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TRADE FACILITATION HANDBOOK
PART I
National Facilitation Bodies:
Lessons from Experience



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Trade Facilitation Handbook

Part I

National Facilitation Bodies: Lessons from Experience

In view of the importance of trade facilitation measures to improve a country's trading performance, Part I of this Handbook is intended to guide users in creating the institutional structure for processing trade facilitation measures. It focuses on one platform — the trade facilitation body — in the form of an interdisciplinary committee where private sector managers, public sector administrators and policymakers can work together towards the effective implementation of trade facilitation measures. Approaches to the setting up of a trade facilitation body by different developing countries are reviewed on the basis of case studies carried out by UNCTAD and relevant work by other institutions. From the review, key lessons are drawn for developing countries intent on establishing and operating trade facilitation committees.



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FOREWORD

Today's global economy, driven by the liberalization of trade in goods and services, affects countries in different ways as it generates changes in traditional trade and logistics patterns in order to cope with growing international competition. Changes in manufacturing processes that call for just-in-time delivery, the ongoing revolution in information technology and electronic communications, and the phenomenal growth in world trade are only some examples that highlight the significance of trade facilitation. It is especially relevant in the light of growing South–South trade.

Cumbersome documentation requirements, non-transparent regulations, excessive delays at the border and related business losses constitute costly non-tariff barriers lessening the potential gains from trade as a result of the reduction of tariffs and the innovations made in multimodal transport or modern production and distribution methods. Developing countries could make important gains from the introduction of simple, standardized trade documents and the modernization of Customs, as well as from trade facilitation because of its multifaceted nature, which includes trade and transport infrastructure, and technological requirements. Trade facilitation is not only a cross-sectoral discipline involving traders from all industries and various government ministries but also depends on the condition of a country's infrastructure — be it roads, ports or Customs facilities — its human resource and revenue base, and its institutional and regulatory capacity. To modernize Customs administration and simplify trade procedures it is necessary to proceed in a coordinated and inclusive manner by involving both private and public stakeholders in devising and implementing reform measures. This interaction and dialogue between public officials and business operators needs to be fostered in many countries.

In carrying out its mandate to promote development through trade, UNCTAD has long been active in helping countries improve their Customs administration and trade logistics services. In particular, UNCTAD promotes the creation of national trade and transport facilitation committees where reform measures can be researched and discussed between government, trade and transport operators and the business sector, and subsequently recommended for implementation. Its technical assistance in these areas aims to enable developing countries to participate more actively in global trade.

With the start of trade facilitation negotiations at the World Trade Organization on the basis of the July 2004 Package and its Annex D, this subject is now receiving focused attention, as evidenced by the active participation of developing and least developed countries in submitting proposals. Most importantly, in view of the principles and modalities agreed in Annex D, these countries will be able to negotiate special and differential treatment and technical assistance geared to their individual capacity and needs and to phase the implementation of required measures accordingly.

I hope that this Handbook, complemented in due time with technical advice on specific trade facilitation issues, will assist Governments and traders alike in operating national committees in support of domestic trade facilitation reform and WTO negotiations.

Supachai Panitchpakdi
Secretary-General
October 2005

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ALBAPRO	Albania PRO Committee
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASYCUDA	Automated System for Customs Data
EDF	Export Development Fund
FAL	Convention on the Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic
FPCCI	Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
ICC	International Chamber of Commerce
IMO	International Maritime Organization
ITC	International Trade Centre
MOC	Ministry of Commerce
MoICS	Ministry of Industries, Commerce and Supplies
NGO	non-governmental organization
NTFC	National Transport Facilitation Committee
NTTCC	National Transit Transport Coordinating Committee
NTTFC (Nepal)	Nepal Trade and Transit Facilitation Committee
NTTFC (Pakistan)	National Trade and Transport Facilitation Committee
PSC	Pakistan Shippers Council
SAD	Single Administrative Document
SECI	Southeast European Cooperative Initiative
TIR	Transports Internationaux Routiers
TTCB	Transit Transport Coordinating Board
TTFP	Transport and Trade Facilitation Project
TTFSE	Trade and Transport Facilitation in Southeast Europe Programme
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UN/CEFACT	United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business
UN/EDIFACT	Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport
WCO	World Customs Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

INTRODUCTION

Trade facilitation measures seek to establish a transparent, consistent and predictable environment for border transactions based on simple and standardized Customs procedures and practices, documentation requirements, cargo and transit operations, and trade and transport conventions and arrangements. The cross-sectoral nature of trade facilitation calls for close coordination between trade operators and service providers on the one hand and Customs and various ministries and regulatory agencies on the other hand.

In carrying out its mandate to promote development through trade, UNCTAD has built up considerable experience, particularly in the fields of transport (policy, legal and management), Customs (implementation of reform and modernization) and trade facilitation (simplification of commercial procedures and documents). Its technical assistance in these areas helps developing countries participate more actively in global trade.

In 1999, UN/CEFACT updated Recommendation No. 4 of 1974 to promote the establishment of national organizations, or other suitable means, for implementing international trade procedures.¹ The UNCTAD Commission on Enterprise, Business Facilitation and Development endorsed in its work programme on Trade Facilitation, Transport and Logistics the elaboration of a reference document for officials and practitioners setting out the basic concepts and tools for consideration by the private and public sectors in the process of promoting and implementing trade facilitation measures in a country.

Trade facilitation assumed more prominence when the 2001 WTO Ministerial Conference placed it on the Doha Development Agenda with the aim of clarifying and streamlining multilateral trade rules to improve transparency, Customs operations and transit trade. In July 2004, the WTO reached an explicit consensus to start negotiations on trade facilitation on the basis of principles and modalities set out in Annex D of the July 2004 Package. A coordinated approach both to delivering technical assistance and capacity building in this area and to conceiving and implementing national trade policies and facilitation measures constitutes the underpinnings for successful negotiations.

It is important for government agencies, enterprises and traders with a direct interest in improving border transactions that reform measures, innovations and regulations be planned, introduced and implemented in a coordinated fashion. Experience has proved that public-private partnerships are vital to both pinpointing the requirements of traders and government and implementing any relevant national or international measures to improve border transactions.

TRADE FACILITATION ISSUES AND OBJECTIVES

Trade facilitation is a diverse and challenging subject with potential benefits for both business and government at national, regional and international levels. It involves political, economic, business, administrative, technical and technological, as well as financial issues, all of which must be taken into consideration when a country or region develops its trade facilitation strategy. The contents of trade facilitation measures can be highly technical and require the input of expert practitioners and administrators.

Any measure that eases a trade transaction and leads to time and cost reductions in the transaction cycle fits into the category of trade facilitation. The latter can be effected through more efficient procedures and operations — increasing value without a proportionate increase in cost — or through removing any deadweight economic loss and redundancies.

¹ UNECE Recommendation No. 4, National Trade Facilitation Bodies (ECE/TRADE/242), 2001, available at the following URL: http://www.unece.org/cefact/recommendations/rec04/rec04_ecetrd242e.pdf.

Therefore, trade facilitation may cover measures regarding:

- (a) Formalities, procedures and documents and the use of standard and electronic messages for trade transactions;
- (b) The physical movement of goods through improvements in services (transparent, predictable, uniform), the legal framework, and the transport and communications infrastructure, as well as the use of modern information technology tools by services providers and users; and
- (c) The timely discussion and dissemination of trade-related information to all concerned parties (government, services providers and the trading community), ideally through an established consultation mechanism, such as a trade facilitation body.²

The main objectives are the simplification and standardization of documents, procedures and operations, with a view to harmonizing local (regulatory and commercial) customs and practices in line with multilateral agreements, either binding (e.g. WTO rules or WCO conventions) or voluntary business standards (e.g. recommended customs and practices of the International Chamber of Commerce).

BENEFICIARIES

This Handbook targets three main categories of users: government officials, trade and transport services providers, and transport users. Government officials are responsible for the design and implementation of national policies, laws and regulations to secure the smooth flow of goods and information; services providers offer market-oriented trade and transport solutions within the framework of national and international trade and transport practices; and traders/services users take advantage of these solutions in the organization of their supply chains. In addition, professional staff from development banks, UN regional commissions, WTO and UNCTAD, including task leaders and project officers, might use this Handbook in their capacity-building efforts or in their development projects. For this audience, the Handbook suggests:

- Uniform concepts and criteria related to international trade and transport;
- A comprehensive, cross-sectoral approach to more efficient regional and international trade and transport-related transactions;
- The main components of a national trade facilitation initiative; and
- The incorporation of cross-sectoral issues related to trade and transport in World Bank lending programmes and WTO technical assistance to developing countries.

This Handbook offers a choice of measures to improve the international trade and transport sectors of developing countries. By way of illustrative examples, it highlights relevant issues and refers to a variety of existing conventions, instruments and documents on specific aspects of trade facilitation. The intention is to make additions over time in the light of country experiences and expressed needs of WTO negotiations, all of which will be posted on the UNCTAD website.

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