

Unlocking the Potential of Data: A case study

Data dissemination practices in Sri Lanka Customs

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17 September 2020

CONTENTS

Why Open Data?

- The benefits

Data Dissemination Practice of Sri Lanka Customs

- Key problems

Why Open Data?

The benefits

Benefits of improved access to data collected by the government

DATA that is...



ACCURATE



COMPLETE



TIMELY



ACCESSIBLE



DISAGGREGATED

Enables:

1. Critical evaluation of project alternatives & policy interventions
2. Design of evidence-based policy
3. Businesses make better decisions
4. Researchers/ academia to develop high quality research outputs & insights
5. Government to becomes accountable for better performance

Data collected by government agencies is a **public good**

DATA is...



“Non-rival”

Can be used by many at once for different purposes without diminishing its value



“Greater usage creates greater value”

Similar to public investments in tangible goods: greater usage determines the return to investment

Providing open and free access to data

ensures **higher returns** for the **investment made by public authorities**

using public funds to collect data

Countries around the world are increasingly realising the value of improving access to data

“Official statistics are key inputs for decision making and policy intervention and become public assets for conducting research both in the public and private sphere.

Recognizing the potential of data, the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, Government of India, has decided to provide free of costs, single point access and support to microdata of census and surveys conducted by the Ministry to Students/researchers/Institutes in India and abroad through its National Repository from 1st April 2019”

- Government of India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

Excerpts from the Office Memorandum issued by the Government of India regarding the provision of free online access to microdata

Trade Data Dissemination Practice of Sri Lanka Customs

A Case Study

Sri Lanka Customs is the primary source of trade statistics in Sri Lanka

What type of trade statistics are in possession of the SLC?

Import and export statistics

- At the most disaggregated level (HS 8 digits)
- Yearly and monthly data
- Csv format

Other useful data

- Imports that came through preferential trade agreements
- Imports that came under various other tax exemption schemes (e.g. TIEP)

Ease of access to Trade Statistics is important

For Formulation and evaluation of a Trade Policy

- Trade Agreements
e.g. feasibility studies, negotiation positions, monitoring impact
- National and Sectoral Policies & Strategies
e.g. National Export Strategy, Sectoral strategies on apparel, coconut & rubber products
- Understand impact of COVID and shifts in demand/ supply & plan recovery

Growing business opportunities: Sri Lankan firms

- Trade Agreements
e.g. assess impact on their sector, own firms
- Identify business opportunities and challenges
e.g. demand trends, key markets, level of competition
- Understand impact of COVID and shifts in demand/ supply & plan recovery

Investment & market access Foreign buyers/ investors

- To identify business opportunities in Sri Lanka

Countries and international agencies across the world are providing free online access to trade data

International databases that provide free online access to trade data

Organisation	Platform	Disaggregated product level data	Download in CSV format?	Visualise data using analytical tools?	Free of charge?	Type of data available	Availability of Sri Lanka's trade data	No. of countries that provide data up to 2019
United Nations	UN COMTRADE comtrade.un.org	HS 6-digit level	✓	✓	✓	Annual	2017	59
						Monthly	Feb 2012	96
World Bank	WITS Database wits.worldbank.org	HS 6-digit level	✓	✓	✓	Annual	2017	59
International Trade Centre (ITC)	Trade Map www.trademap.org	HS 8 to 10 digits	✓	✓	✓	Annual ¹	2017	96

Data availability as of 03rd June 2020

Source: ITC Trade Map, World Bank – WITS Database and UN COMTRADE

India : free online access to trade data

← → ↻ ⓘ Not secure | commerce-app.gov.in/eidb/default.asp

 **GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**
Ministry of Commerce & Industry
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE 

EXPORT IMPORT DATA BANK Ver

Exports

- [Commodity-wise](#)
- [Chapter-wise all commodities](#)
- [Commodity-wise all Countries](#)
- [Commodity x Country-wise](#)
- [Country-wise](#)
- [Country-wise all Commodities](#)
- [Region-wise](#)
- [Region-wise all Countries](#)
- [Region-wise all Commodities](#)
- [Predefined Group of countries](#)
- [Customised Group of countries](#)



Imports

- [Commodity-wise](#)
- [Chapter-wise all commodities](#)
- [Commodity-wise all Countries](#)
- [Commodity x Country-wise](#)
- [Country-wise](#)
- [Country-wise all Commodities](#)
- [Region-wise](#)
- [Region-wise all Countries](#)
- [Region-wise all Commodities](#)
- [Predefined Group of countries](#)
- [Customised Group of countries](#)

Total Trade
[Country-wise](#)
[Top n countries](#)

Data available 1996-1997 to 2018-2019(Apr-Sep) Last data updated on 16/11/2018 [Feedbacks/ Suggestions](#) [Help](#) Data Source : [DGCI&S, Kolkata](#)

NOTE:

1. India's Imports/Exports include re-imports/re-exports also.
2. Imports/Exports from unspecified country includes
 - (a) Trade transactions where country of origin/consignment/destination is not specified or invalid country codes have been assigned in the customs declaration.
 - (b) All re-imported/re-exported transactions which fulfill condition (a) above.
3. Trade figures in US\$ from the year 2006-07 onwards are addition of monthly US\$ figures.
4. Where periods are not mentioned with year, it is yearly data from April to March e.g. 2012-2013 means Apr'2012 to Mar'2013


HOME

Disclaimer:
The data referenced in the system do not have any legal sanctity and is for general reference only.
The user may like to verify official publications for DGCI&S, Kolkata for any further reference

Source: Department of Commerce India: Export Import DataBank (<http://commerce-app.gov.in/eidb/>)

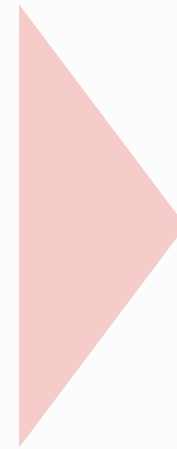


Sri Lanka Custom's data dissemination policy: **Key problems**

1. Information on available data & procedure to access the data is not published

No information provided on SLC website on:

- Type of data available with SLC
- Price of purchasing the data
- Time taken to provide the data
- Contact persons
- Procedure/application form to obtain data



Regulation number 20 - Right to Information Act

Mandates government agencies to **proactively disclose information** relating to available data and its accessibility to the general public **including the fees to be charged** if these publications are sold.

Sri Lanka Custom's data dissemination policy: **Key problems**

2. Trade data is not provided free of charge

Data request	Cost (Rs.)
Import and export data for an HS code as given in the customs return for a month and cumulative	100 for a table of page
Imports or exports by commodity for a country for a specific period	110 per page subject to minimum of 700
Summary of trade statistics by Chapter (Imports/Exports)	310 per table
Customs returns for any month	
Hard Copy	21,000
Soft Copy	20,000
Import statistics by country for a specific period	
Soft Copy	12,000
Hard Copy	13,000
Export statistics by country for a specific period	
Soft Copy	8,500
Hard Copy	9,000
Photo Copy (Each copy)	70

Source: Sri Lanka Customs



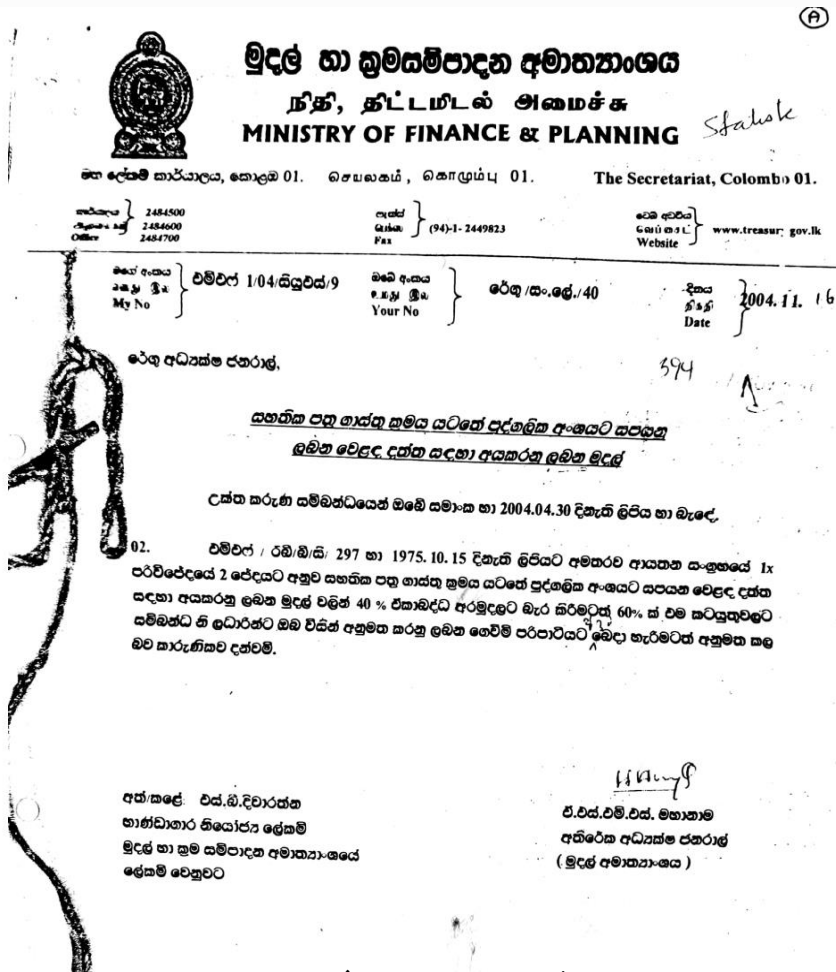
Sri Lanka Custom's data dissemination policy: **Key problems**

3. The process is manual, and data is not accessible online

- Data is not accessible online
- Payments cannot be made online
- Must visit the SLC headquarters to obtain the data

Sri Lanka Custom's data dissemination policy : Key problems

4. The incentive structure in place acts as a disincentive to provide free online access to data



This letter sets out that SLC is granted permission by the Ministry of Finance, as per the Establishment Code Chapter IX, para 2, to sell trade data and split the proceeds as follows: 40% allocated for the consolidated fund of the Ministry of Finance and the remaining 60% distributed at the discretion of the Director General of SLC amongst the officers involved in compiling the trade data set

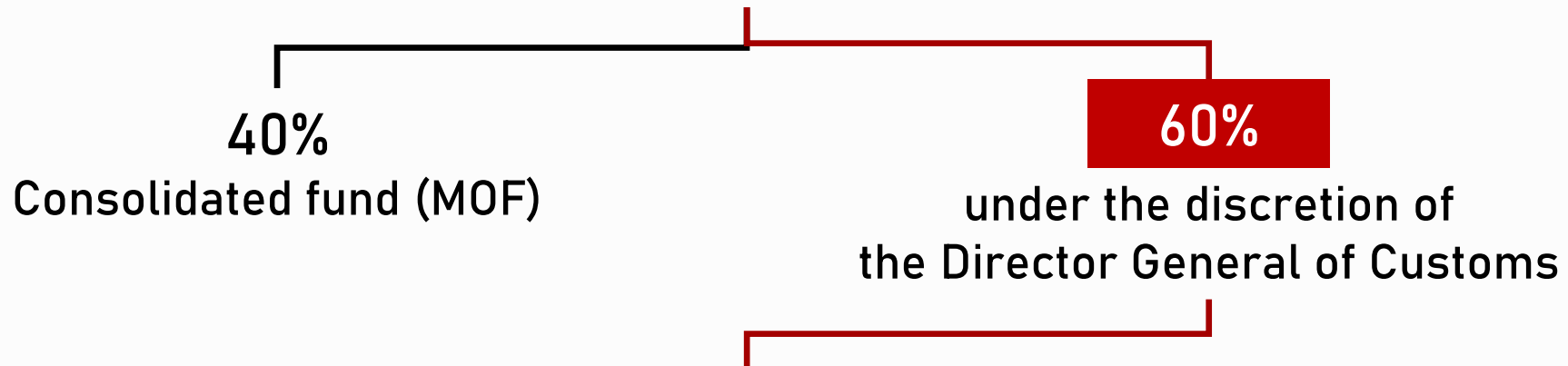
- Ministry of Finance
Letter dated 16th November 2004



Sri Lanka Custom's data dissemination policy: **Key problems**

4. The incentive structure in place acts as a disincentive to provide free online access to data

Where are the charges for trade statistics going?



Total earnings of the sale of import and export statistics (2017):

LKR 8.6 Million

LKR 5.16 Million

distributed among the “officers involved in the process”?

An example of **privatisation of a public good**

Privatisation of data

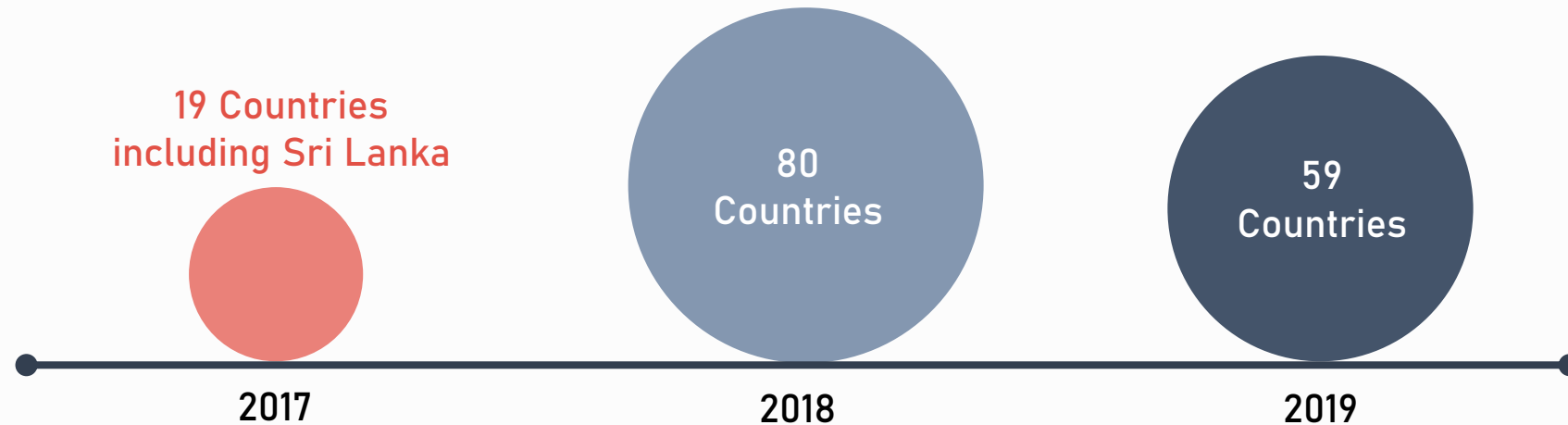
Statistics collected with public funds are being used by public officials to earn money

Sri Lanka lagging behind and missing opportunities

Data outdated

Yearly data availability on the UN COMTRADE of all countries/territories featured in the platform

139 Countries had more updated data when compared to Sri Lanka in the UN COMTRADE database

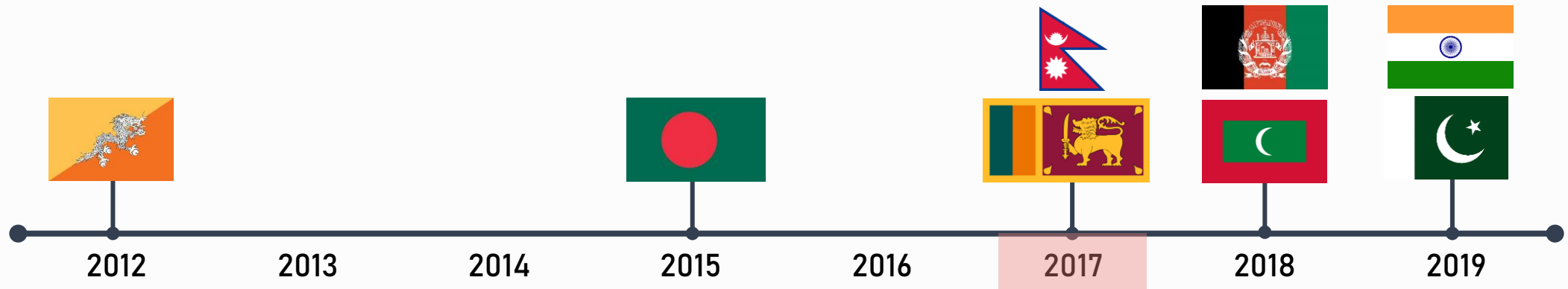


Data availability as of 03rd June 2020
Source: UN COMTRADE (<https://comtrade.un.org/data/da>)

Sri Lanka lagging behind and missing opportunities

Data outdated

Comparison of yearly data availability on the UN COMTRADE platform: South Asian Countries



Data availability as of 03rd June 2020
Source: UN COMTRADE (<https://comtrade.un.org/data/da>)

Sri Lanka lagging behind and missing opportunities

Data outdated

Comparison of monthly data availability on the UN COMTRADE platform: South Asian Countries



* Monthly data not available for other South Asian Countries

Data availability as of 03rd June 2020

Source: UN COMTRADE (<https://comtrade.un.org/data/da>)

EDB Trade Data Platform : A step in the right direction

Improves access to trade data by...



1. Reducing cost

EDB: Rs. 2,500 annual registration¹

SLC: varies based on data requirement²



2. Reducing access time³

EDB: 2-3 days

SLC: 3-6 days



3. Availability of data online

SLC does not provide data online



4. Providing instructions to access data

SLC does not provide instructions to access its data

...but lags behind the best practices

1. Nominal registration fee must be paid

2. Manual registration system (Registration fee cannot be paid online)

Notes:

1. An annual registration fee of Rs. 2,500 provides unlimited access to data on the platform.
2. e.g.: Import and export data for all products for a specific requested period costs Rs. 20,000.
3. Time frames are based on attempts made by Verité Research to get access to the data.

Source: EDB and SLC

EDB data platform has helped

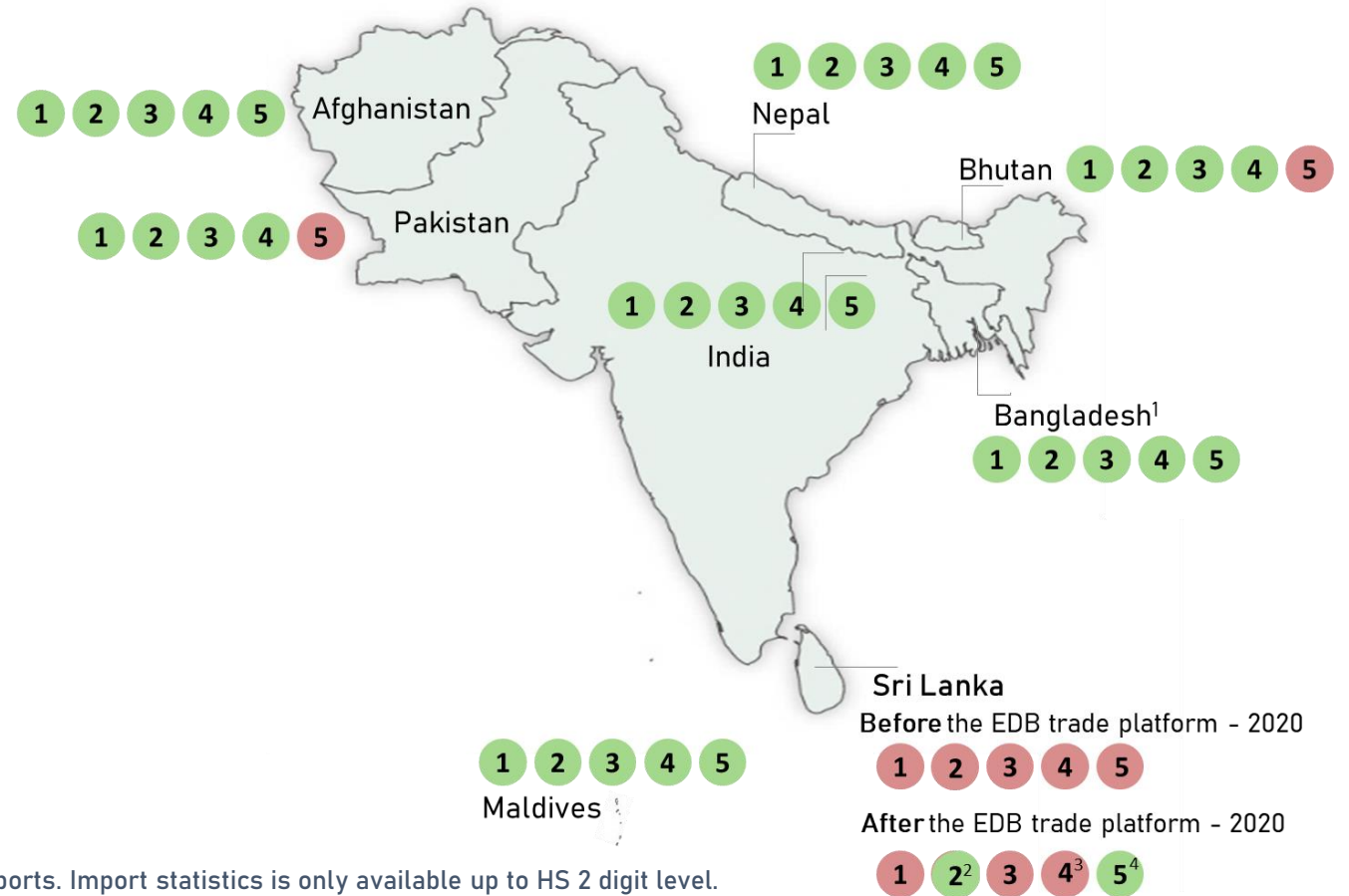
reduce the wide gap between Sri Lanka and rest of South Asia

Can trade data be obtained...

1. Free of charge?
2. Online?
3. With no registration?
4. With immediate access?
5. In an editable format?

Yes

No



Notes:

1. Up to date trade statistics at disaggregated level (HS 8 digit level) is available only for exports. Import statistics is only available up to HS 2 digit level.
2. EDB provides data online, SLC does not.
3. The EDB platform provides immediate access following the initial registration. But the registration cannot be done online, it involves visiting the EDB Offices.
4. The EDB recently introduced the ability to download data through the EDB platform in CSV format.

Source: Department of Commerce India: Export Import DataBank; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics: External Trade Statistics Tables; Export Promotion Bureau Bangladesh: Export Data; Department of Customs Nepal: Statistics; Maldives Customs Service: Statistics; Ministry of Finance Bhutan: Bhutan Trade Statistics; National Statistic and Information Authority Afghanistan: Statistics; Export Development Board Sri Lanka. (Data availability as of 03rd June 2020)

Considering the clear benefits of maintaining an open data policy and the fact that the usefulness of these statistics increases with more people having access,

It is important that government agencies such as SLC take proactive actions (like the EDB) and the rest of South Asia

Ensure that trade data is...

available online,

free of charge,

easy to access,

regularly updated,

& shared with international organisations

in a timely manner

Policy Note

Opening up trade data: The benefits to Sri Lanka

Access through:
www.veriteresearch.org/publications

OPENING UP TRADE DATA

The Benefits to Sri Lanka

This policy note unpacks the importance of free and online access to trade data and highlights the problems of SLC's restrictive data dissemination policy. These hurdles, which must be resolved, have caused Sri Lanka to lag behind regional peers that have made considerable attempts to make their trade data free and easily accessible.

International trade data are the foundational basis when formulating trade policies and assessing their impacts. Trade data also assist stakeholders to evaluate the impact of trade policies at the national, sectoral, and individual firm level, and enhance the capacity of firms engaging in international trade to make sound business decisions. Given the importance of trade data, countries and international organisations across the world are making these statistics freely available on online platforms. In addition, countries are increasingly providing product-wise disaggregated statistics (for instance, at the Harmonized System [HS] 8-digit or 10-digit levels) as well as in a more easily downloadable and editable format (CSV) that makes data analysis easier.

Unfortunately, when compared to regional and international best practice, Sri Lanka is failing to use trade data effectively for the benefit of the country. This is due to Sri Lanka Custom's (SLC) [the agency responsible for collecting trade statistics] restrictive data dissemination policy, which limits access to these types of statistics by not making them freely available on an online downloadable platform. This policy has negative spill over effects. SLC's reluctance to share trade data on Sri Lanka also restricts other government agencies attempting to make trade statistics free and accessible online. Moreover, it results in outdated statistics being featured on data platforms run by international organisations.

IMPORTANCE OF HAVING FREE ONLINE ACCESS TO TRADE DATA

Trade statistics are an important source of information that facilitates evidence-based trade policy and business decisions. This data enables policy makers and businesses to diagnose problems and identify and respond to opportunities.

The following are some specific examples of the importance of open trade data:

Formulation and evaluation of a trade policy

From a policy maker's point of view, ease of access to sound data aids in making timely and evidence-based national policy decisions on international trade. It allows government agencies overlooking different trade sectors (e.g. agriculture, pharmaceuticals) to access data relevant to their respective sectors, reducing acquisition costs, redundancy, and overheads.

Free access to data is also important in terms of keeping the public informed on significant trade policy issues. In addition, with open data, businesses, universities and think tanks can more easily identify problems that need solving and better engage with the government on trade policy decisions. For instance, in Sri Lanka, there is currently a huge outcry for an inclusive trade policy. However, the capacity to develop an inclusive policy is limited in the absence of free access to trade data for all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector, academia, and government.

A key area in which timely trade data is vital is the negotiation of trade agreements. Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) are an important trade policy instrument, and the lack of feasibility studies on their impact is a key concern. Trade statistics play an important role in assessing the costs and benefits of such agreements both pre- and post-entry.

Commercial use

Ease of access to trade statistics will help local businesses to innovate and expand. For instance, exporters need to refer to trade data when researching potential export markets and products, specifically to assess the potential market size, identify untapped markets and assess the level of competition in the market. Also, given that imports are a valuable source of inputs to domestic production, the ability of producers, through trade statistics, to evaluate sources

Thank You

Contact details:
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