Economic and Social Council

Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

First session
31 August - 2 September 2015
Item 4 of the provisional agenda
Programme of work

Status of implementation of the 2014-2015 programme of work

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Pursuant to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe decision, whereby it requested sectoral committees were to undertake biennial performance evaluations of their programmes of work (document E/2004/37-E/ECE/1416), this report reviews the implementation of the 2014-2015 biennial work programme under the Trade subprogramme as contained in the biennial evaluation plan (document ECE/TRADE/C/2014/14).

The report provides a mid-term review, covering 2014, and links between the expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement established under the 2014-2015 biennial programme of work (document ECE/ TRADE/C/2014/13).

The Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards is invited to endorse the mid-term review. Activities carried out by UN/CEFACT (United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business), which reports to the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM), are for information only.

Please recycle

I. Cluster 1: Support to the formulation and adoption of ECE recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools for trade facilitation and electronic business

Expected accomplishment

1.   Enlarged set of UNECE recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools for trade facilitation and electronic business

Indicators of achievement:

(a)   Number of new and/or revised UNECE recommendations, norms, standards and tools for trade facilitation and electronic business agreed upon by member States

Performance measures:

Baseline: 2008-2009: 24 recommendations, norms, standards and tools
Estimate: 2010-2011: 24 recommendations, norms, standards and tools
Target: 2012–2013: 24 recommendations, norms, standards and tools
Achieved by 31 December 2014: 10 recommendations, norms, standards and tools

(b)   Number of countries (regions), international organizations and sectors developing UNECE recommendations, norms, standards and tools for trade facilitation and electronic business

Performance measures:

Baseline: 2010-2011: 40 actors involved
Estimate: 2012-2013: 40 actors involved
Target 2014–2015: 40 actors involved
Achieved by 31 December 2014: 40 actors involved

Statement of accomplishments

2.   Activities under this cluster are carried out by UN/CEFACT (United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business), which comprises experts who meet twice a year at forums to discuss achieved outcomes and propose plans, which are presented to the UN/CEFACT annual plenary for approval.

3.   UN/CEFACT delivered 10 new or revised recommendations, norms, standards and tools in 2014. This includes the approval of the full revision of UNECE Recommendations 14 on Authentication of Trade Documents, which is particularly relevant for the implementation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement on Trade Facilitation (ATF). In addition, 7 standards were updated, including revised directories for UN/EDIFACT (United Nations rules for Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport), UN/LOCODE (United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations), CCL (Core Components Library) and XML schemas and Codes for Units of Measure used in international trade.

4.   These achievements means that UN/LOCODE now contains more than 100,000 trade and transport location codes covering 250 countries and territories and is widely used by the international trade community. As for UN/EDIFACT, it accounts for more than 90 per cent of all electronic data interchange (EDI) messages exchanged globally. The web based Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG), the UNECE online knowledge

management tool, was also revised and new content was added to reflect the developments at the WTO in the area of trade facilitation and the work under the AFT.

4.   In 2014, the UN/CEFACT forum held two sessions in Geneva, Switzerland (April) and New Delhi, India (October) and one plenary session Geneva, Switzerland (April). Participants continued to come from a wide number of countries, although the European, North American and Asia-Pacific regions were relatively more represented than Latin America and Africa. A wide range of stakeholders continued to be involved, ranging from universities to companies in different sectors such as telecoms or banks to government representatives to officials of the United Nations and other international organizations. The 2014-2015 target of 40 stakeholders was reached. Delegations from 25 countries and 12 international organizations and other institutions took part in the first Forum, which was attended by 150 participants. The second Forum was saw delegations from 30 countries and 10 international organisations and other institutions, and was attended by 125 participants. The annual session was attended by 144 participants, representing 16 countries and 5 international organisations and other institutions.

Lessons learned

5.   The number of trade facilitation and electronic business standards could be further increased if more resources were allocated by member States and other stakeholders for UN/CEFACT's work.

II.   Cluster 2: Support to the implementation of ECE recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools for trade facilitation and electronic business

Expected accomplishment

6.   Increased implementation of UNECE recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools for trade facilitation and electronic business

Indicators of achievement:

> (a)   Number of downloads of key trade facilitation and electronic business recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools from the UNECE website, as a proxy for their use.

Performance measures:

Baseline 2010-2011: 120,000 downloads
Estimate 2012–2013: 120,000 downloads
Target 2014-2015: 120,000 downloads
Achieved by 31 December 2014: 1,060,000

> (b)   Number of countries in which UNECE took action in response to their requests for assistance in promoting and implementing trade facilitation and electronic business instruments

Performance measures:

Baseline: 2010-2011: 5 countries
Estimate: 2012-2013: 5 countries
Target: 2014–2015: 6 countries

Achieved by 31 December 2014: 6 countries

Statement of accomplishments

7.   During the previous biennium, the secretariat's software for tracking the use of the UNECE website and the associated data collection methodology were changed. The current software measures web page views, rather than the previously used downloads. As a result, the target and the actual performance are not comparable.

8.   In 2014, the UNECE recorded 1,060,000 page views of trade facilitation and electronic business recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools from its institutional website, with the UN/LOCODE generating most of the page views. TFIG (http://tfig.unece.org) has also seen extra ordinary usage surpassing all previous records, registering more than 650,000 page views.

8.   UNECE also met the biennial target of providing technical assistance and advisory services on Single Window implementation and electronic business to countries upon their requests. In 2014, technical assistance and advisory services were provided to Greece, Italy, Mauritius, Morocco, Tajikistan, and Trinidad and Tobago. UNECE also participated in the discussions of the EU Taxation and Customs Union (TAXUD) Single Window Working Group concerning the development of a future European Single Window architecture. Following the successful development of the Greek Trade Facilitation Roadmap, UNECE's technical assistance in various trade facilitation areas contributed to improving the country's ranking against World Bank Doing Business "trading across border" indicator by 36 positions between 2011 and 2014. Time for export and import was reduced by 25 per cent and 44 per cent, respectively, while the transaction costs were reduced by about 10 per cent during the same period.

Lessons learned

9.   Owing to regular budget cuts and an explicit request by EXCOM, the secretariat will no longer be able to use regular budget resources to respond to member countries' technical assistance requests. The support of member States through extra-budgetary resources has become essential for maintaining technical assistance activities.

III.   Cluster 3: Support to the formulation of ECE recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools for regulatory cooperation

Expected accomplishment

13.   Enlarged set of UNECE recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools for regulatory cooperation

Indicators of achievement

   (a) Number of new and/or revised recommendations and tools for regulatory cooperation agreed upon by Member States

Performance measures:

Baseline 2010-2011: 2 recommendations and tools
Estimate: 2012-2013: 2 recommendations and tools
Target 2014–2015: 1 recommendations and tools

Achieved by 31 December 2014: 0 recommendations

Statement of accomplishments

14. The development of a new tool, namely, a set of educational modules for use as teaching materials, is expected to complete by the end of the biennium. In 2014, the Working Party agreed to develop a set of 15 educational modules on the subject of standardization. 3 modules were completed in cooperation with academic institutions. The work on the other 12 modules of this educational tool will be completed by the end of 2015.

Lessons learned

16. Partnerships with other international UN organizations and the academia and consultations with national authorities made it possible to enhance the programme's implementation efforts. These collaborative approaches and consultative processes will have to be expanded in the future.

IV. Cluster 4: Support to the formulation and adoption of ECE recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools for agricultural quality standards

Expected accomplishment

17. Enlarged set of ECE recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools for agricultural quality standards

Indicators of achievement

(a) Number of new and/or revised UNECE recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools for agricultural quality standards agreed upon by Member States

Performance measures:

Baseline 2010-2011: 25 recommendations, etc.
Estimate: 2012-2013: 25 recommendations, etc.
Target 2014–2015: 25 recommendations, etc.
Achieved by 31 December 2014: 16 recommendations, etc.

Statement of accomplishments

18. Activities under this cluster are carried out by the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) and its four specialized sections on fresh fruit and vegetables; meat; dry and dried produce; and seed potatoes. The Working Party sets internationally harmonized commercial quality standards for agricultural produce, which are widely used by UNECE member States and beyond. In 2014, the subprogramme adopted and/or revised 16 recommendations and standards for fresh fruit and vegetables, dry and dried produce, meat and seed potatoes. The subprogramme also adopted 2 Guides for Seed Potato Diseases, Pests and Defects (English, French and Russian) and Seed Potato Field Inspection as well as an explanatory brochure for walnuts. Work is underway to finalize a brochure on persimmons and a UNECE Guide to Operating a Seed Potato Certification Service as well as a sampling plan for tree nuts and dried fruit for inclusion into the widely used OECD sampling plan for inspection.

19.   This level of output was due to requests from member States. The UNECE recommendations and explanatory material are used worldwide by regulators and national quality inspection services, as well as by producers and traders as references in their international and regional trade transactions.

Lessons learned

20.   Accomplishments under this indicator point to the success of the secretariat's targeted efforts to promote UNECE agricultural quality standards worldwide.

V.   Cluster 5: Support to the implementation UNECE recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools for agricultural quality standards

Expected accomplishment

21.   Increased implementation of UNECE recommendations, standards, guidelines and tools for agricultural produce.

Indicators of achievement

  (a)   Number of implementations UNECE recommendations, norms, standards, guidelines and tools for agricultural quality standards in Member States.

Performance measures:

Baseline 2010-2011: 970 implementations
Estimate 2012-2013: 970 implementations
Target 2014–2015: 1,000 implementations
Achieved by 31 December 2014: 1,439 implementations

  (b)   Number of downloads of ECE recommendations and standards for agricultural quality from the ECE website, as a proxy for their use.

Performance measures:

Baseline 2010-2011: 350,000 downloads
Estimate: 2012-2013: 350,000 downloads
Target 2014–2015: 350,000 downloads
Achieved by 31 December 2014: 17,500 downloads

Statement of accomplishments

22.   UNECE agricultural quality standards remain a major reference in international trade and are used worldwide by governments, producer associations and retailers as a basis for their standards. European Union legislation made 10 UNECE agricultural quality standards obligatory and officially recommended that for the other products (40 of which were covered by UNECE standards), that UNECE standards be one of two options for traders (i.e. EU General Marketing Standard or specific UNECE standards). This indicator is the cumulative total number of implementations by countries. At the end of 2014, the total number of implementations reached 1,439 and exceeded the 2013 level . The target for the end of the biennium was therefore revised. In 2014, there were 49 additional implementations by the Russian National Technical Committee on Fresh Fruit, Vegetables

and Mushrooms and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Technical Committee on Fresh Fruit, Vegetables and Mushrooms. As a result of additional efforts to reach out to CIS countries and other regions, UNECE standards were implemented in Serbia (meat) Poland (meat) or Saudi Arabia (Dried Fruit). A nation-wide operating Russian retailer now labels fresh fruit and vegetables according to UNECE Standards on fresh fruits and vegetables.

22.   The number of downloads in 2014 reached 17,500 opened pdf files. As the data collection method and software for tracking the use of UNECE website changed several times over the past few years, it is only possible to compare this year's figure with the previous 2 years' rather than the stipulated target for the biennium. The secretariat is now measuring the number of pdf files that are opened rather than files downloaded. The total number of opened pdf files in 2012-2013 was around 47,000. The 2014 figure is slightly below that of 2012.

Lessons learned

24.   More funds are required to ensure the continued and consistent use of UNECE standards and to help countries understand and establish the necessary technical and legal infrastructure for producing goods for inspecting their quality in accordance with the standards.

VI.   Cluster 6: Awareness-raising about the UNECE trade programme

Expected accomplishment

25.   Increased awareness about the Trade subprogramme's activities

Indicators of achievement

   (a)   Number of national action matrices for trade development agreed upon with countries.

Performance measures:

Baseline 2010-2011: not applicable
Estimate: 2012-2013: 2
Target 2014–2015: 2
Achieved by 31 December 2014: 4

   (b)   The number of national trade assessments with recommendations agreed upon with the countries assessed

Performance measures:

Baseline 2010-2011: 1
Estimate: 2010-2011: 2
Target 2012–2013: 2
Achieved by 31 December 2014: 2

Statement of accomplishments

27.   Four national action matrices were developed for Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan by UNECE in cooperation with national Aid for Trade focal points. The matrices were adopted by the Governments of the four countries. This figure exceeded the target for the entire biennium.

28.   One needs assessment study on Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade in the Republic of Tajikistan was published in 2014, with practical, action-oriented recommendations for addressing behind and at the border barriers. Tajikistan integrated the recommendations into its national Aid for Trade action plan and the WTO post accession plan in line with the Presidential Decree No. 691 of 31 October 2014. The study was also used to support discussions under the UNECE Administrative Committee for the TIR Convention. In addition, the Government decided to integrate the   recommendations into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the period 2016-2020.

29.   At the request of the Government, UNECE also included the recommendations in the country's action matrix for supporting the successful implementation of regional integration efforts.

Lessons learned

30.   These accomplishments were made possible by extra-budgetary resources that were made available to the secretariat.   Activities under this cluster show the importance of ensuring broadest possible participation of national stakeholders to ensure policy responsiveness and national ownership. They also show the necessity of collaborating with development partners to avoid the duplication of efforts.

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