



# THE DEVELOPMENT IMPACT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN TRADE FACILITATION

A Study by the Asia-Pacific Research and  
Training Network on Trade



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STUDIES IN TRADE AND INVESTMENT

69

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**United Nations**  
**ESCAP**  
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## Preface

Trade Facilitation (TF), or streamlining regulatory and other procedures involved in the import or export of goods, has received increasing attention in recent years as governments realize the significant impact inefficient trade procedures can have on their countries' trade competitiveness. Simplifying trade procedures and making them more transparent has also been identified as a way to make international trade more inclusive, as this would make it easier for small and medium-sized enterprises to engage in import and export activities. At the same time, however, many trade facilitation measures identified for implementation in developing countries – often with the support of development agencies – involve the use of modern information and communications technologies (ICT), to which SMEs may not always have easy access.

Indeed, discussions held at the Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade (ARTNeT) Advisory Committee Meeting in Macao, China<sup>1</sup> – which brought together a mix of Asian developing country policymakers and senior researchers to update the research programme of the network – suggested that TF measures promoted in recent years in various fora, including the WTO, could be giving larger traders and firms an advantage over others, as they may arguably be better prepared to utilize them. The need to study the differential impact of TF measures, particularly those applying ICT, on small and large firms was therefore identified, as the existing body of research on this issue was essentially non-existent.

It is in this context that the ARTNeT Regional Study on the Development Impact of Information Technology on Trade Facilitation was initiated in 2008. Case studies on the impact of information technology in trade facilitation on small and medium-sized enterprises were conducted in 5 countries at different level of development and spanning the Southeast, East and South Asian subregions. Preliminary findings of the regional research team were presented and discussed with policymakers during the Regional Forum on “Trade Facilitation and SMEs in Times of Crisis”, co-organized by ESCAP, ARTNeT and the World Bank Research Group in Beijing, China in May 2009.<sup>2</sup> This book brings together the final outputs of the research team, led by Florian Albuo of the Center for the Advancement of Trade Integration and Facilitation. (CATIF, Manilla, Philippines) and coordinated by Mr. Yann Duval, ARTNeT Trade Facilitation Research Coordinator, under the overall supervision of Mr. Ravi Ratnayake, Director, Trade and Investment Division (TID), ESCAP.

The first two chapters provide background information on the use of ICT in trade facilitation (Chapter 1), and a discussion of the analytical frameworks, and related empirical evidence, used in previous work to evaluate the importance and impact of trade facilitation, particularly ICT-based TF measures, on development and the participation of SMEs in international trade (Chapter 2). The final chapter of Part I highlights the main findings from

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<sup>1</sup> 12 December 2007. See [www.artnetontrade.org](http://www.artnetontrade.org) for details.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.unescap.org/tid/artnet/mtg/tf\\_sme.asp](http://www.unescap.org/tid/artnet/mtg/tf_sme.asp) for details.

the five country case studies (Chapter 3), while Part II (Chapters 4-8) features individual country studies conducted in the Republic of Korea, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

This research effort was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Canada).

## CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
<b>Preface</b> .....	iii
<b>List of Contributors</b> .....	xii
<b>Abbreviations and acronyms</b> .....	xv
<b>PART ONE: OVERVIEW</b>	
<b>I. Context of information technology in trade facilitation</b> .....	3
Introduction .....	3
A. External forces affecting adoption of information technology in trade facilitation .....	4
B. Internal forces affecting adoption of information technology in trade facilitation .....	13
C. Implications .....	21
D. Conclusion .....	22
References .....	24
<b>II. Trade facilitation, information technology and development impact:     Framework and experience</b> .....	25
Introduction .....	25
A. Framework and empirical evidence .....	25
B. Experience with information technology in trade facilitation .....	31
C. Trade and information technology use in small and medium-sized enterprises .....	36
D. Summary and implications for inclusive growth .....	41
References .....	45
<b>III. The development impact of information technology in trade facilitation:     Summary of country studies</b> .....	47
Introduction .....	47
A. Country studies .....	52
B. Implications .....	62
C. Succeeding chapters .....	64
References .....	66

## CONTENTS (*continued*)

*page*

### PART TWO: COUNTRY STUDIES

<b>IV. Small and medium-sized enterprise adjustments to information technology in trade facilitation: The experience of the Republic of Korea</b> .....	69
Introduction .....	69
A. SMEs, trade and trade facilitation in the Republic of Korea .....	69
B. Evolution in the use of information technology for cargo clearance .....	71
C. Adjustments to an information technology environment .....	88
D. Case studies of traders .....	95
E. Impact on SMEs: Conclusions and recommendations .....	100
References .....	104
<b>V. The impact of information technology in trade facilitation on small and medium-sized enterprises in Bangladesh</b> .....	105
Introduction .....	105
A. SMEs in Bangladesh: An overview of the current situation .....	107
B. Evolution of information technology use in trade facilitation in Bangladesh .....	114
C. Chittagong Customs House automation: An overview .....	126
D. Impact of information technology in trade facilitation on internationalization of SMEs in Bangladesh .....	128
E. Conclusion and policy recommendations .....	135
A .....	139

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

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