



Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade – ARTNeT

An open network to build capacity in evidence-based trade, investment and related policies

Challenge

International trade has long been recognized as an effective engine of growth and development and has contributed to lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty in the Asia-Pacific region over the past two decades. Yet not everyone has benefitted equally, and Asia-Pacific developing countries face challenges in tapping the potential of international trade and investment to achieve the SDGs. To overcome these challenges, applied research on trade and investment is essential, for example to identify priority sectors, formulate promotion strategies, assess past initiatives and propose appropriate policies to be incorporated into national sustainable development strategies. However, research capacity to support evidence-based policymaking in developing countries is limited and communication among researchers, analysts and policymakers remains weak and ineffective. Both result in a lack of integration of trade and investment policies in national development strategies, leading trade and investment to make a suboptimal contribution to sustainable development.

Towards a Solution

The Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade (ARTNeT) was set up by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in 2005 to increase the quality and quantity of relevant research in the region in the areas of trade, investment, integration and development. It aimed to achieve these objectives by more effectively harnessing the available research capacity and developing additional capabilities to build trade and investment as key means to implement SDG 17. ARTNeT operates under three pillars: (i) producing demand-driven and home-grown research on trade-related policy issues; (ii) building research capacity of institutions in least-developed countries; and (iii) disseminating knowledge and information to key stakeholders and facilitating interaction among them. ESCAP provides the Secretariat and online platform for the network.

Since its establishment, ARTNeT has facilitated partnerships among developing countries in terms of pursuing shared capacity development objectives and broker scalable solutions and analyses to developing countries where they are most needed and also to enable the harmonization of trade and investment policies to enhance regional competitiveness. ARTNeT takes an innovative approach to fostering South-South and triangular cooperation. By gathering research capacity within and beyond the region, ARTNeT incubates joint policy research projects in an efficient and effective way. For example, a recent project, Supporting Equitable Economic Development in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), brought officials and researchers from these countries together to conduct collaborative research. The results will contribute to managing the use and assessing the impact of non-tariff measures, as well as geographic impact, in the context of



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effective and development-oriented response in trade policy areas. By promoting equitable economic development in ASEAN, ARTNeT helped build strong institutions, narrow development gaps, and further contribute to sustainable growth in the region.

ARTNeT initiates its research programme based on a participatory process. The ARTNeT Secretariat surveys its members on relevant topics, including prioritization of research issues and communication methods. Thematic multi-stakeholder consultative meetings are held periodically to provide research institutions and policymakers with an opportunity to share information, data and ideas, review and refine research findings, and examine recommendations. The results from consultative meetings were used in four phases of the research programme. During phase I, ARTNeT research focused on trade facilitation beyond the negotiations, including customs valuation and implementation of related World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements. Phase II focused on policy coherence, multilateral trade liberalization and regional integration. Phase III focused on drivers of competitiveness and strategies for economic diversification for developing countries. In phase IV, the research priority was to support equitable economic development. Through cross-learning and cross-fertilization of ideas, ARTNeT maintained its centrality in policy advocacy in Asia-Pacific.

Technical assistance and capacity building are at the heart of ARTNeT's work, ensuring the assimilation and long-term sustainability of quality policy research. To date, more than 110 workshops and training sessions have been organized for researchers and policymakers, particularly from least-developed countries. Since 2014, ARTNeT has collaborated with its institutional members, including India's Centre for WTO Studies, to train senior policymakers and researchers in Myanmar. The training built in-house capacity for formulating trade policy in the context of WTO obligations. Similarly, in collaboration with Thailand's International Institute for Trade and Development (ITD), ARTNeT designed and delivered a series of capacity-building sessions on trade negotiations for officials from low-income countries in the region. The workshops enhanced

government officials' trade negotiation skills and techniques and created a network of trade negotiators for exchanging views and experiences.

ARTNeT research and training are demand-driven and forward-looking. ARTNeT projects lead to the formulation of development strategies that enhance the competitiveness of developing countries, including economic diversification, structural transformation, infrastructure and services (relevant for targets under SDGs 3, 5, 8, 9, 10 and 17). For example, in 2017, ARTNeT, in collaboration with ITD and the Ministry of Commerce of Thailand, organized the course, E-commerce and Emerging Digital Trade Agenda, for officials from least-developed countries. The training contributed to the development of foundation-level competencies on e-commerce policy research and design, including how to promote e-commerce for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups.

The outreach of ARTNeT extends beyond the region. Connecting over 1,500 researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders, as well as over 70 institutional members across 23 countries, ARTNeT fosters South-South and triangular cooperation on intellectual exchange and inspires international solidarity in efforts to address obstacles in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By providing its Secretariat to the network as part of its trade and investment work programme, ESCAP has helped guarantee the sustainability of project impact. Sustainability is underpinned by the availability of an online platform (artnet.unescap.org) that provides free access to knowledge products and resources and fosters interactive exchange among members and non-members. Thanks to its effective operation, ARTNeT was included in the 2016 and 2017 Global Go To Think Tank Index reports, published by the Think Tank and Civil Societies Program of the University of Pennsylvania.

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Project name: Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade (ARTNeT)

Countries/Regions: Asia and the Pacific region

Nominated by: UNESCAP

Sustainable Development Goal target(s): Most targets under goals 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 17

Supported by: Trade, Investment Innovation Division (TIID) of UNESCAP

Implementing entities: UNESCAP, TIID through the ARTNeT Secretariat

Project status: Ongoing

Project period: 2005 – Present

URL of the practice: <https://artnet.unescap.org>