



# THE NEW FRONTIER OF COMPETITIVENESS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Implementing trade facilitation

Transport  
and Trade  
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**The new frontier of  
competitiveness in developing  
countries:  
Implementing trade facilitation**

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# Abbreviations

ASYCUDA	Automated System for Customs Data
FALPRO	UNCTAD Special Programme on Trade Facilitation
ICT	information and communications technology
IT	information technology
LDCs	least developed countries
LLDCs	landlocked developing countries
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECS	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
SIDs	small island developing states
TACB	technical assistance and capacity-building
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WCO	World Customs Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

# Introduction

## A. Trade facilitation in UNCTAD

Trade facilitation has a long history in UNCTAD, whose mandate in this area dates from the Final Act of its First Ministerial Conference in 1964. The Final Act of the Conference recommended that UNCTAD “should promote, within the United Nations family, arrangements for: ... (c) Inter-governmental action for research into improved marketing techniques, the organization of trade fairs, the dissemination of market intelligence and the simplification of formalities relating to Customs procedure, commercial travel, etc.” (UNCTAD, 1964).

Over the past fifty years, UNCTAD’s work in the trade facilitation area took a variety of forms, constantly adjusting to the needs and the priorities of its diverse membership. It included helping countries assess their needs for trade facilitation reforms, developing institutional and technical tools for implementing these reforms, and facilitating the participation of the developing countries in the regional and multilateral standard setting activities. The Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA), used by more than 90 countries, is possibly the most concrete result of UNCTAD’s work in this field (see <http://www.asycuda.org/>). Another example is the UNCTAD Special Programme on Trade Facilitation (FALPRO) and the Expert Working Group on Trade Efficiency, which lead to adoption of the 1994 Columbus Ministerial Declaration on Trade Efficiency. This declaration, in turn, was instrumental for the inclusion of trade facilitation in the World Trade Organization (WTO) agenda at the Singapore Ministerial Conference in 1996.

With the beginning of the negotiations on a WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in 2004, supporting the developing countries in these negotiations became another major focus of the UNCTAD trade facilitation activities (UNCTAD, 2013). This support included preparing analytical and policy publications on trade facilitation issues, organizing training and awareness-raising events in the developing countries and in Geneva for Geneva-based delegates, as well as implementing technical assistance and capacity-building (TACB) activities tailored to the needs of developing countries.

Towards the end of 2011 UNCTAD proposed to take the analysis of the practical actions that a future agreement of trade facilitation at the WTO would require at national level one step further. For this purpose UNCTAD developed a new approach and took the lead in an effort carried out in collaboration with Annex D organizations aimed at helping developing countries prepare national implementation plans for the trade facilitation measures proposed within the WTO negotiations. This work was

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