Concept Note:
Capacity Building Program on Cross-border Paperless Trade and Digital Trade Facilitation for BIMSTEC
21-23 January 2025; Bangkok, Thailand

I. Background

Guided by the BIMSTEC Trade Facilitation Strategic Framework 2030, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) supports compliance with international trade facilitation agreements and best practices, with a view to promoting the free and seamless flow of trade and cross-border investments.

Along these lines, BIMSTEC encourages investments in sound infrastructure and adoption of advanced trade logistics to facilitate paperless trade, including the establishment of single window facilities and port community systems, extensive use of automated systems in processing declarations and clearances, and similar digital solutions.

Digital technologies have become a powerful driver of trade and overall economic growth; they have revolutionized the way countries conduct and engage in cross-border trade. Digitalization enables simplified trade processes which lead to greater efficiency, lower trading costs, and faster transactions. According to the ADB-ESCAP joint report, the implementation of digital trade facilitation measures beyond the commitments stipulated in the WTO TFA could yield a reduction of approximately 11% in trade costs in Asia and the Pacific.[1] Moreover, trade digitalization enables greater inclusivity and sustainability and strengthens the resilience of global value chains.

Notwithstanding these advantages, perceptions of its role and relevance in various aspects of the economy including trade are varied, and concerns about cybersecurity risks persist. As a result, digital readiness and investments in paperless platforms / digital solutions are uneven across countries, and uptake remains low in some.[2] However, inability to capitalize on available innovative solutions could prevent countries from participating fully in the growth process. Global trade has expanded remarkably over the past two decades with trade in goods reaching around $25 trillion in 2022 compared to $18 trillion a decade ago.[3] Following a slight dip in 2023, an upward tick in global trade flows is forecast in 2024.[4] With the right mix of sound infrastructure and trade facilitation measures, BIMSTEC member states can contribute as well as benefit fully from the steady and impressive growth in global trade.

Within this context, a capacity building program to promote greater understanding of paperless and digital trade facilitation measures is proposed to be organized in January 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand. ADB will support the organization of the capacity building program in partnership with ESCAP and BIMSTEC Secretariat. Organizers shall provide travel, accommodations, and daily subsistence allowance of 3 participants from each BIMSTEC member state and 2 participants from BIMSTEC Secretariat. ADB will bear the cost of the venue and other expenses that may be incurred during the workshop.

II. Objectives of the Capacity Building Program

The program aims to share knowledge and experience on:

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[1] ADB & ESCAP. 2024. Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Report 2024.
[2] United Nations. 2023. Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: Global Report 2023.
[3] UNCTAD. 2023. Key Statistics and Trends in International Trade 2023).
[4] World Economic Forum. 2024. Global Trade Growth Could More Than Double in 2024. Here's Why.

i. Paperless and digital trade facilitation measures, such as automated customs systems, electronic single window systems, electronic exchange of clearances and certificates, legal and regulatory measures for electronic transactions, etc.;
ii. Compliance and implementation of provisions in trade facilitation agreements relating to digitalization;
iii. Promoting inclusivity, particularly as it relates to SMEs and women traders;
iv. Digitalization of customs and border-crossing points processes;
v. Adoption of automated risk management systems;
vi. Communicational and advocacy strategies in promoting digital trade; and
vii. Capacity building for customs and border-crossing points officers and staff.

III. Program of Activities

DAY 1: 21 JANUARY 2025	
08.30-09.00	**Registration**
09.00-09.15	**Opening Session** Welcome remarks: • ***Mr. Thiam Hee Ng***, Regional Head, Regional Cooperation and Integration Unit, South Asia Department, ADB • **Ms. Rupa Chanda**, Director, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division (TIID), ESCAP • ***Mr. Md. Mosharaf Hossain***, Director, Trade, Investment and Development Division, BIMSTEC Secretariat **Introduction of Participants**
09.15-09.35	**Session 1: Overview of BIMSTEC and its Trade Investment and Development Sector** *Presentation on the overview of BIMSTEC as a regional organization with special focus on its Trade, Investment and Development Sector.* • ***Mr. Md. Mosharaf Hossain***, Director, Trade, Investment and Development Division, BIMSTEC Secretariat
09.35-10.00	**Session 2: BIMSTEC Trade Facilitation Strategic Framework 2030** *Presentation on the findings and recommendations of ADB supported study published in 2022. The report outlines nontariff barriers to trade between the BIMSTEC subregion countries and shows how a structured approach centered on boosting compliance, harnessing technology, and improving infrastructure can bolster intraregional trade.* • ***Satish Reddy,*** *Consultant, ADB*

10.00-10:30	**Session 3: Foundations for a Digitally Connected BIMSTEC: An Introduction to Digital Trade Policies** *Introductory presentation on the overview of digital trade and its policy landscape, highlighting how digital trade policies can support seamless, efficient trade and drive a modern approach to economic integration* • ***Witada Anukoonwattaka**, Economic Affairs Officer, Trade Policy and Facilitation Section (TPFS), TIID, ESCAP*
10.30–10.45	***Coffee/Tea Break and Group Photograph***
10.45-11.15	**Session 4: Digital Trade Facilitation and the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA): State of Play** *Presentation on state of play on digital trade facilitation and TFA, and how digital trade facilitation measures would support the implementation of the TFA measures* • ***Yann Duval**, Chief, TPFS, TIID, ESCAP*
11.15-12.00	**Session 5: Digitalization for Sustainable Trade Facilitation** *Presentation on how digitalization could support sustainable and inclusive trade facilitation* • ***Soo Hyun Kim**, Economic Affairs Officer, TPFS, TIID, ESCAP*
12.00-12.45	**Session 6: Common challenges in implementing Cross-border Paperless Trade** *Presentation on the common challenges faced by the countries while implementing the measures related to Cross-border Paperless Trade* • ***Jonathan Koh**, Managing Director, Trade Facilitation Pte Ltd. & United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT) expert*
12.45-14.00	***Lunch Break***
14.00-15.30	**Session 7: Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA) – Features, Benefits, Implications, and Procedure for Becoming a Party** *Presentation on the CPTA objectives and provisions and how the CPTA helps in accelerating the implementation of digital trade facilitation measures for trade and sustainable development* • ***Tengfei Wang**, Economic Affairs Officer, TPFS, TIID, ESCAP* • ***Soo Hyun Kim**, Economic Affairs Officer, TPFS, TIID, ESCAP* • ***Yern Fai Lee,** Associate Economic Affairs Officer, TPFS, TIID, ESCAP* • ***Tahseen Khan**, Advisory Committee Member, UNNExT*
15.30-15.45	***Coffee/Tea Break***

15.45-17.00	**Session 8: Interactive session on digital trade facilitation and regional cooperation** • ***Tengfei Wang**, Economic Affairs Officer, TPFS, TIID, ESCAP* • ***Alexey Kravchenko**, Economic Affairs Officer, TPFS, TIID, ESCAP*
DAY 2: 22 JANUARY 2025	
09.30-10.30	**Session 9: Promoting cross-border Paperless Trade – Lessons and global best practices** *Presentation on case studies in the cross-border paperless trade including the lessons learnt and the good practices* • ***Jonathan Koh**, Managing Director, Trade Facilitation Pte Ltd. & United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT) expert* • ***Tahseen Khan**, Advisory Committee Member, UNNExT*
10.30-11.15	**Session 10: Role and Significance of National Single Window (NSW) for Paperless Trade** *Presentation on the NSW – its features, benefits, challenges and enablers and its contribution to paperless trade* • ***Mr. Juan Diego Chavarría**, Technical Officer, Compliance and Facilitation Directorate, World Customs Organization (WCO) (virtual)*
11.15-11.45	***Coffee/Tea Break***
11.45-12.45	**Session 11: NSW Implementation - Case Studies** *Presentation on the NSW case studies – models adopted various countries and impact* • *Regional Office for Capacity Building, World Customs Organization (tbc)*
12.45-14.00	***Lunch Break***
14.00–15.30	**Session 12: Cross Border E-commerce – Significance of e-commerce as a trade channel and its growing importance in global trade** *Presentation on cross border ecommerce including its definition, ecosystem, role in global trade and the WCO instruments on ecommerce* • ***Gordana VIDANOVIĆ,** Senior Technical Officer, World Customs Organization (virtual)*
15.30-15.45	***Coffee/Tea Break***
15.45-17.00	**Session 13: Challenges and capacity for cross-border e-commerce and possible solutions** *Presentation on the unique needs and challenges of cross border ecommerce and the elements of a suitable regulatory regime to facilitate ecommerce*

	• ***Satish Reddy**, Consultant, ADB*
DAY 3: 23 JANUARY 2025	
09.15-11.00	**Session 14: Country presentations and discussion: Status of digitalization and paperless trade, challenges faced and initiatives under planning in each participating country** *Each country will be requested to present on its status of digitalization and paperless trade, challenges faced, and initiatives under planning (20 minutes each – template to be provided)* • *Bangladesh* • *Bhutan* • *India* • *Myanmar* • *Nepal* • *Sri Lanka* • *Thailand* • *Moderator: **Thiam Hee Ng**, Regional Head, SARC, ADB*
11.00-11.15	***Coffee/Tea Break***
11.15-12.15	**Session 15: Country presentations and discussion: Status of digitalization and paperless trade, challenges faced and initiatives under planning in each participating country (*Contd/..*)**
12.15-13.00	**Session 16: Discussion on the way forward for enhanced Digital Trade in the region** *Guided discussion on the measures to be implemented for achieving enhanced Digital Trade in the region, including cross-border paperless trade* • *Moderator: **Thiam Hee Ng**, Regional Head, SARC, ADB*
13.00-13.15	**Closing Session** *Wrap up and closing remarks*
13.15-14.30	***Lunch***