



CONFERENCE DES NATIONS UNIES SUR LE COMMERCE ET LE DEVELOPPEMENT
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TRAINFORTRADE

REGIONAL SEMINAR ON THE HARMONIZATION OF CYBERLEGISLATION IN ECOWAS

March, 23-24 March 2015



FINAL REPORT



UNCTAD Seminar on the Harmonisation of Legislation on Electronic Commerce within ECOWAS

Under the UNCTAD project to assist countries in the ECOWAS region to develop harmonised legislation on electronic commerce, the Division on Technology and Logistics organised a regional seminar from 23-24 March 2015 in Geneva as part of the UNCTAD E-Commerce Week.

The project is financed by the United Nations Development Account and the Government of Finland.¹

The project is also supported by the ECOWAS Commission and the African Union Commission in their efforts to ensure the implementation at national level of regional legal frameworks on electronic transactions (Supplementary Act A/SA.2/01/10), data protection (Supplementary Act A/SA.1/01/10) and cybercrime (Directive 1/08/11).

Forty five representatives of the 15 ECOWAS countries participated in the seminar which provided an excellent platform to discuss ways and best practices to facilitate the implementation at the national level of existing regional legal frameworks.

The meeting was opened by Ms. Geneviève Féraud, Head of the Knowledge Development Branch, UNCTAD, and Her Excellency Ms. Nakpa Polo, Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of the Togolese Republic to the United Nations Office in Geneva.

Ms. Féraud gave an overview of the TrainForTrade project, which was launched in West Africa in 2012 and will run until the end of 2015. Its overall goal is to accelerate progress in West-African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Senegal and Togo) towards the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, particularly MDG 8 through trade-related training and capacity building.

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Ambassador Polo emphasized the need to create an enabling legal environment to reap benefits from information and communications technologies (ICTs). She thanked UNCTAD for supporting the building of capacities in the region.

Dr Raphael Koffi, Head of Telecommunication/ICT Division at the ECOWAS Commission thanked UNCTAD for having initiated this important Project and implemented for ECOWAS Member States. He also urged UNCTAD to pursue the assistance to ECOWAS in term of capacity building as well as developing and enacting legislation to complement the existing ones to ensure full development of e-commerce in the ECOWAS region.

Cyber legislation in the region needs to be further enhanced. Out the fifteen ECOWAS countries, seven had specific laws on e-transactions, 7 had data protection laws and 4 had adapted their legislation to cybercrime (see table 1).

His Excellency, Mr. Zotawon D, Titus, Deputy Minister, Department of ICT & Telecommunications, Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications, Liberia highlighted the challenges faced by the region and the need for such regional gathering: *“ECOWAS countries are at different phases in implementing electronic transactions and such transactions need to be safeguarded. Hence, the need for stakeholders across the region to ensure the harmonization of cyber law across member states has implications for effective governance as cyber crimes knows no boundary. Essentially, this workshop has accentuated the need for policy makers, regulatory authorities and other such players responsible to drive the sustainable development of the sector to adopt common principles and approaches to achieve this objective. Addressing cyberlaw harmonization with a sense of urgency is one of such approaches.”*

This Regional Seminar was the third face-to-face event organized for the period between 2013-2015, supporting ECOWAS countries develop harmonised legislation on e-commerce. This seminar followed on distance learning courses on the Legal Aspects of Ecommerce that were organised by UNCTAD's TrainForTrade programme and ICT Analysis Section in 2014. The online training raised the awareness of 380 representatives of the public and private sectors in the region. This seminar provided an opportunity to the delegates who had successfully completed the online training to discuss further the thematic topics covered in the online course.



Representatives of the ECOWAS Commission, ITU, and UNCITRAL made presentations during the seminar.

The UNCITRAL representative appraised the state of existing legislation on electronic transactions and electronic signatures and the challenges that exist in the adoption of such legislation. The discussion clarified how ECOWAS member States could leverage UNCITRAL legal instruments to benchmark regional texts, such as those prepared by the African Union and the ECOWAS.

The ITU representative introduced participants to the challenges of helping ensure that security is made a key aspect of establishing e-commerce in the region as this affects the confidence of consumers and vendors alike. The representative then discussed the implementation of CERTs in the countries to respond to security incidents. The representative of the ECOWAS Commission also suggested complementing the national CERTs with a regional CERT.

The ICANN representative addressed the issue of domain name management. She discussed how legal frameworks may be backed by technical investment to ensure that jurisdiction and development are properly attributed to the region as e-

commerce develops. This tied into the taxation complexities that are introduced by e-commerce.

The representatives of ECOWAS, UNCITRAL, ITU and ICANN agreed that capacity-building activities were essential to strengthening the region's efforts to implementing a secure cyberspace that encourages the use of ICTs and e-commerce.

ELECTRONIC PAYMENTS

The use of electronic payments in the region has grown tremendously in recent years, the most prevalent forms being mobile payments developed and implemented mostly by mobile network operators. Participants stressed the lack of interoperability between systems across countries. This impediment will hinder the growth of regional e-commerce.

Some participants felt that legislation should be used to address interoperability and that, at a regional level, ECOWAS should develop community legislation. However, the discussion reflected on the rapid pace of innovation in ICTs that would make it difficult to keep up and also the fact that legislation might turn out to be a stifling influence on development and investment.

ELECTRONIC TRANSACTIONS

The adoption of regional and national legislation on electronic transactions and electronic signatures based on a global uniform model was encouraged as this would ensure compatibility and thus facilitate, among others, mutual legal recognition of electronic signatures and certificates across borders.

DATA PROTECTION

On the issues data protection, member states are transposing the Supplementary Act on Data Protection into their national legislation. The seven countries that already have adopted the legislation indicated that there were still gaps with regard to developments in data processing.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

In terms of consumer protection, Cape Verde, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Niger have already adopted legislation while the remaining countries are working on bills. As the francophone countries of ECOWAS have benefited from adopting the WAEMU Treaty text and have advanced more than the Anglophone countries, the Anglophone countries could benefit from modelling their own text and legislation on the existing work to reduce the time to implementation and to reduce the possibility of incompatibilities.



CHALLENGES

While almost all the countries had taken steps towards harmonising legislation on e-commerce, there were several common challenges;

- Rate of transposition at national level is very slow;
- The level of awareness is low of new laws among stakeholders, including the judiciary, consumers, civil society and private sector.
- More efforts are needed to build human resources to exploit the opportunities presented by the new legislation.
- The necessary institutional structures need to be established to support the implementation and enforcement of new legislation.
- Some countries (including Mali and Guinea) referred to institutional instability, lack of resources and limited capacity as obstacles to the implementation of legislation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

During the seminar, the following recommendations were agreed upon:

1. Make necessary efforts to accelerate the transposition of community texts at the national level;
2. Harmonise legislation on electronic transactions and electronic signatures, private data and consumer protection;
3. Actively pursue capacity building for policy makers and legislators, and information sharing with national stakeholders on knowledge such as that acquired through the seminar;
4. Advocate for more publicity on new laws when they come into force to ensure their effective use;

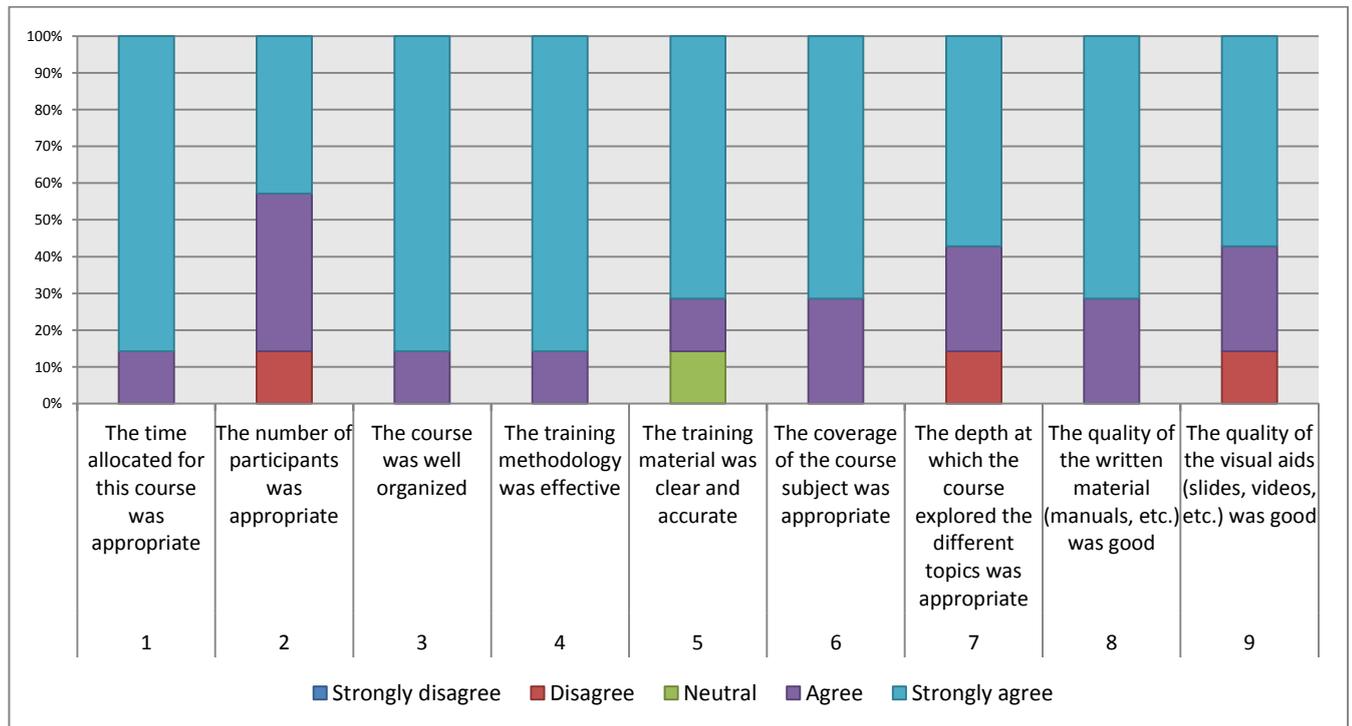
5. Establish a Regional CERT to reinforce the efforts of its member states by complementing their National National CERTS;
6. Establish an information-sharing network to ensure that participants continue to share lessons learned and other experiences critical to the successful harmonisation of ecommerce legislation in the region;
7. On cybersecurity, ECOWAS countries should ratify the Convention on Cybersecurity and the Protection of Personal Data of the African Union;
8. UNCTAD should extend the training and technical capacity building, including through the online TrainForTrade platform, to the judiciary and the police;
9. Africa needs to work on the .africa domain and the promotion of utilising local domains



Table 1. Status of harmonization in the ECOWAS Member States as of December 2014

Member Country	Electronic Transactions	Consumer Protection	Data Protection and Privacy	Cybercrime and Cyber security	On line content Regulation	Domain Name
Benin	Proposal	None	Adopted	Proposal	None	None
Burkina Faso	Adopted	None	Partial	Proposal	None	Adopted
Cape Verde	Adopted	Partial	Adopted	Partial	None	Adopted
Côte d'Ivoire	Adopted	Adopted	Adopted	Adopted	Adopted	Proposal
Gambia	Adopted	Adopted	Partial	Adopted	Adopted	Partial
Ghana	Adopted	Adopted	Adopted	Adopted	Adopted	Adopted
Guinea	None	None	None	None	None	None
Guinea-Bissau	Proposal	Adopted	None	None	None	Adopted
Liberia	Adopted	Partial	Partial	None	None	None
Mali	Proposal	None	Partial	Proposal	None	None
Niger	Proposal	Proposal	Proposal	Proposal	None	None
Nigeria	Proposal	Partial & Proposal	Proposal	Proposal	Adopted	Partial
Senegal	Adopted	Adopted	Adopted	Adopted	Adopted	None
Sierra Leone	None	Partial	Project	None	None	Adopted
Togo	Draft	Draft	Draft	Draft	None	Adopted

Summary of Opinion Questionnaires of the Seminar



PARTICIPANTS

BENIN

Hubert Arsène DADJO

Magistrat, Sous-Directeur
Technique
Ministère de la Justice

**Sêvi Rodolphe ADJAIGBE**

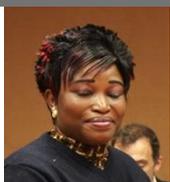
Chercheur en Droit, Chef du
Service de la Règlementation
Ministère de la Communication
et des TIC



Burkina Faso

Lydie ZONGO

Directrice de la Promotion du e-
commerce
Ministère de l'Industrie du
Commerce et de l'Artisanat

**Abdoulaye OUEDRAOGO**

Directeur de la Règlementation
des Communications
électroniques
Ministère du Développement de
l'Economie numérique et des
Postes



IVORY COAST

Kadio Hervé Honoré KOUA

Administrateur des Services
Financiers, Sous-Directeur en
charge du Commerce
électronique
Ministère du Commerce,
Direction des Systèmes
d'Information

**Héraclès Mayé ASSOKO**

Directeur des Affaires
Juridiques et de la Coopération
internationale
Ministère de la Poste et des TIC



GUINÉE

Saikou BALDE

Inspecteur Général adjoint
Ministère du Commerce

**Fatimatou BALDE**

Chef de Section au Centre
d'Appui aux Filières
d'Exportation
Ministère du Commerce

**Mama Tady CONDE**

Directrice Générale
EMAKO SARL

MALI

Fatoumata Sekou DICKO ep. MAIGA

Chef de Cabinet, Présidente de
la Commission Technique
d'Elaboration des Textes du
Cadre TIC du Mali
Ministère de la Justice et des
Droits de l'Homme

**Boubacar Mahamane DICKO**

Chargé Audit des Coûts et
Interconnexion
Autorité de Régulation des
Télécommunications



Assetou SOUMARE

Responsable du Département
des Affaires Juridiques et de la
Règlementation
Société des
Télécommunications du Mali
(SOTELMA-SA)

**Yannick Olivier SOME**

Assistant Juridique
Groupement Interbancaire
Monétique de l'Union
Economique et Monétaire Ouest
Africain

**Lamine Mahamadou DIALLO**

Chef de Service au
Département des Affaires
Juriques et Internationales
Autorité Malienne de Régulation
des Télécommunications/TIC et
Postes

**François Mame Samba
NDIAYE**

Juriste
Observatoire de la Qualité des
Services Financiers Ministère
de l'Economie, des Finances et
du Plan

**NIGER****Mahamane Laoualy ADO
SALIFOU**

Directeur des Affaires
Juridiques et Contentieux
Ministère des Postes, des
Télécommunications et de
l'Economie Numérique

Atté BOEYI

Directeur de la Législation
Secrétariat général du
Gouvernement

**TOGO****Koku Vinyo GBADZI**

Chef Division Réglementation et
Contentieux
Ministère du Commerce,
Direction du Commerce
Intérieur et de la Concurrence

**Dodzi Yawovi Sylvanus
AWUTEY**

Juriste
Autorité de Régulation des
Postes et Télécommunications

**SENEGAL****Diakaria DIALLO**

Responsable Réseaux et
Sécurité
Présidence de la République

**Baye Samba DIOP**

Chef de Division Régulation et
Affaires Juriques
Autorité de Régulation des
Marchés Publics (ARMP)

**CAPE VERDE****Ailine CONCEICAO**

Attorney in the Study and
Strategic Office
Agencia Nacional das
Comunicacoes

**THE GAMBIA**

Ebrima CEESAY

Legal, Licensing and Enforcement Manager
The Gambia Public Utilities Regulatory Authority



Zotawon TITUS

Deputy Minister in charge of ICT
Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications



Sanusi DRAMMEH

ICT Officer
The Gambia Government



NIGERIA

Yakubu GONTOR

Assistant Director of Finance
Nigerian Communications Commission



GHANA

Evelyn BEDIAKOH-ADU

Lawyer
National Communications Authority, Legal Division



Solomon I. INGBA

Deputy Director IT
Ministry of Communication Technology



Freda BENJAMIN-LAING

State Attorney
Ministry of Justice & Attorney General Office, Legislation Drafting Division



SIERRA LEONE

James COBBA

Chief Technology Officer
Ministry of ICTs



GUINEA-BISSAU

Suleimane MANE

Chief, Legal Affairs and Consumer Protection
Authority Regulation National Communication



Musa Bockarie KAMARA

ICT Manager
Ministry of Trade and Industry



LIBERIA

Roosevelt GOULD

Chief Lawyer
Ministry of Commerce and Industry



ECOWAS

Raphaël KOFFI

Chargé Principal de Programmes
Chef de la Division Télécommunications/TIC
Commission de la CEDEAO



INSTRUCTORS

Abdoullah CISSE

Avocat-Conseiller juridique
Dakar
BITEYE & CISSE Association



Ian WALDEN

Professor of Information and
Communication
Queen Mary, University of
London

**SPEAKERS****Luca CASTELLANI**

Legal Officer
UNCITRAL Regional Centre for
Asia and the Pacific

**Rosheen AWOTAR-MAUREE**

Cybersecurity Officer
International Telecommunication
Union

**OBSERVERS****Emmanuel ADJOVI**

Spécialiste de programme
"Société de l'Information"
Direction de la Francophonie
Numérique, Organisation
Internationale de la
Francophonie

**Anne-Rachel INNE**

VP Government Engagement
ICANN

**Claudia GROSS**

Legal Officer
UNCITRAL

**UNCTAD****Cécile BARAYRE-EI SHAMI**

Programme Manager
Electronic Commerce and Law
Reform
ICT Analysis Section

**Ngozi Onodugo**

ICT Analysis Section

Smita LAKHE

Statistics Assistant
UNCTAD/ICT Analysis Section

**Dominique CHANTREL**

Distance Learning Specialist
UNCTAD/TrainForTrade

**Aylwin ZABULA**

Information Systems Officer
UNCTAD/TrainForTrade

**Stephanie GARCIA**

Administrative Assistant
UNCTAD/TrainForTrade

