



Completion Report

Project Number: 47328-001
Technical Assistance Number: 8533
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Asia Regional Integration Center, Phase V

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TA Number, Country, and Name: TA 8533-REG: Asia Regional Integration Center, Phase V			Amount Approved: \$1,500,000.00	
			Revised Amount: N/A	
Executing Agency: Asian Development Bank (ADB)		Source of Funding: TASF-V and RCIF	Amount Undisbursed: \$170,022.95	Amount Utilized: \$1,329,977.05
TA Approval Date: 6 Dec 2013	TA Signing Date: N/A	Fielding of First Consultants: 14 Apr 2014	TA Completion Date Original: 31 May 2015 Actual: 31 Aug 2016	
			Account Closing Date Original: 31 May 2015 Actual: 28 Feb 2017	

Description. The Asia Regional Integration Center (ARIC) was established in 2006 as a one-stop knowledge and information portal on the progress of regional cooperation and integration (RCI) in Asia and the Pacific. The ARIC technical assistance (TA) aimed to (i) provide timely and relevant knowledge and information on RCI, (ii) facilitate economic monitoring and policy dialogue in the region, and (iii) support research on RCI. Specifically, the objectives of the Phase V of ARIC TA were to (i) analyze evolving RCI issues and generate innovative regional solutions to address them; (ii) improve the linkage of the RCI knowledge work among departments, and other knowledge units; and (iii) strengthen the subregional analysis across the region.

Expected Impact, Outcome, and Outputs. The expected impact of the TA was enhanced implementation of existing RCI initiatives and development of new ones by key stakeholders. The expected outcome was increased utilization of ARIC's RCI-related knowledge products by key stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific—namely, ADB's regional departments working and managing RCI initiatives, developing member countries, and RCI-related regional and subregional institutions. The planned outputs were (i) RCI-related knowledge products and events,¹ (ii) updated RCI databases with expanded country coverage, (iii) more informative and updated ARIC website², (iv) an RCI roundtable to serve as venue to discuss and share RCI knowledge and experiences, and (v) stronger horizontal support to improve RCI knowledge sharing with regional and other departments in ADB.

Delivery of Inputs and Conduct of Activities. The TA was implemented following the TA Design and Monitoring Framework and the TA Terms of References. Procurement of equipment and engagement of consulting services under the TA have been carried out in accordance with ADB's guidelines on the procurement and the use of consulting services, respectively. After TA completion, equipment, database subscription, and software applications purchased were either disposed or turned over to related TAs.³ Actual consulting services inputs utilized were 42.0 person-months for international consultants, 348.2 person-months for national consultants, and 3.6 person-months for resource persons. The international consultants provided background papers, while the national consultants provided administrative and technical support for the delivery of the TA outputs. The performance of the consultants engaged under this TA was satisfactory in general.⁴ The ADB team leader supervised the team, and managed the overall production of the TA's reports, with assistance from one economics officer and one administrative assistant. Overall, ADB's performance as executing agency was satisfactory.

Minor changes to the TA were made to meet the evolving needs of the TA and to ensure its effective implementation. The TA was extended twice to support the renewal of the TA's annual subscription to macroeconomic databases and statistical software license; 2016 ADB Trade Finance Survey; and preliminary research work for AEIR 2016. A minor change in implementation plan was also requested to increase the number of international consultants from one to two to prepare background papers for the AEIR 2016 theme chapter.

Evaluation of Outputs and Achievement of Outcome. Through the TA, ERCI published the last issue of the biannual *Asian Economic Integration Monitor* (AEIM) in November 2014 and the maiden issue of the annual *Asian Economic Integration Report* (AEIR) in December 2015, which replaced the AEIM. With the change in dissemination frequency of ERCI's flagship report from twice to once a year, only two reports instead of three were published. Nonetheless, preliminary research for AEIR 2016 theme chapter, including through commissioning of background papers, was also undertaken. In addition, the TA published 12 working papers on RCI, 15 issues of the RCI Chat (which replaced the RCI Information Pack), and 7 blog posts in the ARIC website.

¹ Includes the publication and dissemination of three issues of the Asian Economic Integration Monitor (AEIM), 15 issues of the RCI Information Pack, 10 working papers on RCI, and 10 RCI-related blogs.

² ARIC website: www.aric.adb.org

³ The related TAs include TA 9121-REG (Asian Economic Integration: Building Knowledge for Policy Dialogue), which takes on most of the outputs of TA 8533-REG, particularly the AEIR, Trade Finance Survey, and ARIC databases and website; TA 9077-REG (Enhancing Regional Capacity for Economic Surveillance and Financial Vulnerability Assessment), which aims to improve and expand the ADB's early warning system database and software; and TA 8655-REG (Facilitating Trade for Fragile and Landlocked States in the post-Bali Institutional Environment), which supports research on trade facilitation, the topic for AEIR 2017 theme chapter.

⁴ Performance evaluation of some consultants were not completed within the specified timeframe.

On RCI-related events, the TA organized the first ever annual ADB Conference on Economic Development (ACED) in Hong Kong, China in June 2016, of which the discussions and papers presented fed into the AEIR 2016 theme chapter on the role of foreign direct investment on economic development. The TA also conducted five RCI seminars and the launch of the AEIR 2015, and provided logistics support to the 2014 RCI Roundtable Conference on productivity. Internal workshops were held to gather comments on the preliminary and interim results of the AEIR 2015 and AEIR 2016. The TA's consultants also served as trainers for the use of ADB's early warning system software in September 2014 and October 2015 (Seoul) and June 2015 (Shanghai).

The TA provided research assistance to various background notes and presentations for ADB's senior management during regional policy dialogue and forums, including Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN+3, and Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). The TA expanded the country coverage of its Macroeconomic and Financial Database to include all 48 regional members of ADB. It also continued to update ADB's Early Warning System Database and expanded the country coverage to include India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. In 2015, updating of the Daily Market Watch and the trade and people movement components of the Regional Integration Database was automated. The ARIC website was redesigned in 2015 to make it mobile ready and consistent with the ADB's new branding toolkit. Social media (Twitter and Facebook) was used extensively to promote the TA's knowledge products and events.

The TA conducted the ADB Trade Finance Survey 2016, in collaboration with the Private Sector Operations Department (PSOD) and ADB Institute. With the aid of external partner organizations, the survey was disseminated to companies, banks, and providers of credit insurance, forfaiting, and factoring. The ADB Briefs on the survey results and their policy implications were completed in August 2016⁵ and widely disseminated by PSOD through various international events.

The AEIR 2015 has been downloaded 7,000 times as of end-December 2016. Immediately after the launch, the AEIR 2015 has garnered over 70 media citations and six interviews. The number of ARIC website visitors more than doubled to 411,796 in 2014–2016 from 2011–2013 (previous phase of ARIC TA). Current users are from around 216 countries and territories, serving growing information needs on RCI both within and outside the region. According to perception survey conducted among ARIC website users in January–February 2015, majority of respondents graded the website as useful and easy to use, with timely and relevant postings. The TA has been influential in producing and sharing RCI-related knowledge. This has been achieved through (i) dissemination of RCI-related publications in the region and globally; (ii) improvements of its RCI-related databases which allowed researchers and RCI practitioners to obtain data and information; and (iii) RCI seminars and conferences—in collaboration with renowned academic centers such as Hong Kong University (ACED 2016) and National University of Singapore (AEIR 2016)—which brought together researchers, policy makers, private sector representatives, and media to discuss salient RCI trends and policy issues. The TA also supported ADB's contribution to regional policy forums by providing data and technical support to ADB's senior management as well as staff's participation.

Overall Assessment and Rating. The TA is rated successful. The major outputs of the TA were completed. The AEIR and AEIR have been positioned as an informative, comprehensive, and unique publication on RCI progress and policy issues in the region. The TA has also provided effective support to various RCI research and ADB's contribution to regional policy dialogues and forums.

Major Lessons. The fast-changing global and regional economic landscape and associated challenges require constant follow-up research to better understand the evolution of RCI issues and generate relevant policy recommendations. Partnership with other regional partners and research institutions has been the most efficient and effective way of conducting the ADB Trade Finance Survey and organizing seminars and conferences on RCI along with disseminating ADB's RCI knowledge work. Consultation with and feedback from ADB's regional departments have been useful in shaping the TA's RCI knowledge products, particularly through inputs into the AEIR.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions. Given the success of this TA, we recommend to continue this kind of TA support with heightened focus on the knowledge service aspect in order to produce and disseminate high-quality RCI knowledge products to help policy makers and other stakeholders in promoting RCI further. The dissemination of the AEIR and other knowledge products produced under the TA could still be improved to reach a wider audience by further strengthening collaborations with RDs, capitalizing on social media networks, and beefing up the AEIR and ARIC email list. Regular blogs and infographics disseminated through the ARIC website and email blast could also help market these knowledge products.

TA = technical assistance.

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⁵ ADB. 2016. 2016 Trade Finance Gaps, Growth, and Jobs Survey. ADB Briefs No. 64. Manila.