

TRADE FACILITATION WORK OF THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK IN SOUTH ASIA

1. Introduction to your organization's work on trade facilitation (scope, geographical focus and importance relative to other focus areas)

The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) assistance in the area of trade facilitation aims to address key non-tariff barriers to trade in South Asia, including inefficient customs and land border procedures, as well as inefficiencies in port operations and logistics performance. In March 2014, the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) countries adopted the SASEC Trade Facilitation Strategic Framework (TFSF) 2014-2018, developed with ADB support, which lays out four key priority TF areas for necessary action: (i) customs modernization/ harmonization; (ii) standards and conformity assessment strengthening; (iii) cross-border facilities improvement; and (iv) through transport facilitation. Cross-cutting thrusts include capacity building and strengthening of institutional mechanisms relevant to trade facilitation.

2. Ongoing national/ subregional/ regional trade facilitation programmes/ activities in the Asia-Pacific region

ADB's TF assistance to SASEC covers three broad areas, namely: (i) **SASEC Trade Facilitation Program** (STFP) loans and grants; (ii) **provision of technical assistance** (TA) and support for capacity building and discussion platforms; and (iii) support for **implementation of the SASEC Trade Facilitation Strategic Framework** (TFSF).

The STFP, approved by ADB in November 2012, is under implementation in Bangladesh (\$21 M), Bhutan (\$11.67 M) and Nepal (\$15 M), and its outputs include: (i) modern and effective customs management;¹ (ii) streamlined and transparent processes and procedures, covering enhancing automated customs management and support for national single windows (NSW); and (iii) improved services and information for traders, and formation of national TF committees and electronic trade portals for information access.

ADB has mobilized TA funding to support SASEC TF activities from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR).² Strategic partnerships have been forged with WCO and UNSECAP, strengthening many capacity-building and knowledge-sharing activities in priority TF areas (e.g., SAFE Framework, AEO, TRS, BPA, TTFMM, SCBTM, ECTS, SPS/ TBT).³

The four priority areas under the SASEC TFSF were identified by member countries, based on a stock take of existing TF initiatives and consultative process. The TFSF follows a two-track process where subregional issues of common interest are discussed at SASEC subregional level, while individual countries take action at a national level in line with their unique circumstances and needs.

3. Forthcoming projects and activities for 2015

¹ Includes accession to and implementation of the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC), as well as implementation of WCO's Framework of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade (SAFE Framework).

² \$1.5 M country TF support each, for Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, and \$1.5 M for regional TF activities, for a total of \$6 M.

³ AEO - Authorized Economic Operator; TRS - Time Release Study; BPA - Business Process Analysis; TTFMM - Transport and Trade Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism; ECTS - Electronic Cargo Tracking System; SPS/ TBT - Sanitary/ Phytosanitary measures, Technical Barriers to Trade.

Forthcoming SASEC TFSF activities include:

- a. Customs: Implementation of the SASEC Customs Subgroup (SCS) Work Plan covering (i) simplifying/ expediting border formalities (accession to RKC, SAFE/ AEO, business process re-engineering and documentation); (ii) increasing ICT application (involving automation of customs processes); and (iii) developing national single windows (NSW). The SCS Work Plan comprises (i) national projects involving assistance to meet obligations of TF conventions, including introduction of new systems and relevant capacity building; and (ii) subregional projects involving joint training and studies for simpler border formalities, automated systems and NSW.
- b. Sanitary/ Phytosanitary Standards (SPS): ADB and UNESCAP to jointly organize the Second SASEC Trade Facilitation Week, in Bangkok (December 2014) focusing on SPS/ TBT and standards, to (i) launch a SASEC SPS diagnostics study (national and regional); (ii) develop a sub-strategy and work plan (possibly to be implemented through a SASEC SPS Subgroup).
- c. Transport Facilitation: ADB and UNESCAP to jointly organize a workshop to developing a strategy for transport facilitation in SASEC, in Bangkok (December 2014) to agree on a sub-strategy and action plan for transport facilitation, (possibly to be implemented by a SASEC Transport Facilitation Subgroup), including ways to move forward the SAARC motor vehicle agreement. ADB is supporting the conduct of a feasibility study for the pilot implementation of the electronic cargo tracking system (ECTS) along the Kolkata-Phuenthsholing corridor.
- d. Cross-Border Facilities Improvement: ADB and Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal are developing options for the second round of investment/ program support to TF reforms and infrastructure investments. This second phase support has been included in the country operations business plans of Bhutan and Nepal, where it will include establishment of inland container depots (ICDs), and strengthening of NSW and automation measures.

4. Trade Facilitation-related performance monitoring framework (if any)

Results of the second BPA exercise to develop the Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism (TTFMM) will be taken up at the SASEC TFTWG in 2015. The TTFMM, which commenced in November 2013, combines the BPA methodology with time-cost-distance and time-release methodologies to produce reliable indicators for measuring TF in SASEC.

5. Recommendations and suggestions for enhancing cooperation and possible joint activities

Enhanced knowledge generation and sharing on urgent and emerging TF issues may be effectively pursued under the SASEC platform. Possibilities include (i) establishing partnerships with research institutions and think tanks in advancing the SASEC RCI agenda, including key TF areas; and (ii) broadening the scope of the SASEC web portal and other outreach programs, to better capture and share knowledge.

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