

SOUTH ASIA SUBREGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION TRANSPORT AND TRADE FACILITATION INITIATIVES

A. Background and Introduction

1. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) promotes South Asian connectivity through its regional cooperation and integration (RCI) support for the region, characterized by a multipronged, multiphased approach comprising (i) national projects with subregional dimensions; (ii) subregional efforts through the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) program;¹ (iii) regional efforts through collaboration with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC);² and (iv) interregional coordination with the activities of the Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation program.³

2. **SASEC.** The SASEC program brings together Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka in a project-based partnership to promote regional prosperity by improving cross-border infrastructure connectivity for transport and energy, facilitating faster and less costly trade among member countries, developing industrial and economic corridors, and strengthening regional economic cooperation.

3. **SASEC strategic framework and implementation plan.** The SASEC Vision (endorsed in April 2017) and the SASEC Operational Plan, 2016–2025 (November 2016) lay out the member countries' strategic roadmap and have identified priority projects.⁴ The strategic roadmap envisages SASEC playing a pivotal role in Asia's growth story by generating synergies between the subregion's natural resources, industrial potential, and improved connectivity. Specifically, (i) natural resource-based industries in SASEC countries will be leveraged by tapping into latent industrial demand within the subregion; (ii) industry-to-industry links will be promoted to strengthen regional value chains and enhance the region's competitiveness; and (iii) trade and commerce of SASEC member countries will be expanded by providing access to regional and global markets through the development of subregional gateways and hubs. The SASEC Operational Plan identifies a total of 223 priority RCI projects across all sectors, worth an estimated \$122 billion, that will help achieve the SASEC Vision through coordinated and phased implementation. Of these 223 projects, 128 are in the transport sector, worth an estimated \$63 billion.

4. Since 2001, SASEC member countries have invested cumulatively over \$9.17 billion in 46 projects with a regional dimension that improve physical infrastructure, support reform processes, and build capacity in the priority areas of transport, trade facilitation, and energy.⁵ A significant

¹ Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal formed the South Asian Growth Quadrangle in 1996, which evolved into the SASEC partnership in 2001, with ADB assisting member countries to accelerate this economic cooperation initiative, and serving as SASEC Secretariat and lead financier. In May 2014, Maldives and Sri Lanka joined SASEC, followed by Myanmar in February 2017. <http://www.sasec.asia/>

² SAARC includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. SAARC aims to help develop South Asia member economies, promote collective self-reliance, and enhance social and cultural development. SASEC largely focuses transport infrastructure investment along the SAARC transport corridors 4 and 8. <http://www.saarc-sec.org/>

³ BIMSTEC comprises Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, and works to harness shared and accelerated growth through mutual cooperation in 15 different areas of common interest, drawing on regional resources and geographical advantages. <http://www.bimstec.org/>

⁴ ADB. 2017. *SASEC: Powering Asia in the 21st Century*. Manila. Publication pending; and ADB. 2016. *SASEC Operational Plan, 2016–2025*. Manila.

⁵ Of the total \$9.17 billion, ADB has financed \$5.61 billion, and member countries have provided counterpart funding of \$3.43 billion.

majority of these investments are in the transport sector (31 projects worth \$7.30 billion), followed by energy (11 projects worth \$1.33 billion), economic corridors (2 projects worth \$484 million), and trade facilitation (1 project worth \$48 million). The Bangladesh component of the overall SASEC portfolio comprises 13 projects worth over \$2.72 billion, of which ADB financing accounts for \$1.72 billion (Table 1).

Table 1: Regional Cooperation and Integration SASEC Projects in Bangladesh

	Project (Approval Year)	Status	ADB Financing (\$ million)	Project Scope
1	Chittagong Port Trade Facilitation Project (2004)	Closed 2013	31.0	The project improved the capacity of Chittagong Port's container terminal to meet international port security and environmental standards and lowered shipping and port charges, fostering more international trade. Major outputs: installed computerized container terminal management system, improved intra-port roads and bridges, and improved port area water quality.
2	Railway Sector Investment Program (Subproject 1) (2007)	Ongoing	130.0	This MFF promotes economic growth by improving performance of the railway sector. Organizational and policy reforms will be implemented, together with priority investments, to overcome capacity bottlenecks. Major outputs: doubling of 64 km of Tongi–Bhairab Bazar rail line; final detailed design of follow-on approved subprojects; re-rating study of the Jamuna Bridge; procuring rolling stock.
3	SASEC Information Highway Project (2007)	Ongoing	5.0	This regional project aims to make ICT more accessible, affordable, inclusive, sustainable, and useful to remote and rural communities, entrepreneurs, and research and training institutes in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal. Major outputs: installing fiber-optic regional networks to connect participating countries; developing 110 community e-centers to link to the regional networks; establishing a SASEC research and training network.
4	Bangladesh–India Electrical Grid Interconnection (2010)	Closed 2015	112.0	This project helped establish a cross-border interconnection between Bangladesh's western electrical grid and India's eastern electrical grid, facilitating electricity exchange between the two countries and addressing power shortages in Bangladesh. Major outputs: 500-MW HVDC power station constructed; 27-km of 400 kV transmission line constructed.
5	Subregional Transport Project Preparatory Facility (2010)	Ongoing	23.0	This technical assistance loan provides a facility to prepare RCI road and railway projects that will ensure project implementation readiness by funding feasibility studies, preparing detailed design, assisting with procurement and safeguards. Focus is on priority transport corridors in SRMTS, and corridors linking with BIMSTEC countries (e.g., the Asian Highway Network and the Trans-Asia Rail Network). These completed corridors will stimulate subregional trade and the Bangladesh economy. Major outputs: feasibility study and detailed design of RCI transport projects; RCI transport project implementation support.

	Project (Approval Year)	Status	ADB Financing (\$ million)	Project Scope
6	Railway Sector Investment Program—Tranche 2 (2011)	Closed 2016	150.0	This MFF promotes economic growth by improving performance of the railway sector. Organizational and policy reforms will be implemented, together with priority investments to overcome capacity bottlenecks. The second tranche of the investment program focuses on continued infrastructure rehabilitation. Major outputs: Tongi–Bhairab Bazar double track completed; signaling system Darsana–Ishurdi improved; yards rehabilitated, loops extended in the Darsana–Ishurdi–Sirajganj Bazar section.
7	Dhaka–Chittagong Expressway Public–Private Partnership Design Project (2012)	Ongoing	10.0	This project will develop a design for the Dhaka–Chittagong Expressway that is ready for financing under a PPP. It will assist the Government of Bangladesh in project implementation. Major outputs: feasibility study with different route alignment options; recommendations for the follow-on project; capacity development for PPP implementation; detailed engineering design and safeguard documents; transaction advisory services.
8	SASEC Road Connectivity Project (2012)	Ongoing	198.0	The project aims to increase road capacity of a major international trade corridor and enhance land port capacity, boosting the national economy, facilitating subregional cooperation, and increasing trade. Major outputs: upgrading about 110 km of the Dhaka–Northwest corridor by constructing four lanes in the Joydebpur–Chandra–Tangail–Hatikamrul Road; improving land ports at Benapole and Burimari, and strengthening the capacity of the road sector and the land port operations.
9	SASEC Trade Facilitation Program (2012)	Closed 2015	48.0	This regional program worked to increase trade, including intraregional trade, of SASEC countries by reducing or removing non-tariff barriers, specifically institutional, administrative, and technical barriers to trade in Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. Major outputs: modernizing and strengthening effective customs administration and management; developing streamlined and transparent trade processes and procedures; and improving services and information for private sector traders and investors.
10	SASEC Railway Connectivity: Akhaura–Laksam Double Track Project (2014)	Ongoing	505.0	This project aims to improve domestic and subregional trade flows and passenger movement both in the Dhaka–Chittagong railway corridor and with India, and through India, with Bhutan and Nepal. Major outputs: 72-km of new double-track line; signaling and interlocking modernized in 11 stations; 11 stations reconstructed; capacity development for Bangladesh Railway.
11	Second SASEC Bangladesh–India Electrical Grid Interconnection Project (2014)	Ongoing	120.0	This project will enable increased electricity import from India by upgrading the power transmission capacity of the existing grid interconnection between Bangladesh and India from 500 MW to 1,000 MW. Major outputs: installing additional HVDC back-to-back substation in Bheramara; constructing 12 km 230 kV transmission line; improving the capacity of the Bangladesh Power Grid Company.

	Project (Approval Year)	Status	ADB Financing (\$ million)	Project Scope
12	Railway Sector Investment Program–Tranche 4 (2016)	Ongoing	50.0	Tranche 4 will bridge the financing gap within the existing project scale and scope of ongoing subprojects. No additional civil works will be carried out.
13	SASEC Chittagong–Cox's Bazar Railway Project, Phase 1–Tranche 1 (2016)	Ongoing	301.0	This project will contribute to efficient and safe railway transport, improved subregional connectivity, and increased trade by upgrading the railway transport system along the Chittagong–Cox's Bazar Corridor, part of the Trans-Asia Railway network. Major outputs for Phase 1: 102-km Dohazari–Cox's Bazar railway corridor; strengthening the capacity of the railway sector in project management and implementation.

BIMSTEC = Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, HVDC = high-voltage direct current, km = kilometer, kV = kilovolt, MW = megawatts, MFF = multitranchise financing facility, PPP = public–private partnership, RCI = regional cooperation and integration, RHD = Roads and Highways Department, SASEC = South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation, SRMTS = SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study.

Source: Asian Development Bank.

B. Transport and Transport Facilitation: Progress and Future Directions

5. **Transport.** Under the SASEC transport sector, improving regional connectivity is fundamental to unlocking economies of scale and increasing competitiveness. Intraregional trade is constrained by poor physical connectivity, congested border-crossing points and ports, as well as weak logistics infrastructure and performance. With the advent of regional and global supply chains, a hefty premium is placed on moving goods rapidly, reliably, and cheaply through trade and transport facilitation and improved logistics results.

6. Transport infrastructure is the centerpiece of SASEC investment and is closely aligned with connectivity initiatives in SAARC and BIMSTEC. The 2017 overall SASEC portfolio of approved RCI projects lists 31 transport infrastructure investments across the subregion worth \$7.3 billion, of which 10 transport projects worth \$2.3 billion are underway or have been completed in Bangladesh alone.⁶ Several SASEC projects in Bangladesh and neighboring member countries are contributing to the development of SAARC Road Corridors 4 and 8 that are critical to improving subregional connectivity and enhancing cross-border trade. For example, the SASEC Road Connectivity Project is upgrading to four lanes approximately 7 kilometers (km) of road at the Dhaka–Northwest Corridor (Joydebpur–Chandra–Tangail–Elenga), as well as improving two land ports at Benapole and Burimari.⁷ To the north, tranche 1 of India's SASEC Road Connectivity Investment Program is upgrading about 300 km of the Kakarbhitta (Nepal)–Panitanki (India)–Fulbari (India)–Banglabandha (Bangladesh) road corridor.⁸ Bhutan's SASEC Transport, Trade Facilitation, and Logistics Project is enhancing the national highway between Phuentsholing and Chamkuna and providing equipment to border-crossing points to facilitate cross-border traffic and

⁶ Of the 10 ongoing or completed transport projects, 5 are in railways, 2 in roads, and 1 in port development. ADB financing accounts for \$1.43 billion.

⁷ ADB. 2012. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan and Administration of Loan and Technical Assistance Grant to the People's Republic of Bangladesh for the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Road Connectivity Project*. Manila (Loan 2949-BAN).

⁸ ADB. 2014. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Multitranchise Financing Facility to India for the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Road Connectivity Investment Program*. Manila (Loan 3118-IND).

transit of goods, services, and people.⁹ Also in Bhutan, the SASEC Road Connectivity Project is constructing the Pasakha–Phuentsholing access road and a mini dry port in Phuentsholing to ease congestion at the border-crossing point from India.¹⁰ In Nepal, the SASEC Roads Improvement Project is upgrading 115 km of roads from Narayanghat to Butwal,¹¹ and providing the 73-km alternate East–West Highway route via the Koshi river bridge, together with additional border feeder roads under the SASEC Road Connectivity Project.¹²

7. SASEC projects in Bangladesh also focus on improving rapid and efficient movement of vehicles, goods, and business from landlocked Bhutan and Nepal, and from India’s northeast region to the international ports of Chittagong and Mongla. For example, the Dhaka–Chittagong Expressway Public–Private Partnership Design Project has completed the feasibility study for this road section and is now preparing the detailed design.¹³ India’s SASEC Road Connectivity Investment Program is upgrading sections of Asian Highway 1 in Manipur to better link Imphal with Moreh, and the border with Myanmar. The SASEC railway sector further supports subregional connectivity through Bangladesh’s ongoing Railway Sector Investment Program,¹⁴ the SASEC Railway Connectivity Akhaura–Laksam Double Track Project,¹⁵ and the SASEC Chittagong–Cox’s Bazar Railway Project.¹⁶

8. **Future directions in transport.** Bangladesh is an active participant in the regular meetings of the SASEC Trade Facilitation and Transport Working Group, which recently met in February 2017 to update member countries’ priority projects detailed in the SASEC Operational Plan.¹⁷ A total of 35 priority RCI transport projects worth \$31 billion in the Operational Plan are to be undertaken in Bangladesh during 2016–2025,¹⁸ of which seven RCI investments worth over an estimated \$11 billion are included in the ADB pipeline for 2017–2019.¹⁹ These projects include a phased completion of the SASEC Dhaka–Northwest Corridor Project, which will extend the upgrading of road sections along this international trade corridor from Elenga through Hatikamural to Rangpur, and then further to the border-crossing points with India at both Burimari and

⁹ ADB. 2016. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan to the Kingdom of Bhutan for the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Transport, Trade Facilitation, and Logistics Project*. Manila (Loan 3421-BHU).

¹⁰ ADB. 2014. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan and Grant to the Kingdom of Bhutan for the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Road Connectivity Project*. Manila (Loan 3149-BHU).

¹¹ ADB. 2016. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan to Nepal for the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Roads Improvement Project*. Manila (Loan 3478-NEP).

¹² ADB. 2013. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan and Technical Assistance Grant to Nepal for the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Road Connectivity Project*. Manila (Loan 3012-NEP).

¹³ ADB. 2012. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan to the People’s Republic of Bangladesh for the Dhaka–Chittagong Expressway Public-Private Partnership Design Project*. Manila (Loan 2856-BAN).

¹⁴ ADB. 2006. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Multitranchise Financing Facility and Technical Assistance Grant to the People’s Republic of Bangladesh for the Railway Sector Investment Program*. Manila (Loan 0004-BAN).

¹⁵ ADB. 2014. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loans and Technical Assistance Grant to the People’s Republic of Bangladesh for the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Railway Connectivity: Akhaura–Laksam Double Track Project*. Manila (Loans 3169-BAN, 3170-BAN).

¹⁶ ADB. 2016. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Multitranchise Financing Facility and Technical Assistance Grant People’s Republic of Bangladesh: South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Chittagong–Cox’s Bazar Railway Project, Phase 1*. Manila (Loan 0094-BAN).

¹⁷ <http://www.sasec.asia/index.php?page=event&eid=230&url=sasec-tftwg-2017>

¹⁸ Of the 35 transport investments, 15 are planned in railways, 13 in roads, 3 in ports, 3 in air, and 1 on inland waterway development.

¹⁹ ADB. 2016. *Country Operations Business Plan: Bangladesh, 2017–2019*. Manila.

Banglabandha. Bangladesh railway networks will see continued improvements along sections of subregional importance under the SASEC Chittagong–Cox’s Bazar Railway Project, where rail connectivity will be extended to the border with Myanmar, as well as improving the Dhaka–Ishurdi corridor and extending this to the border with India. The Dhaka–Chittagong Railway Project will improve physical access to the port by converting the Dhaka–Chittagong section to dual gauge. As a result of significantly improved connectivity, the SASEC Chittagong Port Enhancement Project will strengthen the capacity of the seaport to handle increased trade by constructing new terminals and installing cargo-handling equipment and IT systems.

9. **Transport facilitation.** In support of the physical infrastructure investments underway across the SASEC subregion, and to address severe congestion at border-crossing points and ports, the Bangladesh–Bhutan–India–Nepal Motor Vehicle Agreement (BBIN MVA) was signed in Thimphu, Bhutan in June 2015. Ratification by all parties is anticipated in 2017. This groundbreaking MVA facilitates passenger, personal, and cargo vehicular cross-border traffic between and among the four countries to reduce costly time-consuming transshipment of people and goods at border crossings, creating opportunities for greater economic exchanges along designated key trade routes in the four countries. Following ratification, the BBIN countries will consider formulation of the MVA protocols, with technical assistance from ADB.

10. The BBIN MVA lays out provision for the use of electronic cargo tracking systems (ECTS) to speed up cross-border trade transactions and procedures. Avoiding the need for border transshipment of goods, and allowing customs-sealed vehicles and containers to transit directly to inland container depots for clearance in the importing country, significantly reduces border congestion and results in faster and cheaper movement of goods and people among the countries. SASEC transport facilitation initiatives have developed cross-border ECTS in the subregion, running successful pilot tests between Bangladesh and India that were well received by the private sector, given the considerable reduction in cargo transit times.²⁰

C. Trade Facilitation: Progress and Future Directions

11. SASEC trade facilitation investment and activities work to address key constraints to effective intraregional and interregional trade, such as high tariffs, inefficient customs and land border procedures, and inefficiencies in port operations and logistics performance. The SASEC Trade Facilitation Program (STFP) worked in Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal to build modern and effective customs administrations, streamline and ensure transparency of trade processes and procedures, and improve service and information for private sector traders and investors.²¹ Overall, the STFP was successful and largely achieved the anticipated outputs: participating countries acceded to the Revised Kyoto Convention; web-based customs management systems were launched; inroads were made to reduce trade-related import/export documentation; national single windows were piloted; and access to trade information portals was provided for the private sector.²² While ADB continues to work closely with all three SASEC countries to further trade facilitation reform and modernization efforts under four technical assistance projects,²³ Nepal is

²⁰ <http://www.sasec.asia/index.php?page=news&nid=513&url=second-bbin-trial-run>

²¹ ADB. 2012. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Policy-Based Loans and Grants South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Trade Facilitation Program*. Manila (Loans 2954-BAN, 2955-BHU and Grants 0321-BHU, 0322-NEP).

²² ADB. 2017. *Completion Report: South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Trade Facilitation Program in Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal*. Manila.

²³ ADB. 2013. *Technical Assistance to Bangladesh for Supporting Participation in the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Trade Facilitation Program*. Manila; ADB. 2013. *Technical Assistance to Bhutan for Supporting Participation in the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Trade Facilitation Program*. Manila;

also preparing a follow-on ADB-financed policy-based loan to support simplification, harmonization, and modernization of Nepal's trade processes to international standards, including the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement.²⁴

12. In 2014, the SASEC countries adopted the SASEC Trade Facilitation Strategy (2014–2018) to promote (i) customs modernization and harmonization, (ii) standards and conformity assessment strengthening, (iii) cross-border facilities improvement, (iv) through-transport facilitation, and (v) institutional capacity building.²⁵ Member countries actively participate in national and subregional customs-based projects and capacity-building initiatives through the SASEC Customs Subgroup,²⁶ supported by ADB technical assistance. In 2017, to gain a better understanding of the needs of the subregion in strengthening standards and conformity assessment, each SASEC member country will develop a diagnostic study on sanitary/phytosanitary measures and technical barriers to trade, as well as a regional study to identify and address subregional trade constraints in this area. Under the SASEC Operational Plan, member countries identified three key areas for future trade facilitation investment: (i) infrastructure investments, such as development of inland container depots and bonded logistics facilities, testing and certification facilities, automation of a wider base of trade-related agencies, and improvement of port logistics and cargo handling facilities; (ii) trade facilitation reform and modernization measures, including development of national single windows, business reengineering of trade documentation, strengthening of national conformity boards and promotion of harmonized standards and mutual recognition agreements; and (iii) technical assistance focusing on capacity building in priority areas, support for transport facilitation initiatives, and support for the SASEC trade-related subgroups.

13. Although gradual progress in trade facilitation is clear in the subregion, much remains to be done to optimize the gains of improved physical connectivity and to create a more robust environment for intraregional and interregional trade. Bottlenecks in trade facilitation constitute the primary nontariff barriers to effective intraregional trade among SASEC countries. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for example, calculates that trade facilitation reform, in line with the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement recommendations, could potentially reduce trade costs from 11.8% to 17.4%.²⁷ OECD trade facilitation indicators for SASEC countries range from overall scores of 1.5/2 (India) to 0.7/2 (Myanmar), with an average of 1.25/2 for all seven countries.²⁸ The score for Bangladesh is 1.1/2, with disaggregated indicators pointing to improvement during 2012–2015 in reducing fees and charges, automating systems and streamlining procedures, and engaging with the trade community. Trade facilitation areas—where deeper and continuing reform in Bangladesh is expected to have the greatest benefit in terms of increased trade—include simplification and harmonization of trade-related documentation, wider automation and streamlining of procedures, the introduction of advance ruling, and information availability. The World Bank 2016 Logistics

ADB. 2013. *Technical Assistance to Nepal for Supporting Participation in the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Trade Facilitation Program*. Manila; ADB. 2014. *Regional Technical Assistance to Trade Facilitation in South Asia*. Manila.

²⁴ ADB. 2017. *Proposed Policy-Based Loan. Nepal: South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Customs Reform and Modernization for Trade Facilitation Program*. Manila.

²⁵ ADB. 2014. *SASEC Trade Facilitation Strategic Framework (2014–2018)*. Manila.

²⁶ The SASEC Customs Subgroup was established in 2013 by the trade facilitation working group to promote subregional trade facilitation initiatives through concerted customs reforms and modernization, strengthened inter-agency cooperation, and enhanced partnerships with the private sector in order to eliminate non-tariff barriers to trade development. <http://www.sasec.asia/index.php?page=event&eid=202&url=scs-5-meeting>

²⁷ OECD. 2015. *Implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement: The Potential Impact on Trade Costs*. Paris.

²⁸ OECD trade facilitation online country analysis. <http://www2.compareyourcountry.org/trade-facilitation> (accessed on 6 April 2017).

Performance Index (LPI) placed the South Asia region globally as a “partial performer” only ahead of Sub-Saharan Africa, with the customs and infrastructure components rated as “logistics unfriendly.”²⁹ The 2016 average for the seven specific SASEC countries, spanning South Asia and Southeast Asia, likewise scores in the “partial performer” bracket.³⁰

14. Specific trade facilitation constraints in the SASEC subregion include (i) lack of modern and harmonized customs procedures, resulting in time-consuming and expensive trade-related documentation and other requirements; (ii) lack of automated systems in all trade-related government agencies, leading to slow development of national single-window operations; (iii) cumbersome border clearance systems; (iii) outdated legislation and weak implementation of standardized sanitary/phytosanitary and technical barriers to trade approaches; (iv) poor trade-related infrastructure at border crossing points and seaports; and (v) lack of access to information for traders and the private sector.³¹ The SASEC Operational Plan, through coordinated planning of transport and trade facilitation initiatives and a multiphased approach, seeks to help member countries address many of these challenges and maximize the trade-related benefits of expanded transport infrastructure connectivity across the subregion.

²⁹ <http://lpi.worldbank.org/international/scorecard/radar/254/C/DEU/2016/R/EAP/2016/R/ECA/2016/R/LAC/%202016/R/MNA/2016/R/SAS/2016/R/SSA/2016?featured=17>

³⁰ World Bank Logistics Performance Index online database.

<http://lpi.worldbank.org/international/scorecard/radar/254/C/DEU/2016/C/BGD/2016/C/BDN/2016/C/IND/2016/C/MKV/2016/C/MMR/2016/C/NPL/2016/C/LKA/2014?sort=asc&order=Country#datatable> (accessed on 6 April 2017).

³¹ ADB. 2016. *SASEC Operational Plan, 2016–2025*. Manila.