



Asia Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum 2014: Trade Facilitation for Inclusive Development

- Summary of proceedings and discussions –

The Asia Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum (APTFF) 2014, jointly organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) in collaboration with the Thai Ministry of Commerce, was held from 24-25 September 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand. The APTFF 2014 had over 250 participants from 45 countries in attendance and was held in conjunction with the Thailand International Logistics Fair (TILOG) 2014.

Opening Session

The opening session of the APTFF featured welcoming remarks by the joint organizers. Dr. Ravi Ratnayake, Director of the Trade and Investment Division, United Nations ESCAP, highlighted the importance of trade facilitation for the Asia and the Pacific in his opening remarks. He explained that whilst many countries in the Asia-Pacific region were top performers in terms of connectivity to international supply chains, intra-regional trade remains a challenge due to high trade costs between Asian subregions. He noted that implementing strategic trade facilitation measures would promote economic growth and inclusive development by improving the access to more actors to international supply chains.

Mr. Arjun Goswami, Director of ADB's Office of Economic Regional Integration (OREI) noted that the link between trade and economic growth is well-established and Asian economies have excelled in applying trade-led economic growth. Nevertheless, he said that poverty and widening inequality continue to be key issues within countries and across borders. While trade facilitation has an increasingly important role to play in addressing this, Mr. Goswami stressed the importance of cooperation and collaboration.

Ms. Chutima Bunyapraphasara, Permanent Secretary of the Thai Ministry of Commerce explained, in her inaugural address, that Thailand was pushing for new drivers of common economic growth within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). She stated that unfavorable trade regulation and inadequate cooperation to harmonize customs are some of the

barriers impeding economic and trade development in the Asia-Pacific region. Hence, she emphasized importance of trade facilitation in achieving inclusive development.

Following the opening remarks, the Forum saw the official launch of the joint ESCAP-ADB publication, “Towards a National Integrated and Sustainable Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism: BPA+”, which aims to enable countries to establish a sustainable and affordable system to monitor trade facilitation on a regular basis and provide tools to address bottlenecks.

High-level Panel Discussion

The High-level panel discussion, which was moderated by Dr. Ravi Ratnayake, consisted of high-level officials from public and private sectors as well as international organizations. The panelists were tasked with sharing their experiences and perspectives on how trade facilitation can contribute towards making trade and development more inclusive. The Panel discussions highlighted the direct link between trade facilitation and more inclusive participation in international trade. Furthermore, it was noted that simplifying trade procedures and increasing transparency were key factors in enabling those not yet engaged in trade to participate more easily and reap the benefits.

A number of key recommendations emerged from the discussions, including the need for stakeholders to consider the constraints faced by small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) when implementing trade facilitation measures and paperless trade systems, such as single window facilities. In addition, it was noted that in order to maximize the impact of trade facilitation on inclusive development, interventions should be targeted to specific locations, such as border areas away from capital cities, and particular sectors, such as agriculture. The importance of harmonized and supportive legal frameworks at national, regional and global levels was also emphasized. The panel discussion highlighted the need to implement mechanisms, which can improve the monitoring of progress in trade facilitation.

Mr. Md. Ghulam Hussain, Chairman of National Board of Revenue, Bangladesh, shared his government’s experience in implementing major trade facilitation initiatives including, the enactment of Customs Act; improvement of infrastructure for transport connectivity; implementation of ASYCUDA World; and strengthening of cooperation amongst national and international organizations. He also elaborated on some challenges, which had been encountered whilst promoting inclusive development through trade facilitation. The challenges included inadequate legal frameworks; weak private sector representation; resistance to change from stakeholders; and the continued need to further intra- and inter-regional trade.

Mr. Somkiat Triratpan, Deputy Director General of Department of Trade Negotiations, Ministry of Commerce Thailand, informed the Forum of some of the key trade facilitation measures being undertaken in Thailand, including the Thai Ministry of Commerce single trade portal; progress on road connectivity and the adoption of specific SMEs-friendly measures. In order to promote

inclusive development through trade facilitation, Mr. Triratpan emphasized the importance of offering mechanisms for technical assistance and the need to harmonize policies and procedures.

Ms. Trudy Witbreuk, Head of Division of Trade and Agriculture Directorate, OECD, highlighted the work of OECD in trade facilitation and inclusive development. She noted the need to monitor progress in implementing trade facilitation measures, particularly those included in the WTO trade facilitation agreement. This would be beneficial not only for the countries, but also for the organizations providing technical assistance and capacity building, as it would allow for the development of more responsive trade support programmes. Ms. Witbreuk also emphasized the importance of facilitating trade in agriculture, as the sector is important for poverty reduction and subject to particularly complex regulatory requirements and procedures.

Mr. Oudet Souvannavong, Secretary General of GMS Business Forum, shared his experience regarding the concerns and difficulties of private sector actors, particularly from SMEs, in trade facilitation. He noted the need for harmonization of transport standards; provision of SME financing from local institutions and the implementation of the appropriate policies. In order to assess the effectiveness of interventions, he also suggested the analysis of policies, using methods such as Business Process Analysis. Mr. Souvannavong has emphasized the need for the adjustments in the export-oriented approach as well as the need to facilitate migration for the informal sectors. He called for greater collaboration between the public sector and the private sector, yet with a clear division of roles between the two sectors.

Mr. Florian Alburo, President, Center for the Advancement of Trade Integration and Facilitation (CATIF), the Philippines emphasized that participation of SMEs in international trade should be ensured as vehicle for inclusive development and poverty reduction. Mr. Alburo also elaborated on specific cases of border development between certain countries incorporated an inclusive development approach.

Session 1: Implications of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement for Asia and the Pacific

Session 1 focused on the implication of WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) in the context of Asia and the Pacific region. The session was moderated by Mr. Sok Sopheak, Director General of Trade Support Services, Ministry of Commerce, Cambodia.

The session speaker and panelists noted that trade facilitation reform requires strong political will and support by the Governments, as well as collaboration between Government agencies and the private sector. Moreover, national and regional trade facilitation strategies should be designed to include funding and implementation support. It is critical to include provisions, which address the need for capacity building and change management. During the session it was also noted that in many countries Customs is relatively further ahead in terms of trade facilitation reform, than other agencies. Hence, other agencies are likely to require more support and capacity building. Whilst recognizing the importance of implementing the WTO TFA, it was recommended that countries in the region continue to adopt relevant trade facilitation measures

with the objective of reducing costs and increasing transparency in global trade, regardless of current blockage of the WTO TFA.

Dr. Mohammad Saeed, Senior Advisor, Trade Facilitation, International Trade Centre, presented an overview of the provisions of WTO TFA and its implications to the Asia Pacific region. He highlighted the WTO TFA's focus on the border regulatory aspects and the universal commitment approach with differential implementation timeline. Dr. Saeed also briefed the benefits of WTO TFA provisions and the future course of its implementation.

Mr. Erdenetsogt Odbayar, Interim Director, International Think Tank for LLDC, Mongolia, shared the Mongolian perspective as a landlocked developing country (LLDC) and emphasized the importance of the WTO TFA provision on facilitation of transit for LLDCs. Mr. Odbayar also highlighted the key discussion points of the High-Level International Workshop on the WTO TFA: Implications for LLDCs. The workshop emphasized the importance of technical and financial systems; aid for trade; the uptake of World Customs Organization tools, and regional cooperation and integration for harmonization of procedures.

Mr. Toya Narayan Gyawali, Joint Secretary of Ministry of Commerce and Supplies, Nepal, shared a perspective from least developed countries (LDCs). He put forth several of the key issues encountered by LDCs, including linkage with the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) and multi-stakeholder engagement. Mr. Sok Sopheap, Director General of Trade Support Services, Ministry of Commerce, Cambodia and moderator of session, also shared the current status of Cambodia's plans to operationalize electronic certificate of origin system.

Mr. Ronald Butiong, Principal Regional Cooperation Specialist, South Asia Department, ADB, reaffirmed ADB's support to its members in implementing the WTO TFA. He highlighted that ADB's current subregional and national programmes had strong trade facilitation components with a focus on analytical work and capacity development. Mr. Gerard McLinden, Lead Specialist, Trade & Competitiveness Department, World Bank, emphasized the World Bank's commitment to supporting the implementation of WTO TFA. He shared some of the World Bank's experiences and lessons in implementing trade facilitation measures. Mr. Allwyn Netto, Head of the Secretariat, Oceania Customs Organization (OCO), introduced OCO's work in trade facilitation and emphasized the importance of capacity building and sharing of lessons. He also stressed the importance of coordination amongst stakeholders for successful implementation of the WTO TFA.

Session 2: Prioritizing trade facilitation reforms and monitoring performance

Session 2 was moderated by Mr. Florian Alburo, President of the Center for the Advancement of Trade Integration and Facilitation (CATIF), Philippines. The session concluded that monitoring trade facilitation in a sustainable and affordable manner was essential for the continued improvement of trade facilitation performance. Whilst assistance from international organizations played a large role in achieving this, it was critical that the countries themselves

drive the process. The session highlighted that political will and institutional arrangement, among other factors, were essential for sustainable trade facilitation monitoring. The session noted that countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal would start implementing a baseline study of TTFMM in late 2014, with support from ESCAP and ADB.

The first presentation of the session was delivered by Mr. Haruya Koide, Principal Regional Cooperation Specialist, ADB. He touched upon the multiple facets of trade facilitation such as non-intrusive inspection (NII) technology, ICT, e-commerce, e-trade, paperless trade, multimodal transport and logistics and trade facilitation tools. Mr. Koide emphasized in his presentation that trade facilitation monitoring should be a means to an end, not an end itself.

Mr. Tengfei Wang, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP, discussed the fundamental reasons why monitoring trade facilitation performance in a regular and sustainable manner is essential to identify bottlenecks and providing solutions to trade facilitation reform. He reviewed the integrated approach adopted by ESCAP to monitoring trade facilitation, including: (i) ESCAP-World Bank trade cost database; (ii) Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism (TTFMM); (iii) ESCAP survey on implementation of trade facilitation measures; and (iv) Trade Process Analysis Database (TPAD). He asserted that trade facilitation could be monitored in a sustainable and affordable manner in any countries, including LDCs.

Mr. Ruth Banomyong, professor from Thammasat University, Thailand, discussed the logistics performance index in relation to the performance of Thailand. He mentioned that the trade facilitation strategy in Thailand was embedded in the Thailand's Logistics Development Strategy (2013-2017). Furthermore, he stressed that trade facilitation issues were cross-cutting and complex.

Ms. Young-eun Koo, Assistant Director of Clearance Facilitation Bureau, Korea Customs Service, introduced the electronic customs clearance system in Republic of Korea: UNI-PASS. She emphasized that UNI-PASS greatly streamlined trade process; facilitated inter-agency collaboration and enhanced competitiveness of national products in international markets.

Session 3: Enhancing agri-food supply chain efficiency and logistics

Session 3 focused on the trade facilitation measures required within the agri-food industry to promote inclusive development. The session was moderated by Mr. Arjun Goswami, Director of Office of Regional Economic Integration, ADB.

The key messages of this session included the need for various stakeholders within the agri-food supply chain to enhance methods of information sharing throughout the supply chain. The session also highlighted the need for institutionalized mechanisms to be in place to facilitate (i) the issuance of phytosanitary certificates and management of compliance to trade regulations; (ii) the integration of smallholder farmers into international agricultural supply chains; and (iii) the implementation of electronic traceability.

The first presentation, delivered by Ms. Preeyanooch Tippayawat, Director, Food Safety of Plants and Plant Product Group, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives Thailand, highlighted the logistics and certification process related to the export of the mangosteen from Thailand. Ms. Tippayawat informed the Forum that Thailand was developing an electronic system for the issuance of phytosanitary certificates. This electronic system would also link to the National Single Window and store data which could be used for electronic traceability. The objectives of the system are to increase effectiveness; support other export clearance systems; and plan for electronic certificates. The presenter also noted the challenges in meeting the various phytosanitary requirements of the trade partners, in relation the treatment and management of agricultural products. Furthermore, the issuance of phytosanitary certificates is not also always in line with International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM). She noted a lack of understanding of agricultural import regulations amongst trading countries. Moreover, she stated that certain import regulations act as trade barriers for cross-border trade. The presenter also stated that managing issues of non-compliance to trade standards requires cooperation and information sharing between farmers, pack-houses and exporters. Government can play a role in facilitating this.

Dr. Tomy Perdana, Lecturer, Center for Agricultural Supply Chain and Logistics System Studies, Faculty of Agriculture, Padjadjaran University Indonesia, gave a presentation on the integration of smallholder farmers into agricultural supply chains using the case of Indonesia. He noted that smallholder farmers often face difficulties in accessing structured markets due to the lack of consistent production supply; and lack of access to capital and inputs. Dr. Perdana's presentation focused on the national initiative in Indonesia to integrate small horticulture farmers into the international supply chain using system modelling. Furthermore, the use of institutionalized interactions between multiple stakeholders, namely government, private sector and research institutions/universities (Triple Helix model) can lead to more effective integration of smallholder farmers by identifying and jointly addressing the barriers.

Dr. Heiner Lehr, Partner of Syntesa, presented on the topic on electronic traceability in the Asia-Pacific. Mr. Lehr asserted that electronic traceability is an enabler of the 'smarter food vision', which allows information technology to be used to make food *inclusive* to all producers; to make

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