11.   The 20th Forum was held in Vienna from 19 to 23 September 2012:

(a)   The public-private sector participants included over 130 business and technology experts from 27 countries, the United Nations, the European Union and other international organizations including the World Customs Organization (WCO), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA). Some experts were also able to participate through teleconferencing;

(b)   The Forum made progress in current projects and plans for future developments, as well as in the maintenance of existing recommendations and standards. In particular, important activities within the Trade and Transport Facilitation PDA focused on updating Recommendation 14 (Authentication of trade documents by means other than signature) and the Single Window Interoperability Recommendation 36 project, with a view to increasing the "family" of Single Window Recommendations 33-34-35 developed in the 2004-2011 period, and embarking on a project involving public-private partnership and consultation approaches;

(c)   Discussions also focused on projects concerning other standards development organizations, including the new "Open data interchange framework project" involving ISO;

(d)   Workshops were conducted on key subjects, e.g. e-Procurement, Trusted Exchange on Trade Documents and Global Electronic Freight Exchange;

(e)   Significant activity was carried out in specific sectoral environments: "e-Labs" (electronic laboratory observation report) and new "Livestock Traceability" projects in agriculture; three new projects concerning Core Components in the insurance sector (for commercial insurance, for property claims handling and for the reimbursement of claims); new "Destination Travel Information" (DTI process) project in travel and tourism.

12.   The 21st Forum will be held from 15 to 19 April 2013 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva. The Bureau will briefly report on Forum activities at the current session of UN/CEFACT.

V. Outreach

13.   Over the past several months, initiatives were taken to cooperate and exchange views with other organizations involved in trade facilitation and standards activities. Some topics were driven by specific issues and others were more broadly focused on strategic questions. Three notable cases of outreach are noted below.

14.   An important activity followed up on Decision 12-11 of the eighteenth Plenary in order to address the disposition of project work on draft Recommendation 37 on Signed Digital Document Interoperability (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2010/14/Rev.1) and issues concerned with governance of signed digital data interoperability standards for international trade. The outcome to date is noted below:

(a)   The Plenary's interest in issues concerning a governance framework for signed digital data interoperability standards envisaged involvement of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and other relevant organizations, such as the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI). Informal discussions have been held with these organizations and the issues will be outlined to the Plenary, based on a draft note aimed at achieving a common understanding;

(b)   An important outcome of these deliberations has been to identify the critical importance of "technology neutrality" in matters concerning recommendations and standards, especially to avoid any technological barriers to trade;

(c)   A revision of Recommendation 14 on Authentication of Trade Documents by means other than Signature will contain in its final draft for Plenary approval an annex of examples that will include the project work completed for draft Recommendation 37.

15.   Over the years, UN/CEFACT has cooperated extensively with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). An important outreach since the eighteenth Plenary involved the initiation of a project to contribute to an ISO Technical Report through ISO/TC 154, known as ISO DTR 18262 (Open Data Interchange Framework). This Report aims to define a consistent and timely way to address and resolve issues of gaps, overlaps, and counter-productive standardization efforts through describing:

(a)   A coordinated "Open Data Interchange" framework, fostering an integrated work programme to meet stakeholder needs in administration, commerce and trade;

(b)   A collaboration process, involving business processes and supporting data that facilitate the open electronic interchange of structured data.

16.   To date, ISO/TC 154 has drafted ISO/PDTR 18689 "The open interchange of structured data in support of administration, commerce and trade: Introductory element – Open Data Interchange Framework (ODIF)". The document has been approved within ISO. Comments from UN/CEFACT have been submitted with a request to continue the work further before the document is published. This additional effort should help to more effectively achieve the goal of describing a common technical framework that will engage other key players involved in standards development and encourage greater consistency and effectiveness of technical specifications and standards.

17.   A number of experts from the public and private sector participating in UN/CEFACT engage in other standards-setting activities. This provides an opportunity for informal outreach and has often facilitated discussions on common themes in the different organizations, as well as pointing out differences in processes and objectives of these organizations. In the case of workshop activities in the European Committee for Standardization (CEN), this has been a constructive experience in several areas. More

recently, progress in e-invoicing and e-procurement has been particularly noteworthy, especially the emphasis on core semantics and core data models as primary factors in interoperability; with syntax bindings serving the function of meeting specific needs in implementation.

VI. Communication

18. The Bureau's communication strategy addresses the broad and important area of transparent information flows and promotion of UN/CEFACT's contribution to trade facilitation and electronic business. A wide range of audiences need to be given consideration in an effective and robust approach, balancing "push" and "pull" techniques in external and internal communication.

19. An improved UN/CEFACT website has been an important public source of information about developments on a wide range of topics, particularly through its section on "News".

20. Internal communication facilities for persons participating in UN/CEFACT activities have been made available, including an online forum. A roster of experts also helps to identify skill sets and interests in potential activities.

21. Some measures of activity in communication since the eighteenth Plenary include: 25 communications to heads of delegation, seven communications to UN/CEFACT experts, four videos on UN/CEFACT success stories, a UNECE "expert opinion" and various timely press releases and news items concerning calls for participation in projects and progress in recommendations and standards.

VII. Further developments

22. Additional information about UN/CEFACT recommendations and standards will be provided under draft agenda item 4; and more strategic issues will be taken up under draft agenda items 5 and 6, through outreach to other organizations concerning their views on challenges and through consideration of an updated draft integrated strategy for UN/CEFACT deliverables.

23. At the eighteenth Plenary, on the basis of comments concerning the programme of work 2012-2013, it was agreed that an addendum to the programme of work 2012-2013 would be issued. A status report on these addendum items is provided below:

VIII.   Status of addendum items in the programme of work 2012-2013[1]

Comment and additions	Programme of work reference	Form of implementation	Actions taken until 2013 plenary
1. Provide up-to-date and more detailed information on the status of projects, e.g. with respect to experts involved in a project, indicate which delegations have nominated them to participate in UN/CEFACT activities.	Part Two 4.2 Communication and awareness (p. 13)	• Project leaders to update project status on online system that can be accessed on UN/CEFACT website and provide additional information. • Heads of delegation to review lists of nominated experts, to be provided by secretariat, to ensure they are up to date. • Secretariat to provide identification numbers (IDs) on a timely basis for new projects to be listed and updated.	• Projects are updated in the Confluence system. Project leaders have been instructed how to update status regularly and report to the Bureau. • Heads of delegation have been presented with lists of nominated experts with the request to review and update the information provided. • Project numbers are provided by the secretariat promptly. • Included in recently approved communications strategy. • Online UN/CEFACT Participant Registration Form has been developed. Individuals interested in participating in UN/CEFACT can fill-in the online form that it automatically delivered to the Heads of delegation. • Heads of delegation can review the list of national experts through the online UN/CEFACT Participation Database.
2. Clarify further the roles and responsibilities of domain coordinators.	Part One II. Vision, mission and core activities (p. 4) Part Two 3.1 Coordinate… (p. 11)	• Review domain coordinator candidacy form and envisaged tasks; and provide further clarifications as may be needed.	• All domain coordinators have filled out the appropriate form. During the April 2013 Forum, a special session will review tasks and responsibilities.

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[1]   The above table is a status report of the 2012-2013 addendum to the programme of work approved during the eighteenth session of the UN/CEFACT Plenary, document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2012/11/Add.1

Comment and additions	Programme of work reference	Form of implementation	Actions taken until 2013 plenary
3. Explore further opportunities for projects concerning crops and harvested produce.	Part Two 2.1 Development (p. 9) 3.1 Coordinate… (p. 11)	• Further extend collaboration with bodies interested in epidemiological monitoring of crops in order to support stakeholder requirements.	• The Agricultural domain in PDA Sectoral actively engages with stakeholders in this area and a growing number of experts participate in UN/CEFACT Forums.
4. UN/CEFACT should become more actively involved in capacity building planning in Asia-Pacific Region.	Part Two 4.1 Capacity-building (p. 12)	• In cooperation with the secretariat, explore scope for further involvement in capacity-building planning, including opportunities for implementation guides/user guides and capacity-building events, with special attention to needs of Asia-Pacific region.	• Capacity-building in the regions is currently primarily an activity of the secretariat. The Bureau Vice-Chair for liaison has participated in the last two Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forums.
5. Apply principles identified in developing the International Trade Hub Italia (ITH -Italia), involving public and private sectors at national level, allowing a step-by- step import/export strategy and all related activities to be electronically managed for better resource efficiency and effectiveness.	Part Two 3.1 Coordinate… (p. 11)	• Better understand principles developed in ITH-Italia and explore possibilities to foster their use within UN/CEFACT activities.	• A "lunch and learn" session at the 20th UN/CEFACT Forum took up the Trade hub and follow-up discussions are being considered for the upcoming 21st Forum.
6. Give further priority consideration to the availability of resources.	Part One II. Vision, mission and core activities (p. 4) V. Resources (p. 7-8) Part Two 3. Working with other key players… (p. 11)	• Extend outreach with a view to expanding opportunities to foster the availability of resources and avoidance of duplication of work. • Identify bottlenecks and "missing resources" and follow up with outreach to fill time-critical gaps.	• Greater involvement of heads of delegation would be helpful in attracting experts to UN/CEFACT activities. It appears that the nomination process may need to be reviewed in some countries, where it may appear to be complex or cumbersome. • Online UN/CEFACT Participant Registration Form has been developed. Individuals interested in participating in UN/CEFACT can fill-in the online form that it automatically delivered to the Heads of delegation. • Heads of delegation can review the list of national experts through the online UN/CEFACT Participation Database.

Comment and additions	Programme of work reference	Form of implementation	Actions taken until 2013 plenary
7. Provide more readily available information concerning current and proposed projects, as well as for coordinators, in three official languages.	Part One II. Vision, mission and core activities (p. 4) Part Two 3.1 Coordinate… (p. 11) 4.2 Communicate and awareness (p.13)	• Ensure that project leaders update project development details on a timely basis and wherever possible provide information about new proposed projects. • Review domain coordinator candidacy form and clarify where necessary. • Foster the availability of information in three official languages. • Plenary sessions will include materials that provide summary descriptions of projects (completed, current and proposed) in three official languages.	• See also action item 1. • Form has been updated. • Availability in all three languages is getting the highest priority. Procedures for translation from working language to all three languages is time consuming. • Information on existing projects is maintained in "Confluence" In English only. Priority has been given to keeping information current.

Comment and additions	*Programme of work reference*	*Form of implementation*	*Actions taken until 2013 plenary*
8. Initiate cooperation in the field of communication with the Regional Commonwealth (RCC) to identify opportunities for joint activities.	Part Two 3.1 Coordinate… (p.11)	• Outreach to RCC with a view to identifying opportunities to cooperate, particularly in the area of information security.	• At least 2 projects with participation of RCC are progressing.
9. There are many challenges in creating and developing information and communication technology infrastructure and networks that play a vital role in socio-economic development and could better facilitate trade.	Part Two 3.1 Coordinate… (p. 11)	• Extend outreach to those engaged in challenges in Asia-Pacific and identify opportunities to address trade facilitation and electronic business needs, focusing on infrastructure issues.	• See 4
10. Identify core domains where UN/CEFACT should be active and review what UN/CEFACT's future role and strategic direction should be.	Part One IV. Priority outputs for 2012-2013 (p. 7)	• Review critical set of deliverables and supporting domains and strategic direction.	• The UN/CEFACT Integrated Strategy is under review and will be discussed at the 19th Plenary.
11. Review annex A to the Memorandum of Understanding on Electronic Business and propose revisions as necessary to reflect UN/CEFACT's current and envisaged role.	Part Two 3. Working with other key players… (p. 11)	• Review annex A to Memorandum of Understanding on Electronic Business and propose revisions.	• Annex A is under review with the MOU-MG and UN/CEFACT input is under consideration and will benefit from the discussion of issues at the 19th Plenary. • Both ISO TC 154 and ISO-IEC JTC 1 SC32 are also reviewing annex A in coordination with UN/CEFACT.