

UNNExT Advisory Committee Meeting

11 September 2013, Beijing, China

Summary of Discussions and Recommendations

The UNNExT Advisory Committee (UAC) meeting was attended by nine of the eleven UNNExT Advisory Committee Members or their representatives.¹ The UNNExT Secretariat was represented by Ravi Ratnayake and Yann Duval, Trade and Investment Division, ESCAP, as well as Markus Pikart, Trade and Land Management Division, UNECE. Mr. Aung Khin Myint, Chairman of the Myanmar International Freight Forwarder's Association was introduced as a new UAC Member.

The first agenda item of the Meeting was the APTFF 2013 and any comments and suggestions the UAC may have on future APTFFs.² This year's Forum was deemed well attended and organized. The exhibition arrangement was positively reviewed as well. The following recommendations were made:

- Have all sessions in plenary (i.e., no break out session as in previous years), as it provides opportunity for all participants to engage and be aware of the all topics addressed during the event.
- Include numbering in future event titles, i.e., "6th" Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum. This would highlight the fact that APTFF is now a well-established and recognized event by the wider trade facilitation community.
- A review of the implementation of the recommendations made at the 5 forums already held may be conducted. A questionnaire may be developed based on the compilation of recommendations made to assess how they were translated into national agenda for TF (and if not why, what are the challenges etc...)
- As customs administrations are generally more advance in term of reform and modernization than other government agencies (OGAs), future Forums may focus on addressing paperless trade development arising from lack of IT system in OGA and include more issues related to OGA IT system, issues of e- licensing, C/O, permit, SPS certificate etc. in the agenda.
- Future forums may discuss in more details the mechanism and the standards for sharing information between (freight) forwarders on export and import (as representatives of the original supplier and the final buyer, respectively).
- Future forums may discuss in more details the feasibility of an international "supply chain finance" mechanism that would enable the finance to the (supplier or buyer) party based on the trust endorsed by the trading (credit worthy buyer or supplier) party.

Mr. Duval made a presentation describing the activities undertaken between October 2012 and September 2013 in line with the deliverables of the UN Development Account project approved last year on Enhancing Regional Connectivity, as well as the need to implement ESCAP Resolution 68/3 on *"Enabling Paperless Trade and the Cross-border Recognition of Electronic Data and Documents for Inclusive and Sustainable Intraregional Trade Facilitation"*. Achievements since last year included establishment of a UNNExT Advisory Group on agricultural paperless trade facilitation, organization of

¹ See list of participants at: <http://www.unescap.org/unnex/acmember.pdf> . Mr. Lalit Weeratunga was excused.

² This includes views provided by email by UAC Members, particularly Mr. Nhem and Mr. Sugamata, as requested by the Secretariat due to time constraints.

several capacity building events including the first UNNExT Masterclass on Single Window and Paperless Trade Implementations (scheduled from 7-18 Oct.), and release of a study on regional arrangements for cross-border paperless trade facilitation arrangements and draft text for such arrangement in Asia and the Pacific. Advisory Groups on paperless trade for SMEs, and paperless transit would be established in 2014 in order to develop relevant guides and capacity building programmes in these areas, building on existing UNNExT guides. Mr. Pikart also provided an update to the meeting, highlighting the fact that the materials developed by UNNExT were also used outside Asia, including in Greece, where UNECE was supporting trade facilitation reform.

The proposal to change the name of the UNNExT network to include “transport” was again discussed, as ESCAP mentioned that some important stakeholders were not supportive of the UAC proposal made last year to add “transit facilitation” instead. Several UAC members indicated that adding “transport” would lead to confusion for Governments in terms of UNNExT national focal points and possible reluctance to participate in UNNExT activities as most countries had separate trade and transport ministries. One alternative that emerged in light of the discussions held at the APTFF was the possibility to replace “paperless trade (and transport)” by “paperless supply chain”.

The UAC expressed keen interest and support on the work initiated on agricultural trade facilitation and requested to be kept informed of the drafts and developments in this important area. Ms. Hong Xue specifically suggested to take into account the EU recent initiative on the Internet of Things (IoTs) regarding the data flow and protection for goods tracking when developing capacity building materials on agricultural and food product traceability. She also stressed the need for UNNExT to support research on data protection issues – in collaboration with APEC as appropriate. Mr. Nhem requested clarification on whether agricultural trade facilitation also covered processed food product facilitation, emphasizing the importance of Sanitary and Phytosanitary regulations and procedures. He further recommended that SPS procedures should be included in the scope of work of the new agricultural trade facilitation working group.

With regards to implementation of ESCAP Resolution 68/3, the UAC expressed continuous support for the development of a regional agreement on cross-border paperless trade facilitation and suggested that, since the draft was quite advanced in terms of substance, preparation of an implementation guide may proceed – as this may also help countries better understand what would happen should the agreement come into force. More awareness raising and capacity building remained essential as trade-related officials in many countries still lacked sufficient understanding of cross-border paperless trade implementation issues.

The UAC looked forward to the establishment of working groups on SME and transit trade facilitation in 2014; and the development of UNNExT guides. The UAC further suggested that a guide on development of national trade facilitation strategy be prepared as countries were looking at more integrated and holistic strategies to reduce trade time and cost. Several UAC members also suggested that UNNExT may provide support for the development of trade facilitation and paperless trade related programmes in universities, as this would be an effective to further promote these issues.

On behalf of the UNNExT Secretariat, Mr. Ratnayake took note of the recommendations and suggestions and thanked all meeting participants for their continuous commitment to the network.
