



Awareness Workshop on electronic single window
implementation, May, 22-23, 2018, Mamba Point Hotel,
Monrovia, Liberia



Workshop Report

May 2018



**Ministry of Commerce and Industry-African Alliance for E-Commerce
Single Window Implementation Awareness Workshop
May 22 – 23, 2018
Monrovia, Liberia**

A joint workshop organized by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry of the Republic of Liberia and the African Alliance for E-Commerce with support from United Nations Economic Commission for Africa through the African Trade Policy Center.

Rapporteurs' Report

By

**Mr. Clarence P. Freeman
&
Mrs. Millicent O. Gargli**

Speakers

Hon. Wilson K. Tarpeh – Minister of Commerce and Industry, Republic of Liberia

Mr. Matthew Sopotamit – Vice President in Charge of Administration, AAEC

Mr. Mor Talla Diop – Vice President in Charge of Promotion, AAEC

Mr. Robert Mulbah Baysah – Focal Point, NTFC, Customs Modernization Unit, Liberia Revenue Authority

Background

The objective of this workshop is to raise awareness among stakeholders of foreign trade on the single window as an efficient tool for the facilitation of trade formalities. The two-day workshop was marked by the intervention of AAEC experts, and Local experts. Its specific objectives are;

- i. To cast light on the good practices in terms of Single Window, to exchange views on its evolution and the current experiences, particularly on the African continent;
- ii. Draw up an inventory of the country's environment towards the establishment of a national single window; and
- iii. Arouse the interest of the different stakeholders in implementing a national single window.

The workshop which lasted for two days was marked by the intervention of an AAEC experts, and local experts. Hence, the purpose of this report is to summarize the main points made during the workshop and report on recommendations and a roadmap for the implementation of a Single Window in Liberia.

Opening Remarks

Mr. Matthew Sopotamit – welcomed everyone on behalf of AAEC to the Single Window Implementation awareness workshop. He also thanked the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for its support toward the two days workshop. He said if the African continent is to rid itself of aid and benevolence of donors, it will be through trade. It is important to have very efficient trading regimes in African countries in order for the continent to gain momentum in global trade. One way to achieve this status is through the implementation of Single Window. In a brief overview, he said that the workshop will look at the concept of Single Window, and share experience on best practices. He further said that the Single Window implementation awareness workshop was funded by United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) through the African Trade Policy Center (ATPC). He informed the body that AAEC is comprised of 18 member countries and the workshop is the first in the second phase of series of workshops carry out by the African Alliance for Electronic Commerce. It was first organized in 2013, in Niger, Egypt, Burundi, Uganda and Botswana. The African Alliance came into being during the first edition of the International Single Window Conference held in November 2008 in Dakar, Senegal. With the support of the UN ECA and the ATPC initiative, the AAEC held the constituent General Assembly in 2009, in Addis Ababa where the organization was officially birthed.

Hon. Wilson K. Tarpeh – welcomed and greeted the participants and facilitators on behalf of Pres. George M. Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia. He thanked the AAEC for considering Liberia as a beneficiary country of its awareness on the implementation of Single Window. He also indicated that Single Window is very important as it ensures predictability and reduces if not eliminate rent seeking. This workshop is been convened at a time, the

Government of Liberia is evolving policies and programs that will reduce poverty under its “Pro-Poor” Agenda, and that Trade Facilitation through Single Window implementation is an effective tool toward this end. He also informed the participants that in the next few months, Liberia will complete the launch of the National Single Window and he declared the workshop open.

First Session – Introduction

The first session began with the presentation of Mr. Mor Talla Diop, Vice president in Charge of Promotion, AAEC. He gave an overview of the entire workshop. He said the AAEC was founded in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and it comprises 18 member countries and Regional Economic Communities like ECOWAS, WAEMU, etc. are observers. The main goals of the group is to promote and support the use of Single Window; while carrying out projects and promoting E-Commerce in Africa. During his presentation, Mr. Diop informed the workshop that AAEC mission is to expand the concept of Single Window through workshops at both National and Regional levels. He informed the participants that AAEC attends regular international conference on Single Window and the next 2018 Conference will be held in Cameroun. Mr. Diop also discussed several concepts and definitions of Single Window from UN/CEFACT, WCO, EU Customs Code, etc. In his presentation, he discussed the various definitions and concept of Single Windows from UN/CEFACT, WCO, EU Customs Code, etc. He said the AAEC defines the Single window as “Single Window for trade is a national or regional system mainly built on a computer platform initiated by a Government or an ad hoc entity to facilitate the performance of import, export or transit-related formalities, by offering a single point of submission of standardized data and documents in a bid to fulfill official requirements and facilitate logistics” – AAE 2013. He emphasized that a Single Window does not intend to remove the rights and authorities of the regulatory agencies but to synchronize systems and regulatory requirements and reduce the cost of trading and doing business. There were also concerns from a participant from Sierra Leone on the operator of the system. But AAEC Mr. Matthew Supotamit said there are different institutions operating these systems across Africa but all of them operate under a national legal mandate or framework.

One representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Liberia asked about the possibility of integrating the ASYCUDA system with other trade portals. Mr. Diop responded that the ASYCUDA is different, as it is only limited to Customs Management system aimed at collecting revenue and fulfilling customs requirements. But the Single Window is concern with the interconnectivity of all institutions and regulations linked to trade facilitation in a Country. Mr. Soputamit supported his Mr. Diop that while implementation of single window system may be expensive, it is important for African countries like Liberia to look at the benefit and ultimate goal of implementing Single window to facilitate trade. During the interactive session, a representative of the Liberian Revenue Authority asked a question about Senegal experience with regard to customs and implementation of national single window system. Mr. Mor Talla Diop responded that the Single window in Senegal started before the coming into force of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) provision on Single Window. He also said that Senegal has implemented several measures that are similar to some provisions of the TFA. They have also developed system like the Trade information portal and the Single Window integrates all the documentary requirement for import or export. When you access the Single Window portal, it leads you to various links with all the requirements for importation of a particular product.

Mr. Diop also highlighted the main objectives of the Single Window as:

1. Reduce time of trade procedures;

2. Increase efficiency in the customs service;
3. Improve quality of services;
4. Create conducive business environment;
5. Enables electronic exchange of documents and information
6. Enables electronic submission of supporting documents to customs and relevant stakeholders

He also said that regardless of the implementer of Single Window, it must contextualize it so that it suits its country's desire of facilitating trade through Single Window. What works best in one country may not work best in another country. In response to a question from another representative of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Mr. Diop and Mr. Soputamit said private inspection companies and the shipping agencies can be part of the Single Window system and in implementation, a Country must be about to determine who owns and who operates a Single Window system. He added that key consideration must be given to the governance model; legal/regulatory framework, operating model for Single Window, Fee Structure, ICT Organization; Human Resource Organization. He concluded his presentations with outlining the Success factors of a Single Window, which include among other things Customs Administration Involvement; Public Private Partnership. Mr. Mor Diop emphasized that Political will and leadership in the implementation of Single Window is very important and He admonished the Liberian participants to form a Single Window group after the workshop to continue championing the implementation of the Single Window in Liberia. He said the risks to handle in the implementation of Single Window are leadership rivalry, high costs of the services, low impact on the processing time (notion of involvement of commitment), and ineffective change management, Duality of the manual and electronic systems. While the conditions for success are high level governmental leadership, consensual approach, strong involvement of customs, and appropriation by users.

Second Session – Stock-Taking of Liberia

The Second Session was led by Mr. Robert Mulbah Baysah of the Liberia Revenue Authority. He presented on Stock-Taking of Liberia to implement Single Window. Mr. Baysah outlined and discussed a number of trade barriers currently facing Liberia. He mentioned Lack of political will, lack of capacity building (training, etc.), lack of interconnection with Organizations and Government Agencies; Limited automation coverage, Trader's sensitization and limited internet connectivity. He however, explained that some progress are being made in training and capacity building, but there was a need for donor support towards Government Ministries and Agencies. He also informed the participants that the Liberia Trade Information Service Portal has been initiated under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry but the process was still undergoing some technical formalities. In the area of stakeholders' coordination, he said the process has not been easy but progress has been made, as some institutions are beginning to appreciate the benefit of coordination in trade facilitation. He also informed the body that Liberia has not submitted or ratified the WTO TFA, and that it has been delayed due to the transition from one administration to the other. He emphasized political will to achieve progress in Liberia legal framework and implementation. But Mr. Matthew Supotamit and Ministry of Transport representative said while we may have challenges with Internet issues, Government desire to implement SW should not be hindered if it sees it as a priority issue. It can work with GSM service providers to achieve this goal. Mr. Supotamit said it is not possible to do everything at once, hence it will be important to proceed step by step and focus on the low hanging fruit.

A representative from Ghana suggested that in the development of the Single Window, it is important that the Government look at the various institutions that are applying manual systems and see how they can move to automation. A representative from Sierra Leone suggested that the National Trade Facilitation Committee can be an effective group to champion the work of Single Window and trade facilitation in Liberia. She added that if the NTFC is strengthened, it will function well and void of any failure as a result of change in government. A representative of Liberia Immigration Service said given that Trade facilitation and Single Window issue is new, this workshop will help us learn from our neighboring colleagues and ensure that we the technicians can sustain the activities of Trade Facilitation and Single Window. A representative from Nigeria advised that Liberian Government Ministries and Agencies need to engage the Legislators. Following several inputs from representatives of the Liberia Immigration Services, Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Liberia and others, there was a consensus that there is a need for more engagements with National Legislature; possibly change our strategy in Liberia.

Third Session – Summary of Single Window Model and Configuration

Mr. Matthew Sopotamit did the presentation during session. He said given the multi-sectorial nature of Single Window, it is important to have a strong high level governmental involvement and leadership that will keep the Single Window system moving and sustainable. He advised that after the design and setup, it is necessary to have an autonomous agency to take charge of the system. He said if a Single Window works well initially, it later collapses, and nobody or agency is charged with restoring it, it fails and the Single Window becomes a problem. Hence, the need for an autonomous body that has the resources and ability to manage the Single Window. He encouraged the need for a steering committee headed by the President's office, which will ensure political will and strong leadership. Sharing the example of Ghana, he said the Single Window was initiated by the Ghanaian Ministry of Trade and the Minister was supportive and insisted the need for a Single Window. He also reemphasized the need for all parties (logistics, shipping agencies, etc.) to be cooperative and supportive for the Single Window to succeed.

In Mr. Sopotamit presentation, he said mainly operate under two models. The first model is a Single Window operation without electronic signature (i.e. the Single Window is a platform for automated processes and data exchanges). The second model is a Single Window operation with electronic signature (i.e. the Single Window accommodates paperless procedures). It is therefore necessary to have a legal framework governing the new transition from paper based system to paperless system. Hence, in order to achieve the paperless formalities for Single Window system, some laws are to be enacted. They include: Law on the protection of personal data; Law on electronic transactions; Law on cybercrime; Law on cryptography (transmission of data on the SW systems). It is worth noting that a country association to a given Economic Community can also Cause restrictions that have to be considered.

There were three groups' presentations at the end of the session, outlining strategic solutions towards the development and implementation of Single Window in Liberia. They outlined the following points:

1. Identification of Key Stakeholders involved in trade facilitation
2. Need for sensitization and awareness on the impact of Single Window
3. Political Will
4. Quality Infrastructure

5. Acceptability
6. Inter-agency collaboration
7. Resources
8. Pre-briefing/Consultative Dialogue with the Public & Private Sector Executives on the need for the implementation of Single Window

The Workshop ended with brief remarks, rounds of applaud and exchange of business cards.

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