
Concept Note on Subregional Think Tank Forum

- Promoting Economic Cooperation for an Integrated Central Asia¹

A. Background

1 The Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Institute (CI) was established as a knowledge institution for promoting the regional economic cooperation of the member countries, and is expected to be at the intellectual forefront in the region. The mission of CI is to serve its member countries through knowledge generation, service and management for effective regional cooperation needed for achieving Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program's strategic goals and accelerating economic growth in the region. In the development process of regional economic integration, cooperation in energy, transportation, trade, and trade facilitation have been outlined as key factors among the member countries and between the region and the countries, and in the meantime, the cooperation of cross-region, cross-discipline and cross-sector requires advanced knowledge, accurate data and information, and strong capacities in making policy recommendations for regional economic development.

2 Economic integration and private sector-led development is a feature common to all the member countries in the Central Asia region. The development of an enabling economic environment is an integral part of the economic cooperation strategies and has been rigorously pursued by CI's member countries through policy reforms, capacity building, and technical measures. To effectively engage the cooperation of the regional economic development, formulate rational policies and strategies in a scientific manner and sustained use of scarce resources, there are urgent needs and it has reached a consensus by CI's member countries to build a stronger capacity of the think tanks in the countries² of the Central Asia region to play an even more important and active role on the regional and national policy formulation. As a subregional think tank, a knowledge sharing platform and a regional international organization in Central Asia region, CI could and should play a critical leading role in integrating all available resources and expanding collaborations with various relevant international, regional and national think tanks to provide essential knowledge and build capacities in the Central Asia region for promoting economic cooperation in the subregion.

3 To effectively provide innovative solutions for promoting economic cooperation and development, recent development experiences have highlighted the importance of regional economic cooperation among developing countries—a key form of which is sharing knowledge and practices of the region and the world to enable the member countries to respond to regional challenges and cooperative processes, and enhance the capabilities of government officials to engage in regional cooperation processes. The member countries have a great deal to learn from each other on development practices and policy lessons, and such learning is particularly useful since they face similar challenges and circumstances. In the process, think tanks play a critical role in knowledge sharing and learning as many are involved in supporting governments in preparing medium- and long-term development plans and making policy recommendations to address emerging policy issues.

¹ The Central Asia refers to the member countries of Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Institute (CI), including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, the People's Republic of China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

²The countries refer to CI's member countries.

4 Currently in Central Asian countries, think tanks have substantial knowledge on development issues in their respective countries and many are actively involved in cross-country knowledge-sharing activities. However, due to the lack of distinct channels, processes and platform, the potential for knowledge networking and sharing among the Central Asian think tanks is far from being fully exploited. On a basis of CI's Strategic Knowledge Framework (SKF) to provide knowledge and delivery services and activities to its member countries in collaboration with relevant institutes in the CAREC region, CI has its advantages to play a lead role in establishing a subregional knowledge network and sharing mechanism for CI's countries.

5 Against above background and considering the urgent needs of CAREC countries for a tangible think tank network support, in consultation with the Economic Research and Regional Cooperation Department of Asian Development Bank (ADB), which is managing a regional knowledge sharing platform for think tanks in the Asia Pacific region, CI proposes to set up a subregional knowledge sharing platform and mechanism, particularly for the CAREC countries. The objective of the subregional platform and mechanism is to support networking of CAREC think tanks for sharing knowledge and capacity building on development experiences and policy lessons in a sustainable and systematic way. This will be achieved through organizing annual CAREC country think tank development forum, conduct regional cooperation research, capacity building activities, among others. The proposal is in line with CI's Strategic Knowledge Framework (SKF) and development plan.

B. The Proposed First Think Tank Forum (the Forum) for the CAREC Countries

6 The objectives of the Forum are to promote Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation through sharing knowledge and research methodologies on infrastructure development and trade facilitation and initiating the process to establish subregional think tanks network. "Promoting Economic Cooperation for an Integrated Central Asia" will be the theme of the Forum for the CI's member countries. This will be organized in partnership with ADB. The Forum will focus on infrastructure and trade facilitation in Central Asia countries³.

7 The Forum will include the following major activities:

- To invite resource persons to present:(i) the Central Asia regional macroeconomic outlook, including all CI's member countries; (ii) relevant economic and sector issues to provide analytical context, and (iii) the progress status and preliminary outcomes of Central Asia Infrastructure Investment research on the demand and supply, financing, quality and safeguards, which CI will start the implementation in April of 2016, including objectives, methodologies and major activities of the research.
- To invite participating think tanks to present country-specific experiences and policy issues in relation to regional connectivity, infrastructure, and competitiveness. Interactions and networking among the participants will be encouraged during and outside the sessions.

³They are mainly in CI's member countries

- On the basis of the presentations and discussions, an integrated policy recommendation on infrastructure development (financing and sustainability) will be prepared for information of policy makers in the CAREC region.
- To discuss possible governing structures of the knowledge sharing network for the CAREC countries and a joint declaration for establishment of a subregional think tank network will be issued.⁴

8 The specific resource persons and think tank representatives and detailed forum agenda will be prepared at the next step of the proposal process by CI after the preliminary proposal is endorsed by concerned authority of ADB and the Ministry of Finance of PRC.

C. The Proposed Implementation Arrangement

9 CI will be responsible for the preparation and organization of the Forum. ADB will provide advisory assistance throughout the design and preparation for the Forum. Regional Knowledge Sharing Initiative of ADB will also contribute to the Forum.

10 About 100 participants are expected to participate in the forum, comprising of CI and ADB staff, senior government officials, resource persons and think tanks representatives from CI member countries. Media and other relevant representatives will participate in the first forum. The government officials, participating think tank representatives should have close links with central ministries of finance, economy, planning, transport, energy, trade and customs, and get deeply involved in supporting policy makers in preparing development plans in relevant sectors.

11 The Forum is expected to take place on 20-21 June 2016, in Astana, Kazakhstan.

⁴ A draft of a general joint declaration for the establishment of a subregional think tank network will be prepared by CI and sent to its member countries for review before the Forum.