



Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in South and South West Asia

SUB-REGIONAL REPORT 2019

Based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

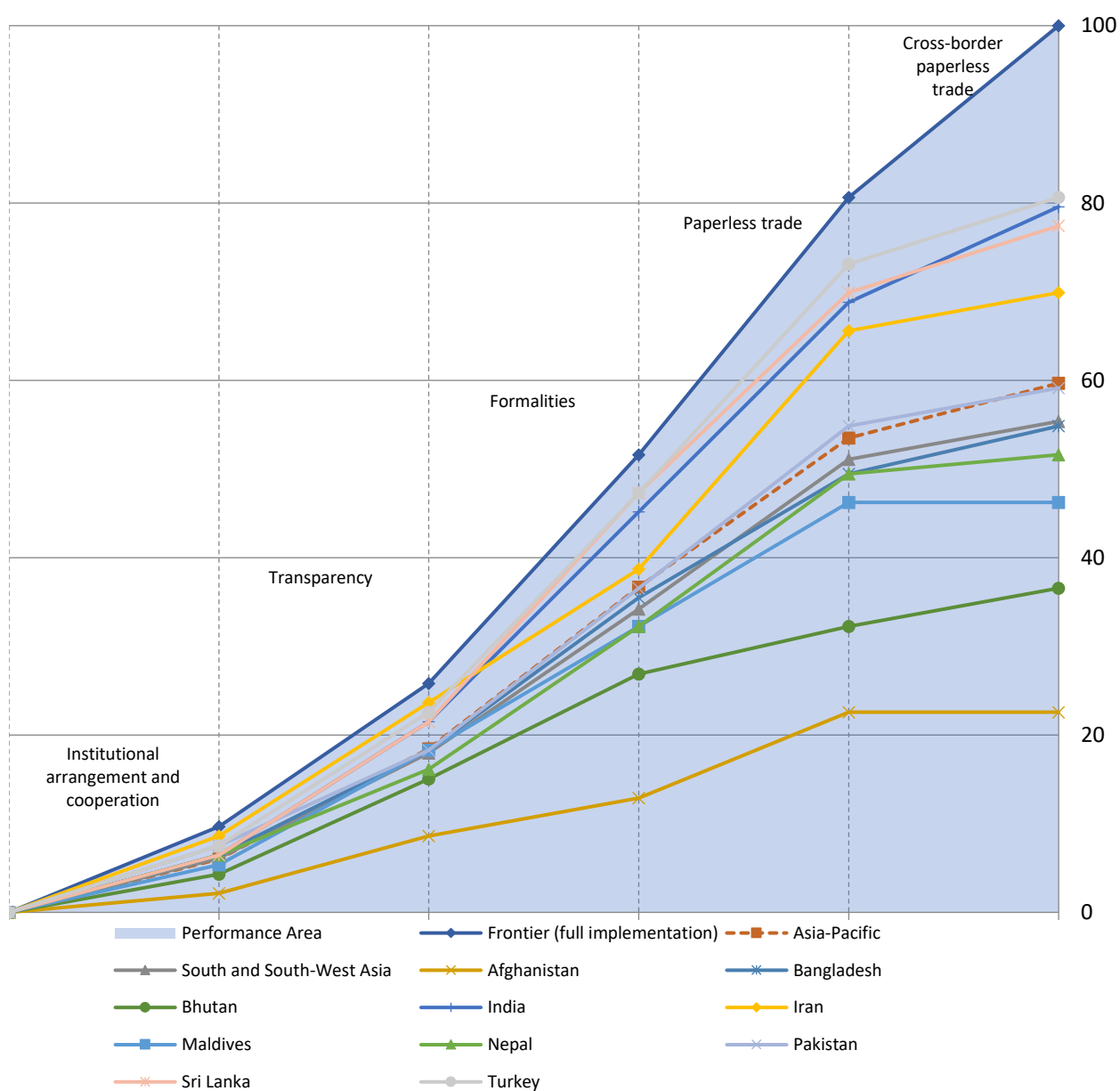
Reducing trade costs is essential for developing economies to effectively use trade as an engine of growth and sustainable development. Trade facilitation and digitalization have taken increasing importance as evidenced by the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), as well as the growing number of regional and sub-regional initiatives for facilitating the electronic exchange of information along international supply chains, including the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific.

This report presents an analysis of the results of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation for 10 South and South West Asian countries. The WTO TFA+ Survey was conducted during the first half of 2019 and covered 53 trade facilitation measures categorized under four groups: “General Trade Facilitation”, “Digital Trade Facilitation”, “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” and “Trade Finance”. The report reveals that:

- SSWA implementation rate of the measures stands at 55.4%, slightly below the Asia-Pacific regional average (59.7%). Moreover, Pacific Islands has the lowest average level of implementation in the region, much lesser than AUS-NZL (93%) and is only ahead of Pacific Island Developing Economies (35.5%).
- Implementation in SSWA varies widely, which can be explained by the wide development gap between the countries in the sub-region with more developed nations like Turkey (80.65%) and India (79.57%) scoring higher, while less developed nations like Bhutan (36.56%) and Afghanistan (22.58%) trailing behind.
- Implementation level of Trade Facilitation measures by SSWA saw a somewhat small increase of approximately 11 percentage points from 43% in 2017 to 54% 2019. While, Bangladesh, Nepal and Turkey, made huge leaps of around 20, 18 and 16 percentage points respectively, other SSWA countries made modest increase in their implementation level over the past two years, with Maldives making the least progress with an increase of about 1 percentage point.
- SSWA countries have already implemented some of the WTO TFA related measures, in particular ‘Transparency’ measures. However, implementation levels of ‘Cross-Border Paperless Trade’ measures remain extremely low with an average implementation of about 22%.
- Measures under the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” category have low implementation levels, particularly those targeted at women and SMEs. These measures are typically not specified in multilateral and/or regional agreements but need to be further emphasized to ensure trade facilitation benefits a wider range of stakeholders.
- Data on implementation of “trade finance” facilitation measures were collected for the first time this year and does not provide a complete picture. It suggests, however, a serious lack of awareness about the importance of these measures and how they could be integrated in trade facilitation strategies.

The report finds that achieving basic SSWA-wide compliance with the WTO TFA may reduce trade costs of the group by only about 12-14% going forward. In contrast, a more ambitious strategy involving digital trade facilitation and cross-border paperless trade could reduce trade costs by close to 22%.

Moving up the trade facilitation ladder towards seamless international supply chains



Note: the figure shows cumulative trade facilitation implementation scores of Asia-Pacific sub-regions for 31 common trade facilitation measures included in the survey. Full implementation of all measures =100.

Source: UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, untfsurvey.org, 2019

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