

Trade Facilitation in Regional Trade Agreements: A Systematic Literature Review

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Trade Facilitation in regional trade agreements: A systematic literature review Trade facilitation means the rules, policies, formalities, and practices adopted by the government to simplify, modernize and harmonize the procedural activities related to exports and imports. Previously, narrower coverage of trade facilitation in the trade agreements under Customs Procedures has been witnessed in different studies. During the last decade, this issue has emerged as a trade-enhancing strategic policy instrument and gained attention in the global trading system. After the agreement on trade facilitation came into force on 22 February 2017 under the auspices of the World Trade Organization, trade facilitation has gained much wider attention and crossed the boundary of the multilateral trading system. At that time, it started becoming an integral part of the Regional Trade Agreements. However, there is no specific legal obligation in the Trade Facilitation Agreement regarding the coverage of Trade Facilitation issues in the Free Trade Agreements. In this connection, contracting parties of those trade agreements are free to determine their own coverage and standards of Trade Facilitation provisions and even could maintain several higher levels of standard rules governing Trade Facilitation based on the purpose of the particular agreement. The growing number of trade facilitation provisions in the regional trade agreement reflects that this issue has gained significance over time. Moreover, Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements such as Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) have started including a higher level of obligations such as trade facilitation issues as highlighted in a number of different studies. In some recent studies, the role of using trade facilitation provisions has also been highlighted as a trade facilitating policy instrument, which could be used in the Regional Trade Agreements in times of present and future crisis and pandemics. In addition, some of the studies also highlighted that future trade agreements have a higher level of intention to cover such provisions in a wider manner. In this context, the present study tries to explore how trade facilitation provisions covered in the Regional Trade Agreements are addressed in different studies using Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). In addition, this study seeks to explore whether the provisions of trade facilitation covered in the trade agreements are burdensome for developing countries based on those studies. Using this method, an overview of the linkages between trade facilitation and regional trade agreement as depicted in those studies would also be highlighted. This study primarily uses secondary data procured from different scholarly journal articles

published during 2010-2020. The findings of this study would be a great source towards reforming existing trade agreements as well as the inclusion of trade facilitation provisions in future trade agreements. Finally, this study put forward a set of policy recommendations for the developing countries towards the inclusion of trade facilitation in their regional trade agreements.

Keywords: *Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, PRISMA, Regional Trade Agreement, Trade Facilitation*