

The SADC Ministerial Task Force on Regional Economic Integration, at its [16th meeting held in Gaborone on 13 March 2016](#), approved the SADC Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP), also known as “Comprehensive Trade Facilitation Program (CTFP), which outlined a harmonised approach to trade facilitation for SADC Members. The SADC TFP covers 28 trade facilitation measures (TFMs) clustered around four pillars: transparency, predictability, simplification, and cooperation, roughly corresponding to the measures contained in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. One of the TFMs includes the implementation of an electronic certificate of origin (eCoO) for products traded between the SADC countries.

The certificate of origin is a document attesting the origin of the goods which is a requirement in preferential agreements for export and import of the goods subject for duty free and quota free. This certificate is particularly important because allows Customs in the importing country to determine whether certain goods are eligible for import under the preferential arrangement.

So far, SADC certificates of origin have been processed manually by the issuing authority in the country of origin of the goods, according to the rules contained in the Annex I of the [SADC Protocol on Trade](#) concerning the rules of origin for products to be traded between the SADC countries. The relevant procedure is, however, particularly cumbersome as it requires traders to go physically to the offices of the authority responsible for the issuance of the COO in order to lodge the relevant application and obtain response on the issuance of the certificate. Once the issuing authority has verified that goods declared by the exporter conform to the SADC rules of origin, the CoO is transmitted to the country of import. The implementation of the eCoO will simplify this process, since it will allow the trader to apply on-line, trace the application and get the response on the submission through the same platform. Customs authorities of the importing country will verify online the eCoO authenticity, without the need to receive the original paper-based certificate.

For the implementation of the e-CoO concept regionally, the SADC Secretariat has put in place a Regional eCoO framework aimed at harmonising the process of automation for registration, issuance and transmission of the certificate of origin. The Framework, which also includes many security features like optical watermarking technology (to distinguish between original and copies of CoOs issued), digital rubber stamps of the competent authority and signatures of authorized officials, microprint (to deter unauthorized re-production of the certificate of origin), 2-D barcode encrypt and decrypt system (to ensure data integrity), Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) technology (to ensure data security and authenticity) and printer control language (to control the printing of only one original certificate of origin), was approved by the Sectoral

Committee of Ministers of Trade at the 31st Meeting held in June 2019 in Windhoek, Namibia.

Currently, in the SADC region, Botswana, Eswatini, Malawi, Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia have already developed their national module and are working on the component for transmission and receiving (outbound and inbound) of the e-CoO as per the specifications contained in the Regional eCoO Framework and they will participate in the pilot phase. Mauritius has also developed its eCoO module and is currently waiting to exchange with other Member States.

The implementation of the eCoO is expected to contribute to the reduction of non-tariff barriers to trade and enhance participation of SADC Member States in the regional value chain and ultimately, support successful implementation of the industrialization strategy and roadmap in the consolidation of the SADC FTA.

Before SADC, also COMESA developed a standardised regional electronic certificate of origin system, although this system is not fully implemented in all COMESA member states. The COMESA electronic certificate of origin system (eCO) can be obtained by exporters via a web-based system that is accessible through a [web browser](#) upon registration.

More info [here](#)