

**TRADE FACILITATION
AND PAPERLESS TRADE
IMPLEMENTATION:
2013/14 ASIA-PACIFIC
UPDATE**



Tengfei Wang and Yann Duval

Trade and Investment
Working Paper Series

NO. 02/14 | JUNE 2014

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TRADE IMPLEMENTATION: 2013/14 ASIA-
PACIFIC UPDATE**

Tengfei Wang and Yann Duval*

Please cite this paper as: Wang, Tengfei and Yann Duval (2014), Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation: 2013/14 Asia-Pacific Update, ESCAP Trade and Investment Division, TID Working Paper No. 02/14, 27 June 2014. Bangkok.

*Tengfei Wang and Yann Duval are respectively Economic Affairs Officer and Chief, Trade Facilitation, Trade and Investment Division, at United Nations ESCAP. Authors are grateful to Roman Vernidub and Sarisa Pechpoothong for their invaluable inputs and able assistance for data collection. Authors are indebted to Markus Pikart from UNECE, Vincent Valentine and Jan Hoffmann from UNCTAD, Evdokia Moise from OECD and Kokichi Watanabe from Japan Association for Simplification of International Trade Procedures (JASTPRO) for their constructive comments. Authors are grateful to Jean-Paul Rodrigue from Hofstra University and Theo Notteboom from University of Antwerp for allowing the authors to use their dataset on transshipment incidence at major ports in Asia. Any errors that remain are sole responsibility of the authors.

Abstract: The Trade Facilitation Agreement adopted by the WTO member countries at the Bali Ministerial Conference in December 2013 highlights the importance of trade facilitation for international trade and the global economy. This paper provides a unique set of data on the progress made by 29 countries in Asia and the Pacific in implementing various trade facilitation and paperless trade measures in 2013/14, as well as estimates of the benefits from moving forward with implementation. An important finding is that most countries do not regularly assess or publish release times, pointing to the lack of effective national trade facilitation monitoring mechanisms. The study reveals that, at the regional level, automation and paperless trade, including establishment of national single window, were the key focus of trade facilitation reforms in 2013. Enabling cross-border paperless trade is identified as the most challenging task to further advance trade facilitation in Asia-Pacific, highlighting the need for timely conclusion of a regional arrangement to facilitate cross-border recognition and exchange of trade-related electronic data and documents, as currently being discussed by countries of the region under ESCAP Resolution 68/3. At the subregional level, East and Northeast Asia and ASEAN lead implementation of trade facilitation measures, followed by Central Asia (including the Russian Federation) and South Asia (SAARC). The empirical analysis included in the paper reveals that direct trade costs for containerized goods in the region, excluding international transport costs between seaports, amount to approximately US\$ 159 billion annually and that full implementation of trade facilitation measures included in the survey could lower such costs by 20% on average, amounting to savings of at least US\$ 31 billion every year. It also reveals that full implementation of trade facilitation measures in the 14 landlocked developing and/or least developed countries (LLDCs and/or LDCs) included in the study would enable these countries to collectively reduce direct trade costs for containerized goods by US\$ 3 billion per annum.

JEL Classification: F1, O5, C1

Key words: Trade facilitation, Trade costs, paperless trade, Single Window, Transit, LLDC, LDC, WTO, connectivity.

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Introduction

The most important achievement in advancing trade facilitation at the global level in 2013 was the adoption of the WTO trade facilitation agreement (TFA) at the Ministerial Conference held in Bali in December. The Agreement provides a global framework for WTO member countries to implement selected trade facilitation measures and highlights the importance of trade facilitation for international trade and the global economy. More importantly, it demonstrates the commitment of a wide range of countries, from least developed to most advanced countries, to advancing trade facilitation and making international trade procedures more transparent and efficient.

Since 2012, the ESCAP Secretariat has set out to systematically collect and analyze information on the actual implementation of trade facilitation measures in the region, to provide a basis for developing more relevant capacity building and technical assistance programmes as well as for countries to design and prioritize their own trade facilitation implementation plans and strategies. Taking into account the interest of Member States from the region in enabling paperless trade for trade facilitation, a first regional survey on trade facilitation and paperless trade implementation was conducted in 2012. One conclusion from that first survey was that the “survey effort should be treated as a continuous, rather than an ad-hoc ‘one-off’ activity”.¹ A follow-up survey was therefore conducted in 2013/14, the results of which are presented in this paper, along with an empirical analysis of the benefits from moving forward with trade facilitation and paperless trade implementation.

Data collection was mainly conducted through a survey questionnaire (see Annex 1) administered as an email attachment and via a dedicated website to participants of the Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum 2013 held in Beijing in September. The respondents were typically government officials and experts in charge of trade facilitation and/or Customs control, as well as representatives from relevant private sector associations. Additional data collection through other experts as well as secondary data was conducted between October 2013 and March 2014 in order to complete, cross-check and validate the data. The final dataset, presented in this paper, included information on implementation of over 40 trade facilitation and paperless trade measures in 29 countries of Asia and the Pacific.² Most measures featured in the WTO TFA are covered.³

Implementation status of each trade facilitation and paperless trade measures included in the study is discussed in the next section, followed by a regional assessment of trade facilitation implementation and benefits. Summary and conclusions are then presented. The paper ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study and way forward.

¹ The paper summarizing results from the 2012/13 survey is available at <http://www.unescap.org/resources/trade-facilitation-and-paperless-trade-asia-results-expert-survey>. Most conclusions and findings in the previous paper are still largely valid and have not been repeated in this paper. Reading the two papers together is therefore recommended.

² Questionnaire and dataset are available at <http://unnex.unescap.org/tfforum13.asp>.

³ At the time the questionnaire was prepared, the outcome of the WTO Bali Ministerial Conference was unknown yet but the content of the latest draft WTO TFA text was taken into account.

Implementation Status of 40 Trade Facilitation Measures

This section presents findings on the status of implementation of each trade facilitation measure included in the survey. The discussion follows the survey structure, starting with (1) National trade facilitation bodies, and followed by (2) General trade facilitation measures; (3) Paperless trade facilitation; (4) Cross-border paperless trade measures; (5) Border agency cooperation and (5) Transit facilitation. Measures related to (6) trade-related information availability, selected as a special focus for this 2013/14 survey, are then discussed in greater details, followed by (7) key challenges and recommendations for trade facilitation and paperless trade.

National Trade Facilitation Body

A national trade facilitation body (NTFB) generally refers to an institutional arrangement that brings together relevant diverse parties with interest in trade facilitation (including both government and private sector) and provides a mechanism for identifying problems and implementing measures to streamline trade procedures. Examples of NTFBs include PRO-Committees, FAL Committees, and National Trade and Transport Facilitation Committees. In the context of the WTO negotiations on trade facilitation, many countries also set up various working groups to support the negotiating process.⁴

According to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, “*Each Member shall establish and/or maintain a national committee on trade facilitation or designate an existing mechanism to facilitate both domestic coordination and implementation of provisions of this Agreement.*”

Results from the survey reveal that 11 countries (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore and Thailand) have a national trade facilitation body in place. Bhutan is a new member of this group. It established its trade facilitation committee in February 2013 and the committee has been active since then.⁵

In 7 countries (China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Republic of Korea and Viet Nam), NTFBs have been partially established, or a mechanism for coordination of trade facilitation has been put in place. Among these countries, in China, Indonesia and Malaysia, a mechanism for cross-sectoral coordination to facilitate trade and logistics has been put in place, although officially there is no trade facilitation body. In India, Japan, Republic of Korea

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