Paperless trade facilitation in Asia and the Pacific

Cumbersome trade procedures discourage economic activity and make it difficult for the private sector and countries to participate in regional and global production networks. With the support of the Development Account, ESCAP has assisted countries in the Asia-Pacific region with enhancing their capacity to develop and implement cross-border paperless trade facilitation measures that help simplify processes and regulations, reduce trade costs and boost trade in the region.

With support from the Development Account, ESCAP implemented the Enhancing trade competitiveness of LDCs, countries in transition, and transit countries through the implementation of single window facilities (0809D) project from 2009 to 2011 under the 6th tranche of the Account and the Deepening Regional Connectivity: Strengthening Capacities of Asian Developing Countries to Increase Intra-regional Trade by Implementing Paperless Trade and Transport Facilitation Systems (1213AJ) project from 2012 to 2015 under the 8th tranche.

Through these projects ESCAP supported 19 countries in the Asia-Pacific region in developing paperless trade facilitation measures and building capacities to engage in the intergovernmental negotiations.

As an example, ESCAP technical assistance to Maldives accelerated the implementation of its National Single Window initiative and facilitated the drafting of electronic transaction laws in cooperation with the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

ESCAP also strengthened regional knowledge sharing, capacity building, development of tools and guidelines in the implementation of electronic trade systems and trade facilitation through the United Nations Network of Experts for Paper Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT). The network currently has a membership of over 400 experts from governments, private sector and academia in the region.

Adoption of the Asia-Pacific cross-border paperless trade facilitation treaty

A concrete result of ESCAP capacity development initiatives in this area is the adoption of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, a UN treaty, by ESCAP Members on 19 May 2016 – five months after the completion of the second project above – ensuring sustainability of results achieved. Once the treaty enters into force, capacity building in paperless trade will become part of its implementation, which will lead to wide application of the trade facilitation guides and tools developed under the projects.

Read more about ESCAP’s work in this area:

The trade facilitation guides and tools developed under the project can be found on the UNNExT website: https://unnext.unescap.org/