



Knowledge-Sharing Modules on CAREC Trade: Regional Improvement of Border Services

Virtual Workshop Proceedings Report

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This report is one of the outputs of the virtual capacity building workshop – “Knowledge Sharing Modules on CAREC Trade: Regional Improvement of Border Services” – that was jointly organized by the CAREC Institute and the Asian Development Bank.

The workshop was delivered during 14, 22-23 January 2021. The overall aim of this capacity building activity was to bring together experts and member country officials to share experience of CAREC members and identify key elements of modernizing facilities and procedures at border crossing points and to draw lessons for the effective implementation of coordinated border management and potential replication among CAREC countries.

The report is drafted by Mr. Steven Liu, Capacity Building Specialist, the CAREC Institute and edited by Mr. Eisa Khan Ayoob Ayoobi, Chief of Capacity Building Division, the CAREC Institute. Rovshan Mahmudov, Senior Capacity Building Specialist, and Gary Huang, e-Learning Specialist, the CAREC Institute, have contributed to the report.

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Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Institute
No. 376 Nanchang Road, Urumqi, Xinjiang, the PRC
f: +86-991-8891151

[LinkedIn](#)

[Weibo](#)

km@carecinstitute.org

www.carecinstitute.org

Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASYCER	UNCTAD Electronic Phytosanitary Certification System
B2B	Business to Business
B2G	Business to Government
BCP	Border Crossing Point
BOMCA	Border Management Program in Central Asia
CAIS	Customs Automated Information System
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CBRA	Cross-Border Regulatory Agencies
CEFACT	United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business
CI	CAREC Institute
CITA	CAREC Integrated Trade Agenda
CPMM	CAREC Corridor Performance Measurement and Monitoring
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EDI	Energy Development Indicator
EU	European Union
GACC	PRC's General Administration of Customs
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IJPA	Inter-ministerial Joint Conference on Port Administration
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
IRU	International Road Transport Union
MCGA	Mongolia Customs General Administration
N2N	Nation to Nation
NOPA	National Office of Port Administration
NSW	National Single Window
PRC	The People's Republic of China
RIBS	Regional Improvement of Border Services
RSAP	Rolling Strategic Action Plan
SEW	Single Electronic Window
SOE	State-Owned Enterprises
SW	Single Window
SWC	Single Window Center
SWS	Single Window System
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
TIR	Transport Internationaux Routier
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WB	World Bank
WCO	World Customs Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Introduction

Most CAREC countries are landlocked and would benefit from seamless corridors, thereby enhancing the region's economic competitiveness. However, a number of border crossing points (BCPs) pose serious impediments to cross-border transport and trade in the region. Estimates from the 2019 CAREC Corridor Performance Measurement and Monitoring (CPMM) reveal that on average, more than 90% (or 11 hours) of the total stopping time of a typical 20-ton truck's 500-kilometer journey occurs at BCPs. Of this time, more than seven hours are spent waiting for the start of border crossing formalities. A significant portion of delays is attributable to inadequate infrastructure, including poor customs facilities, insufficient and outdated cargo-handling equipment, limited parking space for cargo vehicles near border crossings, frequent power failures, and insufficient logistics support infrastructure. This is exacerbated by cumbersome customs controls and limited use of information and communications technology (ICT).

Connectivity and regional cooperation, including through improvements in physical infrastructure and border control procedures, are essential in the CAREC region. In this regard, CAREC's Regional Improvement of Border Services (RIBS) project was designed to upgrade and renovate the infrastructure of BCPs along CAREC corridors, including those supporting transport and trade logistics adjacent to BCP areas, and help developing national single windows (NSW) in these BCPs, contributing to the longer-term goal of a regional platform for the networking and interoperability of CAREC NSWs. In the long-run, facilitating trade and commercial activity along the corridors could attract cross-border investments in the region. In addition, improvement in trade-related services sectors around and along border points will also develop and provide employment and income-generating opportunities that encourage social mobility of the communities and help alleviate poverty.

The full benefit of RIBS is realized with the cooperation of the two countries that share common border. RIBS is currently implemented under ADB financing in four CAREC countries, starting in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan (2013), then Mongolia (2016), and Pakistan (2017). Implementation of RIBS projects varies across these countries. For instance, the civil works and full roll-out of the single window information system for Karamyk BCP in the Kyrgyz Republic was to be completed in 2020, but hardware supply was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, the development of the single window information system for Tajikistan was launched in September 2020. Construction at Pakistan's Torkham and Chaman BCPs was delayed. Separately, a Policy Based Loan (program) is supporting Pakistan in implementing its commitment under the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) to establish a national single window. In Mongolia, the construction works in several BCPs started, while the upgrade of its Customs Automated Information System was to be completed in 2020.

Understanding the importance of regional cooperation in reducing distances and the time needed for people and freight movements, thus enhancing trade, particularly in landlocked region, the CAREC Institute and ADB jointly conducted this capacity building activity as a knowledge sharing and policy dialogue platform among international experts and CAREC senior government officials. This virtual workshop helped participants exchange knowledge and experience as well as discuss best practices in CAREC countries. The aims included identification of key elements to modernize facilities and procedures at border crossing points and drawing lessons for effective implementation of coordinated border management and potential replication among member countries.

The workshop was based around one module per day for over three days – with each day consisting of nominally about two hours of expert discussions. Representatives from ADB and the CAREC Institute chaired the workshop, introducing the sessions, moderators, and speakers, and encouraging discussions and active participation.

Welcoming and Opening Remarks

Opening remarks were made by **Dr. Iskandar Abdullaev**, Deputy Director Two of the CAREC Institute, **Mr. Syed Shakeel Shah**, Director of the CAREC Institute and **Ms. Emma Fan**, Director, Public Management, Financial Sector, and Regional Cooperation Division (EAPF), East Asia Department, Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Dr. Iskandar Abdullaev, in his opening remark, noted that since 2013 regional improvement of border services projects have been implemented in four countries as a part of trade facilitation initiative under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program. He stressed that recently published CPMM report showed that almost 90% of the overall stopping time of a standard 20-ton truck traveling 500 kilometers occurred with an average waiting time of 11 hours and more than seven hours spent waiting for the start of border crossing formalities at CAREC BCPs. He briefly highlighted the CAREC Institute's approach to capacity building and assured the participants that they will have access to all workshop materials, including recordings, presentations, and workshop proceedings through the CAREC Institute's e-learning platform.

Mr. Syed Shakeel Shah greeted and welcomed all participants and mentioned that the virtual gatherings have some restrictions compared with physical meetings. He talked of the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 crisis and believed constraints might persist for the coming weeks and months. He went on to highlight that most of the CAREC countries are landlocked and BCP efficiency is very important for regional cooperation. He believed delays at BCPs in the region pose serious impediments to cross-border transport and trade. A huge percentage of the delays was due to insufficient facilities, including poor customs services, insufficient and outdated cargo-handling equipment, restricted parking space for cargo vehicles near border crossings, frequent power failures, and weak logistics support infrastructure. This is aggravated by cumbersome customs regulations and inadequate use of ICT. He highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in reducing distances and the time needed for people and freight movements, thus enhancing trade, particularly in the landlocked region. He believed that CAREC Program with support of ADB has been playing a significant role in bringing together countries to promote necessary measures for trade facilitation through cross-border hard and soft infrastructure.

Mr. Shah stressed that the CAREC Institute, as the CAREC Program's knowledge arm, provides innovative research and capacity building support to member countries and all stakeholders related to the improvement of cross-border services in the CAREC region. He further highlighted the Institute's significant role in the implementation of the CAREC Integrated Trade Agenda (CITA) 2030 and its complementary RSAPs. He also emphasized the importance of sharing knowledge and providing analytical approaches for policy dialogue at the CAREC's Regional Trade Group, Customs Cooperation Committee, and other trade-related working groups. Such knowledge support promotes synergies and networking with national academia and think tanks. It is important to use local knowledge and enhance it with capacity building programs to improve governance and service standards across member countries.

Mr. Shah thanked development partners for their attendance and contribution to the workshop and underlined that the CAREC Institute intends leveraging efforts with all relevant and interested development partners in support of the CAREC countries. He noted that coordinated and collaborative efforts are more effective, impactful, and beneficial to our stakeholders than duplicating activities.

Ms. Emma Fan welcomed all participants and noted that the knowledge sharing modules are developed to be uploaded on the CAREC Institute e-learning platform and made available in both English and Russian languages for registered users. She believed that such approach to knowledge

sharing reach more stakeholders in the CAREC region and beyond. She talked about follow-up activities, including in-depth discussions and exchanges through virtual and physical seminars or workshops to be organized to supplement the modules as part of the blended learning approach. The first set of the CAREC trade module will focus on the topic of regional improvement of border services and national single window development. These are very relevant and timely topics as most CAREC countries are landlocked and trade facilitation will improve regional competitiveness and reduce costs.

Ms. Fan said that delays for a typical 20-ton truck crossing a border along the CAREC corridor amount to an average of 11 hours and are caused by formalities, poor facilities, and poor border infrastructure. She provided an example of the continuity of the supply chain for medical supplies and associated risks. She stressed that the webinar sessions would focus on RIBS projects, which are priority interventions under the CAREC Integrate Trade Agenda 2030 and have long been part of ADB's trade facilitation program since their introduction in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan in 2013, as well as Mongolia and Pakistan in 2016 and 2017. She thanked all experts from development agencies for sharing their experiences and lessons in designing and implementing RIBS projects. She hoped that such activities would improve understanding and cooperation among CAREC countries and RIBS practitioners and among those who aim to implement similar projects in the future.

Module 1: RIBS Project Development and Country Experiences

In module 1 (session one), there were four country-perspective presentations from Mongolia, the Kyrgyz republic, Tajikistan, and Pakistan. The session was chaired by **Ms. Dorothea Lazaro**, Regional Cooperation Specialist, EAPF, ADB. She gave a brief moderation remark to highlight approaches and efforts taken by CAREC member countries in improving border crossing services.

The first presenter was **Ms. Norov Unurtsetseg**, Monitoring Specialist, Regional Improvement of Border Services Project, Mongolia. She made a brief introduction of RIBS project in Mongolia. According to her, the main aims of RIBS in Mongolia were: 1) upgrading and improvement of facilities and equipment at BCPs; 2) improvement of communication infrastructure for CAIS and interoperability of MCGA system; and 3) carrying out the preparatory work for foreign trade SEW system. In addition, she discussed in detail the mechanisms for the project implementation arrangements regarding facilities and equipment at the upgraded and improved BCPs. She hoped that her experiences, lessons, and recommendations would be of benefit to other countries.

The next presenter was **Mr. Uran Abdynasyrov**, PIU RIBS Project Manager, the Kyrgyz Republic. He gave some background information on RIBS project and its components, including detailed information on construction and improvement of Karamyk BCP and development of NSW. According to him, RIBS aimed for: 1) optimization of administrative procedures; 2) ensuring of seamless electronic communication between government agencies and traders; 3) providing access to information related to foreign trade; and 4) reducing administrative barriers to accessing documents required for customs formalities. In his elaboration on progress made in the Kyrgyz Republic, he shared the outputs of the modernization of NSW, which included: 1) development and approval of 11 terms of references and 11 departmental modules; 2) repair and provision of equipment for the Primary and Backup Data Center with fail-safety and information security features; 3) development of the module for accredited laboratories; and 4) training of IT specialists of SOE SWC on upgraded technology and installation of nine core system modules.

The next country presenter was **Mr. Parviz Zarifzoda**, RIBS Project Manager, Customs Service, Tajikistan. He discussed RIBS project in Tajikistan. He thanked key development partners (i.e., the Asian Development Bank) for the continuous support for improvement of border crossing services. He believed that Tajikistan made significant progress in RIBS. He presented implemented activities in

detail, including BCPs improvement, design of the single window system, project management and supervision capabilities, and shared Tajikistan experiences, lessons, and recommendations with other member countries.

The last country-perspective presenter was **Mr. Muhammad Ali Raza Hanjra**, Project Director, CAREC RIBS Program, Federal Board of Revenue, Pakistan. He noted that Pakistan, as a regional transit trade and transshipment hub for the CAREC region, has great potential for bilateral trade and regional ties. According to him, Pakistan offers the shortest route by land, sea and air to Afghanistan, Central Asian countries, the PRC, India, and Iran; therein Karachi and Gwadar ports are designed for transshipment as the main business model. He also talked about BCPs at Torkham and Chaman (bordering Afghanistan) and Wagha (bordering India), which are currently incapable of managing current volumes of export, import, transit cargo and pedestrian traffic owing to lack of modern physical and logistics infrastructure, ICT, and trade facilitation business procedures. He highlighted some opportunities to improve the port efficiency within RIBS. In conclusion, he pointed out Afghanistan-Pakistan BCPs as examples where more focus should be given to improve cross-border services.

Module 2: Single Window Development

This session was moderated by **Mr. Rovshan Mahmudov**, Senior Capacity Building Specialist, the CAREC Institute. He gave an overview of the single window development in the CAREC region and highlighted that one of the key phases in building seamless corridors to facilitate cross-border trade in the CAREC region is establishment and connectivity of national single window systems. He stressed that improvement of border-crossing services would minimize duration of customs clearance and related costs which is required for greater competitiveness of the CAREC corridors. At the same time, it will affect poverty reduction and encourage cross-border investment in the region, with expanded economic and trade activities along the corridors. He expressed delight for having high-level experts to present progress in their respective countries.

The first speaker was **Mr. Samad Garalov**, Director, Head Department on Customs Control and Trade Facilitation, State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan. He gave a detailed presentation on the “Development of Single Window for the Customs Services of Azerbaijan.” According to him, Azerbaijan started to utilize the single window system in January 2009 based on the State Customs Development Program of Azerbaijan 2007-2011, and Azerbaijan President’s decree No. 12 of November 11, 2008 on “Using the Single Window Principle for Inspection of Goods and Vehicles at BCP’s of Azerbaijan.” The need remains for simplifying border crossing procedures due to increasing demand for cargo transit through the territory of Azerbaijan.

According to Mr. Garalov, prior to the development of SW border procedures, processes were administered by different ministries of Azerbaijan. Hence, goods had to be checked several times by different entities before moving in or out of country. Such old-fashioned procedure had posed severe challenges to timely border crossing services; thus, the President issued a decree to remove trade and transit barriers. Since then, a Uniform Automated System has been established to improve services. Now, information from various ministries, departments, agencies, administrations, financial, political, military and police sources are unified and made accessible to all concerned authorities instantly. This modernization has helped Azerbaijan clear outbound and inbound flow of goods through its territories in the matter of minutes. It has also simplified licensing and certification of goods and services. There is also a system of a green corridor – goods could go directly to warehouses for quarantine while necessary checks are conducted simultaneously.

Mr. Garalov went on to discuss more initiatives undertaken by the government, including the e-customs concept (implementation of electronic paperwork, integration of systems, electronic

services). There are legislative reforms to facilitate pre-arrival electronic declaration and implementation of the risk management system as well as electronic payments. In addition, there are cargo tracking and movement control systems. The government has also undertaken HR reforms. According to Garalov, Azerbaijan is practicing non-intrusive customs inspections and adopting international standards and recommendations of WCO, UN, CEFACT, etc.

The second speaker was **Mr. Jinping Zhou**, Deputy Director, National Office for Port Administration, General Administration of Customs, the People's Republic of China (PRC). According to Mr. Zhou, single window as an advanced concept and common international practice, has been vigorously advocated by international organizations and actively promoted by governments all over the world. More than 70+ economies in the world, including the PRC, have implemented the SW. A series of policy documents were issued by the State Council of the PRC to promote and institutionalize SW. The legal basis for implementation of SW in the PRC is the Regulations on Optimizing the Business Environment.

The Inter-ministerial Joint Conference on Port Administration (IJCPA) is responsible for the overall planning of SW in the PRC. The National Office of Port Administration (NOPA) leads the implementation of SW. The Working Group for the Establishment of National Single Window (NSW Group) consisting of Cross-Border Regulatory Agencies (CBRAs) acts as the decision-making and steering entity. China E-port Data Center is the technical implementer of NSW. At the micro level, the provincial governments take the lead for application and implementation of NSW, also actively expanding local special services.

According to Mr. Zhou, the PRC has established strong ICT infrastructure for SW systems, based on which all processing (port management, foreign trade, warehousing, logistics, financial services, etc.) are conducted electronically. He elaborated that more than 400 million users are registered in SW system in the PRC and more than 12 million transactions happen daily. All these take place based on reduced documentation, better process, higher efficiency, and lower cost.

In his conclusion, Mr. Zhou listed better planning and coordination; meeting users' needs; technology application; and legislation reform as key building blocks for effective establishment and implementation of SWs.

The third speaker was **Mr. Lochin Faizullozoda**, Director of SUE Single Window Center, and Customs Service of Tajikistan. According to him, on 1 September 2020, Tajikistan officially launched the single windows system for export, import and transit transactions. Generally, the regulatory and legal framework for development of the single window system included several stages:

- Concept of developing the single window system for processing the export, import and transit, passed by the Governmental Decree of Tajikistan on December 31, 2008, No. 659.
- Program of implementation of the single window system for processing the export, import and transit, passed by the Governmental Decree of Tajikistan on May 3, 2010, No. 222.
- Resolution of the Government of Tajikistan on the establishment of the State Unitary Enterprise "Single Window Center" dated December 3, 2010., No. 630.
- Rules of information-based cooperation within single window passed by the Decree of the Government of Tajikistan on September 2, 2010, No. 567.
- Law of Tajikistan on the licensing system passed on July 4, 2020.
- Resolution of the Government of Tajikistan on introduction of the single window system for conducting the export, import and transit procedures, passed on July 24, 2020, No. 410.

Mr. Faizullozoda recognized the important role that ADB has been playing on this front in support of Tajikistan. According to him, in April 2013, a grant agreement between Tajikistan and ADB for improvement of border services was signed. This also aimed at establishing and further developing the single window system and improving the performance of border customs points.

Hence, Tajikistan has been able to take various important steps to transition towards SW building. While proactively identifying and correcting existing shortcomings in the business processes of the involved agencies, feedback from the private sector organizations was crucial to develop a user-friendly system. Also, while optimizing the support of software developers, special attention was paid to training of end users.

Mr. Faizullozoda informed that main participants of the SW system for conducting of export, import and transit procedures were customs bodies, state committees, state and social welfare services, ministries, organizations, agencies, laboratories, private companies, brokers, and individuals connected into the unified electronic system.

Speaking on electronic data exchange incorporated into the system, Mr. Faizullozoda noted that the SW system is integrated with the following operating systems of Tajikistan:

- Tax Committee
- Central Bank of Tajikistan
- Alif Sarmoya Bank
- Unified automated information system of the customs service

Mr. Faizullozoda concluded by listing several benefits the SW brings, including reduced time, proficiency in handling requests and increased productivity in border crossing services.

The fourth speaker was **Mr. Zhanat Ablaevich Shaimov**, Head of Customs Operations Division, Methodology Department, State Revenue Committee, Kazakhstan. He mentioned that SWS implementation is an integral part and one of the priorities in the greater framework of the Digital Government and Digitalization Program of Kazakhstan. It is part of the President of Kazakhstan's Plan of the Nation – 100 Specific Steps Program.

The Concept of integrated information system “Single Window for Export and Import Transactions” was adopted by the Kazakhstan Government Resolutions No 771 of 3 July 2011 and No 288 of 30 March 2011 on Establishing a Commission to Develop Proposals for the Integrated Information System of SW. There are also the Eurasian Inter-Governmental Council's Decision No 6 of 30 April 2019 on “Profiling the Reference Model of the National Single Window Mechanism for Foreign Trade Control” and WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, High Eurasian Economic Council's Decision No 19 of 8 May 2015 “Single Window for Foreign Trade Control Action Plan.”

Based on the above stated framework, according to Mr. Shaimov, Kazakhstan has been developing a unified gateway for export and import transactions, standardization and automation of permit issuance and registration, and streamlining delivery of customs-related public services. The Government of Kazakhstan has made significant progress on this front. There has been a multi-stakeholder approach in establishing SW. All ministries and agencies responsible for the export and import transactions were engaged in designing the SW.

According to Mr. Shaimov, the ICT Infrastructure of the SWS included several following major elements: “Based on UNCTAD's proposal, we have used a ready-made solution – ASYCER platform for SW implementation, which subsequently was retrofitted to comply with the local regulatory

provisions. The Single Window Working Group consisted of members from 30+ government authorities. The Project was funded by the Government.”

Mr. Shaimov listed users of SW which included, among others, traders, customs brokers, customs carriers, warehouse operators, duty free shops owners, authorized economic operators, IPR holders, goods certification agencies and government employees. He said that Kazakhstan SW system was compatible with the integrated information systems of the Eurasian Economic Commission Union (EAEU) and enabled data exchange with neighboring countries.

Commenting on challenges, Mr. Shaimov indicated that the major challenges in implementation of the SWS included lack of timely engagement from the government agencies and organizations, and remote work by certain international vendor staff (different time zones, irresponsiveness for urgent matters). In his opinion, the benefits of SWS for government include transparency of customs authorities and other government agencies; no human factor influencing decision making and minimization of the risk of corruption; and labor costs savings for state agencies. The benefits for individuals and businesses include faster customs formalities, reduced time costs, no need to submit supporting papers, and no physical contact with service providers.

On the lessons learned, Mr. Shaimov shared the following:

- Adopting relevant aspects of advanced countries as well as taking into consideration recommendations of international experts.
- Establishing an advisory body (Commission) under the Government to ensure engagement of concerned ministries and agencies based on the single window implementation plan.
- Establishing a working group consisting of relevant ministries and agencies, including business entities.
- Identification of funding sources.
- Application of cutting-edge information and communication technology.

After this final part of his presentation, Mr. Shaimov thanked all participants and handed over the floor to the moderator.

There was a Q&A part of the session led by **Mr. Jonathan Koh**, Managing Director, Trade Facilitation Pte, Ltd., and **Mr. Mario Apostolov**, Regional Adviser, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Module 3: Role of Development Partners

Mr. Eisa Khan Ayoob Ayoobi, Chief of Capacity Building Division of the CAREC Institute, moderated module three (the last day of the knowledge sharing series of events). He started by acknowledging the presence of high-level panel of distinguished speakers and practitioners from different international partner organizations and thanked them for their commitment to contributing to the knowledge sharing event despite the time differences. He went on to briefly introduce the CAREC Institute’s newly transformed capacity building approach, which is research-based, blended and collaborative. He highlighted the three series of knowledge-sharing modules as part of the CAREC Institute blended workshops on trade related activities. The modules are produced to be uploaded on the CAREC Institute e-learning platform for distance and virtual learning.

The panelists for this session were **Mr. Oleg Samukhin**, Senior Transport Specialist, Central and West Asia Department, ADB, **Mr. Satya Prasad Sahu** of the World Bank, **Mr. Mario Apostolov**, Regional Economic Advisor of Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of UN Economic Commission for Europe

(UNECE), **Mr. Vladimirs Zaguzovs**, Deputy Project Coordinator/Deputy Consortium Leader for Border Management Program in Central Asia (BOMCA), International Cooperation Board, State Border Guard of Latvia, and **Ms. Tatyana Rey-Bellet**, Director of TIR and Transit, International Road Transport Union (IRU).

Each panelist was to briefly discuss her/his respective organization's support to CAREC member states on trade facilitation, regional cooperation of customs and other fields. It was to have them share their knowledge and experience of working in the region and further exploring better ways of collaboration in leveraging efforts and resources in support of CAREC countries.

Mr. Samukhin began by pinpointing ADB's vital role infrastructural development of CAREC countries. He also mentioned that ADB hosted the CAREC Program Secretariate. He went on to discuss CAREC priority areas, including tourism, energy, transport, trade, and other sectors. According to him, ADB's approach towards cross-border transport and logistics facilitation was comprised of multiple parts, starting from analytical studies, expert group meetings, reports, and other knowledge products to guide decision making. He mentioned the CAREC measurement and monitoring unit that helps obtain statistically robust information about costs and terms of crossing the borders and other major issues related to RIBS.

Mr. Samukhin recognized that there is a need and demand for border crossing procedures, practices and risk management schemes and infrastructure improvements in CAREC countries. He demonstrated some of the ongoing ADB works in CAREC and significant progress made through RIBS. He also appreciated the role of other development partners like AIIB and EBRD in helping CAREC countries with investment in infrastructure projects. In his concluding remarks, he advocated for increased political commitment and will from CAREC member top leadership to multiply the efforts invested by development partners in their respective countries.

The second speaker, **Mr. Sahu** discussed the World Bank's support to the CAREC Program as one of its development partners. He went on to talk about WB investment initiatives in Central Asia as part its efforts of channeling new sources of growth and supporting global market development. According to him, WB had multibillion dollar infrastructure development programs and projects in the region. Especially, trade facilitation projects are of great interest to WB, he said. Great investments were made in regional countries' customs and single window developments.

Mr. Sahu highlighted WB's support in acquisition of technical equipment. Also, he discussed WB's increasing attention to gender issues. "For us, gender issue is as important as trade facilitation," he said. Additionally, he elaborated that WB has analytical and advisory initiatives within Central Asia as well as in South Asia. Such initiatives aim at establishing broader dialogues among trading partner states in the region as well as enhancing cooperation through information technology and logistics integration. In his concluding remarks, he expressed WB's commitment to continue working in the region to achieve its strategic long-term development goals.

Mr. Apostolov was the third panelist to discuss UNECE activities and approach in providing support to the CAREC countries. According to him, most of CAREC countries directly use the standards and tools developed and recommended by UNECE. Standardization is a key part of trade facilitation while information exchange is the essence of it. In the age of digitalization, he said, the computer systems should understand what they are exchanging, codes must be harmonized.

Mr. Apostolov believed that national trade facilitation committee was important for better trade facilitation and even establishment of SW since it provides feasible recommendations on how to deal with trade coordination and impacts consultations between public and private sectors. He said despite

the COVID-19 pandemic, his team was working on a package of standards called digitalization of multi model transport. This initiative was to let the relevant agencies, private sectors, and stakeholders develop their own digital solutions for railway, road transport, sea transportation, and air transport. He said that the pandemic revealed the importance of virtual world and digitalization. Digital infrastructures and platforms were needed to facilitated exchange of information which would support transport and supply chain, and at the same time prevent human-to-human transmission of the virus.

Mr. Zaguzovs provided an overview of the EU support to Central Asia in improvement of border crossing services. According to him, since 2003, the EU has been providing CAREC countries with border management assistance through its designated program – the Border Management Program for Central Asia (BOMCA). The program trains border guards and provides key technology and infrastructure support at border crossings and helps the region in managing borders jointly. BOMCA is funded by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Development Program.

Mr. Zaguzovs believed that enhancing the professional capability of border security and unification of information systems through SW developments were key for CAREC countries. He also noted that CAREC countries needed to improve data analysis expertise to improve customs clearance schemes that are crucial for achieving trade facilitation. He said that BOMCA would continue providing support in these areas to CAREC countries.

Finally, **Ms. Rey-Bellet** discussed IRU's work in CAREC region. She said, "CAREC is the region we work most actively." Her organization had planned various activities for 2020 which were halted due to the pandemic. Hence, according to her, they have adjusted their work to focus more on digitalization. They have developed digital platforms to help all countries, including CAREC members. She further elaborated that digitalization is going to remain at the center of everything, including TIR. Hence, countries will need to adjust legislations to facilitate enabling legal frameworks for digitalization.

Ms. Rey-Bellet also pointed out the importance of customs to customs message exchange, on which, according to her, TIR is also helping countries to enhance cooperation. For her, the next step was to create direct electronic connection with international TIR system that helps countries set up green lanes to speed up cargo transition through borders. She concluded by saying that best practices on this front are emerging in the CAREC region. For instance, Kazakhstan has established green lane with the PRC and Uzbekistan is making significant progress in this regard.

At the end of the module, **questions and answers** were exchanged as part of the session's expanded expert discussion. Among other contributors, **Mr. Syed Shakeel Shah**, Director of the CAREC Institute, who is also an International Trade Expert, intervened and shared his experience regarding trade facilitation by highlighting its crucial contribution to regional cooperation and development in the CAREC region.

Closing Remarks

Dr. Iskandar Abdullaev, Deputy Director Two of the CAREC Institute and **Ms. Dorothea Lazaro**, Regional Cooperation Specialist, EAPF, ADB, gave closing remarks at the end of the workshop.

Dr. Iskandar Abdullaev closed the workshop by thanking the organizers for excellent organization and speakers for their contributions. He stressed that development of border crossing services improve not only trade relations among member countries, but also intensify human interactions. Indeed, the CAREC member countries need to make improvement at border crossings. He stressed that CI as a regional knowledge institution will continue supporting the CAREC countries in achieving their national and regional development goals through knowledge transfer, policy dialogues and targeted capacity building. He emphasized that dialogue between experts and government officials is always fruitful and productive and the CAREC Institute stands ready to continuously conduct such discussions with ADB and other development partners as well as government officials.

Ms. Dorothea Lazaro, on behalf of ADB, also thanked all participants from, including development partners and country representatives. She assured that all modules will be uploaded on the CAREC Institute e-learning platform for wide dissemination while work will continue to supplement them with face-to-face or real-time online workshops to expand dialogue among stakeholders. She stressed that trade facilitation remains crucial to economic competitiveness, supply chain continuity and cross-border risk mitigation amid the pandemic. ADB hopes that the CAREC Program is able to contribute and facilitate the cross-learning processes based on country experiences and explore and implement innovative processes of border crossing services along the CAREC corridors.

Appendices

Agenda



CAREC Trade Knowledge-Sharing Modules

REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT OF BORDER SERVICES

14 January 2021

Since 2013, Regional Improvement of Border Services (RIBS) projects were implemented in four countries as part of trade facilitation initiatives under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program. To share knowledge and information on these projects and related initiatives, the ADB and CAREC Institute are developing CAREC trade modules that will be available in English and Russian languages and accessible via the CAREC Institute E-Learning Platform (<https://elearning.carecinstitute.org/>). As part of blended-learning approach, these modules will be supplemented with face-to-face or live seminars or workshops to strengthen dialogue on overall trade facilitation and RIBS projects and their potential replication in the CAREC region and beyond.

Module 1: RIBS Project Development and Country Experiences

13:45-14:00 **Opening Remarks**

Emma Fan, Director, Public Management, Financial Sector, and Regional Cooperation Division (EAPF), East Asia Department, Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Syed Shakeel Shah, Director, CAREC Institute

14:00-14:10 **Brief Introduction to the Knowledge-Sharing Module 1**

Moderator: **Dorothea Lazaro**, Regional Cooperation Specialist, EAPF, ADB

14:10-15:00 **Country Experiences on RIBS Project Implementation**

Norov Unurtsetseg, Monitoring Specialist, Regional Improvement of Border Services Project, Mongolia

Uran Abdynasyrov, PIU RIBS Project Manager, Kyrgyz Republic

Parviz Zarifzoda, RIBS Project Manager, Customs Service, Tajikistan

Muhammad Ali Raza Hanjra, Project Director, CAREC RIBS Program, Federal Board of Revenue, Pakistan

15:00-15:20 **Q&A and Discussion**

Moderator: **Dorothea Lazaro**, ADB

15:20-15:30 **Wrap Up and Closing**



Since 2013, *Regional Improvement of Border Services (RIBS)* projects were implemented in four countries as part of trade facilitation initiatives under the *Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program*. To share knowledge and information on these projects and related initiatives, the ADB and CAREC Institute are developing CAREC trade modules that will be available in English and Russian languages and accessible via the CAREC Institute E-Learning Platform (<https://elearning.carecinstitute.org/>). As part of blended-learning approach, these modules will be supplemented with face-to-face or live seminars or workshops to strengthen dialogue on overall trade facilitation and RIBS projects and their potential replication in the CAREC region and beyond.

Module 2: Single Window Development

14:05-14:10 *Brief Introduction to the Knowledge-Sharing Module 2*

Moderator: **Rovshan Mahmudov**, Senior Capacity Building Specialist, CAREC Institute

14:10-15:00 *Country Experiences on Single Window Development*

Samad Garalov, Director, Head Department on Customs Control and Trade Facilitation, State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan

Jinping Zhou, Deputy Director, National Office for Port Administration, General Administration of Customs, People's Republic of China

Zhanat Ablaevich Shaimov, Head of Customs Operations Division, Methodology Department, State Revenue Committee, Kazakhstan

Lochin Faizullozoda, Director of SUE Single Window Center, Customs Service of Tajikistan

15:00-15:20 *Q&A and Discussions*

Discussant: **Jonathan Koh**, Managing Director, Trade Facilitation Pte, Ltd

Moderator: **Rovshan Mahmudov**, CAREC Institute

15:20-15:30 *Wrap Up and Closing*

Dorothea Lazaro, Regional Cooperation Specialist, Public Management, Financial Sector, and Regional Cooperation Division (EAPF), East Asia Department, ADB



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Module 3: Role of Development Partners

14:05-14:10 *Brief Introduction to the Knowledge-Sharing Module 3*

Moderator: **Eisa Khan Ayoob Ayoobi**, Chief of Capacity Building Division, CAREC Institute

14:10-15:00 *Role of Development Partners*

Oleg Samukhin, Senior Transport Specialist, Central and West Asia Department, Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Satya Prasad Sahu, World Bank

UNDP/EU

Mario Apostolov, Regional Adviser, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

Tatiana Rey-Bellet, Director, TIR and Transit, International Road Transport Union (IRU)

15:00-15:20 *Q&A and Discussion*

Moderator: **Eisa Khan Ayoob Ayoobi**, Chief of Capacity Building Division, CAREC Institute

15:20-15:30 *Wrap Up and Closing Remarks*

List of organizers

CAREC Institute

Eisa Khan Ayoob Ayoobi, Chief, Capacity Building Division, CAREC Institute

Rovshan Mahmudov, Senior Capacity Building Specialist, Capacity Building Division, CAREC Institute

Steven Hao Liu, Capacity Building Specialist, Capacity Building Division, CAREC Institute

Gary He Huang, E-Learning Specialist, Capacity Building Division, CAREC Institute

Asian Development Bank

Dorothea Lazaro, Regional Cooperation Specialist, EAPF/EARD, ADB

Camille Cyn Isles, Consultant, ADB

Aiken Tafgar, Consultant, ADB