

Findings from ESCAP's Trade Process Analysis Database (TPAD)

Business process analysis (BPA) of trade procedures has proven to be an effective tool to design and motivate trade facilitation reform in Asia and the Pacific by providing a detailed picture of the existing import and export processes along the entire international supply chain. Over 50 import and export processes in Asia and the Pacific have been mapped out and evaluated using the UNNExT BPA methodology since 2009, both by international organizations (such as ESCAP, ECE, ADB) and relevant organizations and agencies in individual member states. ESCAP has begun to consolidate the information from the various studies into a Trade Process Analysis Database (TPAD),¹ providing access to data on the time and cost of various procedures as well as standardized maps of the flow of documents and sequencing of activities of the various stakeholders involved. A meta-analysis of the BPA studies included in TPAD, which cover more than 15 least developed and developing countries in the region, reveals the following about reducing trade costs:

- **Full and inclusive representation of the private sector is essential.**

Reducing the time and cost of trade transactions cannot be done without the support of the private sector. All procedures and steps in the import and export processes involve the private sector, while only some of them involve national regulatory authorities directly. While Governments could and should streamline the procedures over which they have direct control (e.g. customs and other regulatory procedures), they may also need to encourage private sector collaboration and coordination initiatives to achieve significant results. Chambers of Commerce and/or Industry Associations sometimes play a significant role in issuing trade-related documents, such as certificates of origin or quality certificates, and the procedures put in place by these entities may not always facilitate trade and can sometimes be discriminatory. Similarly, some private sector intermediaries, e.g. transport and logistics service providers and customs brokers, do not always have an incentive to support trade facilitation, as some of the services they render may become unnecessary if import and export processes are simplified or automated. Governments could address these issues by ensuring more inclusive representation of the private sector in national trade facilitation bodies (or similar institutions in charge of enabling trade).

- **Implementation of basic trade facilitation measures should be consistently enforced and re-enforced nation-wide.**

The process analyses revealed that simple trade facilitation measures, such as the provision of customs clearance services during holidays and weekends, and the harmonization of work hours at border checkpoints on both sides of a land border, are sometimes not implemented. Many of the studies also reveal that the trade facilitation situation varies significantly depending on the route and border crossings used within each country. These findings highlight the need for central authorities to

¹ MS Access version of TPAD, as well as links to individual BPA studies, are available at:
http://unnex.unescap.org/tools/business_process.asp

promote a change of mind-set among the staff of trade control agencies in terms of the importance of trade facilitation and their role in it. Development of change management programmes encouraging officials to develop and test simple and pragmatic trade facilitation solutions at the local level in consultation with the private sector – and/or officials on the other side of the border if possible – may be considered.

- **Paperless trade, including development of national and regional single windows, needs to be prioritized.**

Preparation of documents and exchange of information among various parties involved (even before the goods start moving from the factory, or before they arrive at the port in case of imports) account for the largest share of the time required to complete an import or export process. As such, the development of single window facilities for submission and processing of information and documents is important. Again taking into account the importance of private sector actors in the transaction chain, the development of single window facilities should enable not only submission of information to regulatory and control agencies but to both public and private actors along the transaction chain, thus facilitating trade. Such “extended” national single windows are now operating in the Republic of Korea and Singapore. At the same time, the BPA studies reveal that there is still limited use of modern information and communication technologies and a heavy reliance on paper documents throughout the import and export processes in most Asian developing countries. Increased use of ICT and the development of paperless trade should therefore be pursued more vigorously to reduce trade transactions costs and increase transparency.

- **Hard infrastructure investment needed to support implementation of more efficient trade procedures**

While basic transparency and coordination measures may go a long way in facilitating trade and may be put in place with little investment in new physical infrastructure, almost all BPA studies of trade procedures featured in TPAD point to a serious lack of physical trade-related and border infrastructure in many developing countries, in particular least developed countries. Upgrading of various physical infrastructures (e.g., building roads, bridges, and/or testing facilities), on average across all BPA studies in TPAD, is the second most frequent recommendation, after the implementation of electronic trade data and documentation systems. This recommendation is often accompanied with one on the need for building human and institutional capacity to make effective use of these new facilities, including through alignment and harmonization of documents.

- **Physical inspections should be minimized whenever possible, in particular through adoption of risk management techniques by all organizations involved in the trade process.**

Inspection and testing procedures often increase the average transaction time required to complete export and import processes. More importantly, inspections affect the timeliness and predictability of the trade transaction process and are key factors in enabling firms to participate in international production networks. Inspections are often required at various stages of the import and export processes, typically at the border or port for imports, but also often as part of the preparation of documents in the case of exports. The frequency of inspections should be minimized through the use of

appropriate risk management techniques. While customs often have some form of risk management system in place, other regulatory agencies often do not. Building the capacity of these non-customs agencies and developing inter-agency risk management systems should be considered, along with joint (multi-agency) inspections, when needed. Setting up certification programmes where the quality and other characteristics of goods can be ensured, through control of the production process at the factory, rather than for every shipment, could also be promoted as a way to reduce the need for inspections.

■ **Healthy competition among transport, logistics and other trade-related service providers should be encouraged.**

The BPA studies in TPAD include all international supply chain procedures (Buy-Ship-Pay) and clearly showed the key role that is played by service providers in the trade process. Aside from preparation of documents, which is often outsourced in part to service providers, inland carriage and handling and terminal handling are the most time-consuming procedures in the import and export processes. Providing traders with access to a variety of high quality and affordable services is therefore essential in reducing the costs and time of import and export processes. This implies the need for countries that are aiming to improve trade performance to carefully review policies related to transport and other trade-related service sectors, to ensure that existing service providers are not unduly protected and have clear incentives to provide the efficient services needed by the trading community.

■ **Reviewing payment systems and their efficiency may reveal new opportunities for improving trade facilitation performance.**

The analysis of the entire Buy-Ship-Pay process provided some evidence of the extent of time involved in the buying and payment process relative to the shipping process. One interesting finding is that the payment process accounted in some cases for a large proportion of the time required for the overall trade process, sometimes even approaching the time needed for the shipping process (excluding international shipment). While in some cases this can be due to the payment method (e.g. open account method) or negotiated payment terms, some of the process analyses revealed delays in receiving payment of up to two weeks after all necessary documents specified in the letter of credit (L/C) had been submitted to the bank. These findings indicate the need for a more detailed review of payment systems, as well as of the efficiency and practices of financial intermediaries as a way to facilitate trade, particularly since the cost of L/Cs was also found to represent, in some cases, nearly half of the direct cost of exporting a 20-foot container (excluding international shipping costs).

■ **National trade facilitation performance monitoring mechanisms are needed to identify the real and most important barriers to trade efficiency.**

Regulatory authorities have a limited view of the entire trade process, often only aware of their own internal efficiency – or inefficiency. Traders also have limited awareness and information about procedural bottlenecks, as it is the intermediaries who hold a lot of the information on the time and cost of specific procedures. Whether the inefficiencies are actually due to the intermediaries or to other parties (e.g. regulatory authorities), and the impact of the inefficiencies, would need to be assessed independently and regularly in order to identify priorities for reform. Governments should therefore consider the establishment of national trade performance monitoring mechanisms or measurement

systems. As proposed in the Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism (TTFMM)² developed by ESCAP with ADB for trade facilitation in South Asia, regular, systematic business process analyses of import and export processes, may be considered as the basis for such systems, possibly in combination with other methodologies (such as the World Customs Organization (WCO) Time Release Study methodology, which focuses on a narrower set of procedures). Embedding performance measurement and monitoring into ICT systems being developed as part of paperless trade initiatives, such as customs automation systems and Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) tracking of container systems, should also be considered, as such systems could provide real-time information and detailed records about the time taken to move goods and exchange electronic documents for all transactions.

■ **Industry-specific trade facilitation programmes should be considered, in particular for agricultural products.**

The product-specific studies clearly highlighted differences in the complexity and length of the trade process depending on the type of goods traded. For example, the often mandatory sampling and testing procedures for agricultural goods and food products were found to account for nearly half of the export time in some cases, often due to limited availability of recognized testing facilities in the exporting country. Such industry- or sector-specific bottlenecks may best be addressed through the implementation of industry- or sector-specific trade facilitation programmes. This finding is consistent with macro-level results from analysis of ESCAP-World Bank international trade cost data,³ which show that countries with low manufacturing trade costs do not necessarily have low agricultural trade costs (and vice-versa).

■ **Harmonization of documentary requirements across countries should be actively pursued.**

A recurrent issue noted by the traders interviewed for the TPAD studies is that, for a given product, different documentation is needed for exports to different destinations. These differences, more than the volume or number of documents, are found to create confusion and delays. Besides simplification of documentary requirements, a concerted effort should be made to align national procedures and documents to international standards and conventions (i.e. harmonization). In that context, participation of developing countries from Asia and the Pacific in the development of these international standards would be important, as would be the need to increase awareness and build the capacity of trade

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