

BANGLADESH



THE CHALLENGE

Traders using Bhomra Land Port, Bangladesh's border crossing with India's populous West Bengal region, often faced lengthy delays in exporting and importing goods.

Inefficient manual, paper-based processes created a bottleneck, ramping up time and cost for traders and undermining the country's economic competitiveness. Increased traffic since the opening of the Padma Bridge in 2022 also added to the congestion at a crossing already running at full capacity.

By connecting the country's relatively underdeveloped southwest region to the capital Dhaka, the Padma Bridge is set to have a significant impact on boosting inclusive economic growth and development. However, fulfilling untapped potential requires additional investment in regional infrastructure, including digitalising Bhomra Land Port.

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Md. Zillur Rahman Chowdhury, Chairman, BLPA

WHAT WE DID

The Alliance, through its implementing partner Swisscontact, worked with the Bangladesh Land Port Authority (BLPA) and the Bhomra C&F Agents Association, which represents around 400 clearing and forwarding personnel, to create an ePort management system, alleviating many of the obstacles hindering the port's potential.

Key achievements include:

1. **Introducing** an e-payment system to facilitate online payments, eliminating the requirement to pay in person at designated offices.
2. **Implementing** an automated port-billing feature, streamlining bill generation to improve speed and accuracy.
3. **Enabling** traders and C&F agents to track consignments online, eliminating the need for constant physical contact to verify truck movements.
4. **Creating** unprecedented levels of trust through facilitating extensive engagement, training and workshops involving BLPA officials, C&F agents, and importers/exporters.
5. **Building** a successful template system for roll-out to the country's 22 other land ports.

“When we look at technologically advanced ports in first-world countries, we see a seamless process from scanning to payment, with minimal human intervention. This project represents the first step in our journey toward achieving that level of sophistication.”

D M Atiqur Rahman,
Joint Secretary, Member (Traffic)
& BLPA Project Director

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THE IMPACTS

The digitalisation of Bhomra Land Port is streamlining operations, and enhancing the efficiency of trade activities. C&F agents and traders are now able to clear more consignments in less time, while port officials report reductions in errors and paperwork. Both parties also report greater trust and understanding of their respective challenges. Some of the key benefits include:

- **Time Savings:** The digital system has led to faster processing, increasing the capacity of BLPA officials to handle more shipments, while allowing C&F agents to clear more consignments.
- **Increased Transparency:** Digitalising processes has increased transparency and accountability, bolstering trust generated through numerous engagements during project implementation.
- **Improved Efficiency:** Automating key processes such as billing and

documentation allows port staff to manage their workloads more effectively, enabling faster turnover and freeing up valuable time and resources.

- **Stronger Public-Private Collaboration:** The Alliance's public private partnership approach has fostered collaboration between government officials and private sector stakeholders, building a foundation for future cooperation in port management and creating a blueprint for a rollout to the country's other land ports.

The Bhomra ePort management system is enhancing regional and national growth, positioning Bangladesh to become more competitive in international trade by reducing delays, cutting costs, and ensuring transparency, setting the stage for future economic growth and further expansion of digital solutions across the country's land ports.

“Working with computers and inputting data digitally has significantly reduced my workload compared to the previous manual process. Now, I can release a truck within one minute, whereas it used to take five minutes.”

Mohammed Nazrul Islam, BPLA Traffic Inspector

“The results of this project are already evident and far-reaching. It has made our work more efficient and established a new culture of transparency and accountability. Bhomra Port now sets the standard for future projects. The increased transparency, economic growth, and accountability achieved here are goals we are now working to replicate in other land ports.”

Dr Md. Harunur Rashid, Director (Traffic) and Deputy Director, BLPA



TRADER STORY 1

A.S.M. Maksud Khan, Member Secretary of the Bhomra C&F Agents Association, is also an entrepreneur who set up three companies trading in local goods, supporting the local and national economy.

His businesses specialise in trading a wide range of goods, including rice bran oil, jute items, and garments. Employing 17 people and working almost exclusively with MSMEs, the former social worker regards his businesses as essential components for economic development.

Maksud Khan, who has held many senior positions in the C&F Agents Association, has witnessed its growth into a network of around 600-700 people. He regards participation in the Bhomra Land Port digitalisation project as a pivotal moment for the association, with its members experiencing immediate, positive gains.

“C&F agents are already benefiting from the Bhomra e-Port management system. Previously, manual processes led to frequent errors, causing operational delays. Now, digital inputs reduce human error, saving time and cutting down on paperwork. With the new system, C&F agents can clear more consignments in less time.”

He also says the Alliance public-private partnership approach was crucial to success, emphasising the public-private dialogues (PPDs) and related project events organised by implementing partner Swisscontact.

“Swisscontact organised multiple PPDs where government and private sector representatives could share their views and address challenges faced by the business community. I participated in several PPDs, offering my insights as a representative of the association. The project team also conducted training sessions and workshops on basic digital literacy and the Bhomra e-port management system. Our staff were eager to learn, as these skills are essential for adapting to the new digital system.”

Looking ahead, Maksud is optimistic about the future of the port and its readiness to take full advantage of the increased trade opportunities following the opening of the Padma Bridge, which has eased access to the southwest region.



TRADER STORY 2

Like many MSMEs, KHL Exim Limited, an export-importer business established in 2011, lacked the expertise to handle clearance and forwarding at Bhomra Land Port. This changed in 2018, when the company obtained a C&F licence, enabling it to reduce its costs significantly and improving its competitiveness.

Company founder, Md. Sadikur Rahman, details how the new ePort system has already allowed him to double consignment clearance for his clients, trading in stone and perishable goods such as green chilies, onions, garlic, and ginger.

The company survived the COVID-19 pandemic and is firmly in expansion mode, employing 10 people from the local area and handling clearance for 10-15 companies.

“I was actively involved in the project from the start, working closely with the implementing team to provide input to business process analysis and system design. I also attended multiple meetings involving BLPA and the C&F Association - these engagements have fostered a strong collaborative relationship between us.”

Mr Sadikur participated in several project events, engaging with high-level government officials to provide feedback and suggestions.

“Before the new system, we were clearing about 5 to 10 consignments weekly. The process was documentation-heavy, and we frequently had to communicate for truck tracking, which often resulted in errors due to handwritten entries, creating further challenges. Since adopting the e-Port system, we have been able to increase our capacity to handle 15-20 consignments weekly, while significantly reducing errors and improving efficiency.”

His commitment to change is further reflected in the level of engagement of his employees, five of whom underwent training in the digitalised system, acclimatising them to their new trading environment.

Looking ahead, with further complementary infrastructure improvements at Bhomra, KHL Exim expects further business growth and increasing revenues. Mr Rahman says the new processes will play a key role in growing the regional and national economy.

HOST ORGANISATIONS



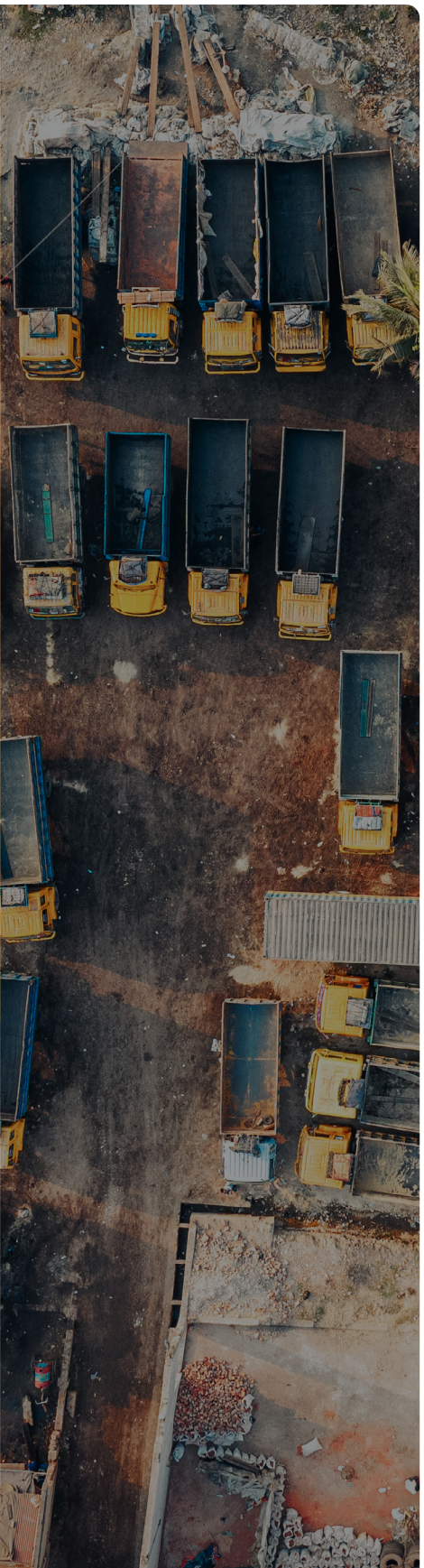
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