

# Terms of Reference

## SASEC ASYCUDA Subregional Network (SASUN)

### 1. Background

Of the six SASEC Customs administrations, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka (BMNS) have adopted ASYCUDA World (AW) as their core customs automation system. Because they use the same automation system, each country has similar management and technical sustainability issues in the operation of the system. Knowledge sharing and mutual support on automation has the potential to improve operational efficiency and maximize the effectiveness of AW implementation in each administration.

During the sub-regional workshop on AW held in September 2015 in Pokhara, Nepal, BMNS, along with UNCTAD, considered a collaborative mechanism to support AW implementation more efficiently and effectively. The words from the final report mention the importance of *“harnessing the maximum use of regional expertise [for] possible future support mechanisms, based on mobilization of national expertise to provide regional support.”* This was discussed in conjunction with an agreed level of support from UNCTAD as well.

Subsequently, the Fourth Meeting of the SASEC Customs Subgroup (SCS) held in Cebu, Philippines in October 2015 endorsed inclusion of the AW sub-regional network into the list of SCS sub regional projects to be supported by ADB. The level of support was not further elaborated in Cebu except to make it clear that the network was not in any way a formal SASEC technical committee or other structure and that ADB support would not necessarily form an ongoing feature. The exact nature of ADB’s role in this arrangement can be discussed later on and need not be a part of the draft ToR. On 8-9 June in Kathmandu, Nepal ADB hosted a sub-regional network meeting that evaluated in depth the objectives and recommended modality of a network. The workshop produced a draft Terms of Reference that reflected the consensus view of all five SASUN stakeholders.

The proposed SASEC ASYCUDA sub-regional network provides the potential to improve the technical capacity of Customs administrations and allow UNCTAD to be in a position to manage its expertise optimally, thereby providing relevant assistance in order to bridge resource gaps in a timely manner.

## **2. Objective**

To share experiences and seek collaborative solutions to common problems in order to achieve higher levels of efficiency and optimal system sustainability among SASEC ASYCUDA user countries.

## **3. Scope of the Network**

As the stakeholders of the SASUN, namely the four Governments of BMNS and UNCTAD, will work jointly to help achieve the final goals of maximum system efficiency, operational effectiveness and harmonized processes working towards sustainability for AW in the region. The network will be the overarching framework within which Members can work toward those objectives and this will be detailed in the yet-to-be established SASUN agreement. It is proposed to operate within the following suggested scope:

1. As an apex body of the mechanism, liaise with the four countries and UNCTAD to ensure sustainability of the ASYCUDA system over time.
2. Identify common issues and problems of ASYCUDA both in implementation and post-implementation and maintain regular communication within the SASUN to resolve those issues.
3. Identify, document and, to the extent possible, address sub-regional functional and technical needs.
4. Prepare an annual action plan, ideally in conjunction with ASYCUDA annual releases, taking into account regional requirements which will detail the entire proposed training and enhancement calendar.
5. Update the annual action plan with progress made on a quarterly basis. The priorities and state of readiness of the respective working environments must be taken into consideration.

6. Develop an online common discussion platform and video conferencing facility to share functional and technical issues and provide a cooperative and constructive working environment among SASEC ASYCUDA user countries.
7. Establish a regional mechanism for online availability of the current operational versions for trouble-shooting.
8. Harmonize functional and technical areas in line with relevant international standards/conventions.
9. AW upgrades should be evaluated at regional level regarding new features and for quality assurance before being put in place within the respective countries.
10. Develop a roster of experts in functional and technical areas and share with SASEC ASYCUDA user countries.
11. Ensure technological knowledge transfers (ie: technical development training and technical missions) from UNCTAD to and within the BMNS technical experts

#### **4. Role of UNCTAD**

UNCTAD will provide agreed common services to the BMNS countries and allow them to better manage their scarce technical expertise. UNCTAD will channel aspects of its support mechanism through the SASUN and incorporate the supply of expertise and other forms of assistance such as technical training, online assistance and support missions, management of system faults, managing the network and prioritising requests from BMNS.

#### **5. Role of ADB**

ADB will use its best endeavours to try to encourage a positive outcome and, for a limited period, the ADB will assist in a secretariat administrative and coordination role.

#### **6. Core activities and Benefits of the network under UNCTAD**

The network, with the technical assistance from the UNCTAD technical expert designated to the network and the technical experts from the member countries,

may carry out any activities deemed necessary by the respective stakeholders. Specific activities will be identified as an early and urgent task once the network is established.

The network is expected to deliver the following benefits:

- a. Increased collaboration as a benefit in itself
- b. Better understanding of ASYCUDA, especially new releases
- c. increased operational efficiency
- d. Greater efficiency in automation
- e. Better resource management, especially for ICT
- f. Improved opportunities for training in ASYCUDA
- g. Closer working arrangements with UNCTAD
- h. Improved second level support for ICT/ASYCUDA

## **7. Composition of the network**

At least one ASYCUDA expert (either functional or technical, but in either case, with sufficient expertise in both to know where issues belong and who is best-placed to address) will be designated by the countries on consensus and also, on a rotational basis for a defined period. UNCTAD will designate appropriate technical support to the network. While the detailed resource requirement for the SASUN support office shall be detailed in the documentation for the establishment of SASUN.

## **8. Modality of execution**

The following indicative list of modalities and composition for the proposed network was agreed by the workshop members. They are, of necessity, high level and they include no priorities nor any elaboration on the various points made. At this early stage, it is of critical importance to agree the outline of the Terms of Reference before trying to establish the details of how the network might work in practice.

- The SASUN will be established in one of the SASEC BMNS countries on consensus.
- The SASUN will establish linkages through focal points of each SASEC BMNS countries for its operation.
- The entire ongoing cost will be borne by the SASEC BMNS countries

- As one of the SASEC Customs Subgroup sub-regional projects, SASUN will be supported by ADB's technical assistance at its initial setup phase.
- Meeting of the network members shall be held at least annually.
- Formal review of progress and operational effectiveness should take place annually also
- SASUN should maintain a remote support mechanism
- A formal reporting mechanism is needed and a web portal as a means for information sharing and also the maintenance of the knowledge base
- Problems solved at national level should be shared regionally and immediate responses should be provided
- Experience in the implementation of new AW modules, or extensions of the software should be shared regionally
- Regional training needs must be assessed and addressed at regional level
- Coordinators should remain in place for 12 months, technical/functional experts for 3 months.- coordinated with the regional UNCTAD office
- The SASUN Support Agreement (to be developed) shall be subject to review and clearance by the respective Customs administrations and by UNCTAD.
- Being an initiative of the SASEC Customs Subgroup (SCS), the SASUN will co-operate and work in close liaison with the SCS.