



Global Trade Facilitation Conference



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SOCIAL COMMISSION
FOR
WESTERN ASIA

Connecting International Trade: Single Windows and Supply Chains in the Next Decade

12 - 13 December 2011, Geneva, Switzerland

Conclusions of the Conference¹

Summary of main points made

Single Window implementation²

- In developing countries and countries in transition, the Single Window has been a success story. Many of these countries implement government Single Windows that provide users with access to both Customs and other government agencies to facilitate export and import procedures. Successful Single Window implementations generally focus more on facilitation and change management rather than technical solutions.
- The Single Window models vary greatly from one country to another, depending on a country's readiness and priorities. Models include paperless Customs, Port Community Systems and Single Window systems that link government agencies on the national and regional level.

¹ The Conference was organised under the Joint United Nations Regional Commission Approach to Trade Facilitation. It was attended by over 200 representatives from government, the business community and international organizations. A total of 51 countries were represented from all five continents. The conference discussion papers, presentations, and information on the complementary events, are available at: www.unece.org/swglobalconference2011

² A Single Window is defined as "a facility that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfil all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements" - see http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/recommendations/rec33/rec33_trd352e.pdf

- Many advanced trading countries have not implemented the national Single Window concept. Instead, other forms of Single Window networks, in particular Port Community Systems and Customs Single Windows, are being successfully used to support a high-performing logistics sector.
- The development of the Single Window is typically a major undertaking, involving the creation of interlinkages and information sharing between Customs and other government agencies responsible for trade, as well as the trading community. It is therefore usually implemented in a phased approach.

Cross-border information exchange

- Both in developed and developing countries, there is a need to link or network national Single Windows either regionally or globally, for cross-border data exchange.
- Single Window interconnectivity is especially important for landlocked and transit countries as it provides new opportunities for access to markets. Single Window project managers and operators should, therefore, collaborate on a regional level to analyse cross-border supply-chain issues and ensure technical interoperability in the development of single windows.
- Groups of Single Window operators, such as the Pan Asia E-Commerce Alliance (PAA) and the African Alliance for e-Commerce (AACE), are working to establish a mechanism and framework to conduct secure cross-border document and data interchanges among the stakeholders in their regions.
- However, many aspects of regional/global Single Window integration still have to be defined. Further international collaboration is required to develop and implement data harmonization, as well as common strategies, policies and standards to support inter-connectivity.

An enabling legal environment

- Although the need for an enabling legislative environment for paperless international trade is well recognized, the legislation applicable to electronic transactions with governmental entities (e-government) is often specific to individual sectors and individual technologies. This creates barriers to the exchange of electronic communications among different public-sector entities, as well as between government and business.
- The widespread adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts, 2005, was proposed as one element in the regulatory framework for national and international Single Window facilities.

New approaches for information sharing in global trade supply chains for security, trust and efficiency

- The conference discussed concepts for better managing international supply-chain processes through the advanced use of information and technology, such as information pipelines in which government agencies and private-sector companies share all the relevant information required for increased security and efficiency.

- Information sharing in global supply chains can take advantage of different Single Window implementations in the developed and developing countries.
- New technologies and concepts were also presented, such as cloud computing and supply-chain traceability. These technologies provide additional opportunities for exploring new information-sharing concepts in global trade.

PROPOSALS FROM THE MEETING

The United Nations has a central role to play in consolidating and supporting Single Window implementation and development across all regions.

Reference group

To implement and coordinate these initiatives, the meeting requested the regional commissions, with the support of their intergovernmental bodies (such as UN/CEFACT) and in collaboration with other relevant international organizations (such as WCO, IMO, UNCTAD) and the business community, to establish a reference group of Single Window and supply-chain stakeholders from government agencies, the private sector and academia. UNECE will assist in drafting the terms of reference of this group.

Roadmap

Central to the work of this group will be the creation of a roadmap for developing Single Window and supply-chain automation for cross-border trade.

The purpose of the roadmap is to:

- outline options for the step-by-step development and sustainable maintenance of Single Window and collaboration between Single Window facilities in a regional and global context.
- identify activities of various Single Window initiatives in Trade, Maritime and Port Community Systems and attempt to achieve a “joined up” approach across the supply chain.
- explore the possibilities for improved information exchange, competitiveness and lower costs offered by data pipelines and cloud computing, through developing pilot projects.
- consider mechanisms to facilitate the financing of Single Window implementation, particularly in developing countries.

The roadmap will be discussed and developed jointly with all stakeholders during 2012 and presented to the next Joint United Nations Regional Commission Trade Facilitation Conference, to be organized by UNESCAP in early 2013.

Providing support and capacity-building

The regional commissions are also requested, in collaboration with other relevant international organization such as development banks and the regional economic communities, to continue to provide support and capacity-building for stakeholders in national and regional Single Window projects and trade facilitation initiatives, including on specific knowledge areas that enhance Single Window development.

This could include preparing national and regional master plans, data harmonization, business process analysis and legal frameworks for Single Windows. The United Nations should consider organizing specific workshops on legal frameworks for Single Windows, accompanied by relevant training.

The regional commissions are requested to set up a central repository for information on Single Windows across the globe. To do so, they should seek input from sector-specific surveys and repositories made, inter alia, by the WCO and IMO.

UNECE will undertake to host this repository on behalf of the all the regional commissions, under joint maintenance. A common template will be developed and provided to the participants. All participants are invited to contribute to the repository and provide information about their Single Window activities.

The UNECE Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), the World Customs Organization and other relevant bodies, such as ISO, IEC and ITU, were requested to consider developing any additional standards that might be required to support electronic information flows across global supply chains and Single Window implementations.

The proposals of this meeting will support the implementation of trade facilitation measures currently being discussed under the WTO Doha Development Agenda.

The regional commissions should support the application of these measures by providing capacity-building and facilitating the exchange of best practice and networking among policymakers and stakeholders from the regions.
