



**South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Trade Facilitation Week:  
Sanitary/Phytosanitary and Technical Barriers to Trade**  
1-3 December 2014: Bangkok, Thailand

**Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations**

**I. Introduction**

1. The SASEC Trade Facilitation (TF) Week: Sanitary/Phytosanitary and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) meeting (the Meeting), co-organized by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) was held on 1-3 December 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand. Mr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Economic Affairs Officer, Trade and Investment Division, ESCAP, and Ms. Rose McKenzie, Regional Cooperation Specialist, South Asia Regional Department, ADB welcomed the participants and opened the Meeting.

2. Delegations from the six SASEC member countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) attended, together with staff and consultants of ADB and ESCAP. The various sessions were co-chaired and co-moderated by Ms. McKenzie (ADB) and Mr. Ratna (ESCAP). Representatives from BFTI, CWS-IIFT, FAO, IPS, SAARC Secretariat, SANEM, SARSO, SAWTEE, and STDF-WTO, made presentations and/or acted as resource persons at specific sessions.<sup>1</sup> The Agenda of the Meeting is in **Attachment 1**. The list of participants is in **Attachment 2**.

3. The Meeting objectives were to: (i) define country-specific constraints in meeting SPS and TBT standards; (ii) agree on the terms of reference (TOR) for national and subregional SPS and TBT diagnostics studies; and (iii) consider establishment of a SASEC SPS and TBT Subgroup, and discuss preliminary work plan and capacity building priorities for this Subgroup.

**II. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The key items discussed and agreed for each day of the Meeting were as follows:

4. **Day 1:** ADB updated the Meeting on the SASEC Trade Facilitation (TF) program, and developments under the SASEC TF strategic framework. ADB and ESCAP summarized the results and key agreements of the SASEC SPS Brainstorming Meeting held in Bangkok in November 2013. International experts presented their organizations' roles in facilitation in regional standard setting, and their current and potential contributions to harmonization of standards, setting of regional standards, and facilitation of Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs)/conformity assessments. Individual presentations and their summaries are in **Attachment 3**. Discussions focused on building effective partnerships in SPS and TBT standards in SAARC, analyzing prevailing non-tariff measures (NTMs) in SAARC, and clarifying the WTO's STDF. These discussions helped define the nature and focus of capacity development and advisory services on standards and regulations that may be provided to SASEC countries by the participating international organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> International organizations included: Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute (BFTI), Centre for WTO Studies (CWS)-Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) of Sri Lanka, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Secretariat, South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM), South Asian Regional Standards Organization (SARSO), South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics, and Environment (SAWTEE), and Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) Secretariat-World Trade Organization (WTO).

5. **Day 2:** Country representatives presented their views on issues/approaches to develop the SASEC SPS and TBT agenda. The presentations covered the countries' views on how to move forward on the Brainstorming Meeting recommendations, as well as options to address SPS and TBT issues, including formation of a SASEC SPS and TBT Subgroup. The countries also shared respective government efforts to address these issues, and gave their views and suggestions on the TORs for national and regional diagnostics studies. The individual presentations and their summaries, which highlighted the countries' key views on the SASEC SPS and TBT agenda, are in **Attachment 4**. The presentation on CODEX, recognized by the WTO as the benchmark standard for national food safety regulations, focused on achieving effective participation in the CODEX process, involving provision of strategic inputs and internalizing the prescribed capacity development program.

6. **Day 3:** The Meeting discussed, refined and eventually reached broad agreement on the TOR of the national and subregional diagnostics studies (**Attachment 5**) to identify the potential export items facing SPS and TBT measures, and agreed on the way forward. It was noted that the TOR would be flexible and accommodate national fine-tuning. The following indicative schedule was considered: (i) Q1-Q2 2015: national consultations, (ii) Q3 2015: launch of national diagnostics studies, and (iii) Q1 2016: launch of regional diagnostics.

7. The Meeting also discussed and reached broad agreement on the TOR (**Attachment 6**) of the proposed SASEC SPS and TBT Subgroup (SSTS). The meeting considered the draft work plan of SSTS as detailed in the TOR and agreed to be guided by it in three broad areas: (i) coordination of analytical work, (ii) information sharing on options to facilitate trade, and (iii) capacity building.

8. To develop the capacity building plan of SSTS for 2015-2016, the Meeting agreed the topics will be identified for subregional as well as national activities. Subregional activities would consist of topics that came out of the 2013 Brainstorming Meeting, for validation and prioritization in 2014 (2-3 to be prioritized). These included: (i) agriculture and livestock SPS and TBT regimes,<sup>2</sup> (ii) accreditation schemes, (iii) equipment modernization, laboratory testing, inspection and certification process, (iv) database management, (v) network development, and (vi) reporting mechanisms. National activities (with 2-3 priorities per country), would be developed via national consultations to determine topics and develop activities, specifying: (i) type of activity, (ii) project rationale, (ii) objectives and scope, (iii) activities, (iv) milestones, and (v) financing and risks.

9. The Meeting broadly agreed on the following next steps by SASEC member countries for the SSTS: (i) identification of nodal points for the Subgroup, (ii) participation in consultations on diagnostic studies, and (iii) feedback on development of Subgroup work plan. The next steps for the SASEC Secretariat and ESCAP included: (i) national consultations on diagnostic process, (ii) consultations with SAARC and SARSO, (iii) proposal for database development, (iv) development of Subgroup work plan for 2015-2016, and (v) holding of next meeting (June/July 2015).

10. The participants thanked ADB and ESCAP for hosting and organizing, and also providing technical support to the Workshop.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Agriculture and livestock SPS and TBT regimes' is deemed to include fisheries.