



## **Concept Note**

### **5th CAREC Institute Annual Research Conference**

#### **CAREC Connectivity: Promoting Trade and Trade Facilitation**

##### **Background and Motivation**

The Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) region faces complex connectivity and trade facilitation challenges, including fragmented supply chains, evolving geopolitical dynamics, slow implementation for digital consideration, and the need for greener and resilient infrastructure. Regional collaboration offers a pathway to address these challenges collectively, enhancing corridors, ports, transit development, reducing trade barriers, and promoting economic resilience. This conference aims to provide a platform to explore these critical issues, encouraging fostering academic and policy-oriented research. Also, the policymakers will be engaged to demonstrate high quality research that inform policy. The conference will support the production of evidence-based policy recommendations, and contribute to regional policy dialogue and actionable solutions with experts from Multi Development Partners and policymakers to strengthen CAREC connectivity.

By emphasizing themes of regional connectivity and trade facilitation, promoting green transport and corridor development, customs reforms and efficiency, energy transition and green investment, and private sector engagement and regional cooperation, the conference seeks to promote sustainable economic growth, enhanced connectivity, and inclusive regional integration. This initiative reflects CI's commitment to fostering a cohesive and forward-looking vision for the CAREC region. Regional integration between CAREC region is increasingly essential for unlocking economic potential and fostering sustainable growth. As a critical nexus, Pakistan offers unique opportunities to bridge these regions through enhanced connectivity and trade facilitation. Transit and trade corridors have the potential to significantly reduce logistical barriers and costs, thereby boosting trade volumes and economic cooperation. Efficient customs operations streamlined transit systems like TIR and eTIR, and digitalization play a pivotal role in this transformation.

Coordinated efforts among research-oriented organizations, academia, international organizations, multilateral development banks (MDBs), and national policy-oriented organizations can contribute to overcoming these challenges and suggest comprehensive developmental strategies for the CAREC region. The exchange of views and ideas and learning from each other are crucial ingredients for successfully utilizing the CAREC region's green,

innovative, and inclusive opportunities. The CI's annual research conference provides a platform for the exchange of views and ideas and the learning of developmental practices and strategies from each other.

**The fifth CAREC Institute Research Conference** shall take stock of ongoing developmental challenges and what innovative prospects are ahead for the economic development of CAREC countries. With in-depth deliberation for two days, the conference outputs seek to provide policy options to re-think development strategies in the sphere of connectivity in the CAREC region.

## **Objective**

The objective of the fifth CAREC Institute Annual Research Conference is to provide a platform for discussing regional issues, generating new ideas, and exploring potential ways to address the complex challenges CAREC countries face by connecting researchers and policy stakeholders. Through synthesizing knowledge activities across the region, the CI aims to build up the region's research partnerships and attract partners from CAREC countries and the rest of the world into high-quality research activities. The conference shall help to showcase research findings and their translation into policy prescriptions for better economic development and integration in the CAREC region.

## **Core Objectives**

1. **Enhance Regional Integration:** Explore strategies to improve connectivity and trade facilitation through international transport and transit facilitation, streamlined customs operations, and the development of efficient rail and road networks.
2. **Strengthen Regional Cooperation:** Foster dialogue on harmonizing policies for transit trade, leveraging international instrument such as TIR and eTIR, and advancing rail and road initiatives for seamless connectivity.
3. **Promote Green Infrastructure:** Discuss investment opportunities in green transport systems and energy transition corridors to achieve sustainable development goals.
4. **Facilitate Transit and Trade in South Asia-Central Asia Context:** Analyse the specific role of transit trade corridors, rail and road initiatives, and agreements in integrating South Asia and Central Asia, addressing logistical barriers, and promoting economic interdependence.
5. **Advance Knowledge Sharing:** Provide a platform for policymakers, academics, and practitioners to share research, best practices, and innovative solutions for regional challenges.

## **Conference Themes and Sub-Themes**

1. **Regional Connectivity and Trade Facilitation**
  - The role of transit trade agreements
  - Integration and implementation of TIR and eTIR systems
  - Application of CMR Convention and Transition to e-CMR

- Enhancing customs operations through digitalization and efficiency reforms
- Connecting South Asia with Central Asia, East Asia, Middle East and International Markets
- Developments in Border-Crossing Points (BCPs)
- 2. **Green Transport and Corridor Development**
  - Development of efficient and sustainable transport systems
  - Opportunities and challenges in green corridor infrastructure
  - Policy frameworks for decarbonizing regional transport networks
- 3. **Customs Reforms and Efficiency**
  - Innovative approaches to streamline customs processes
  - Cross-border cooperation and capacity building
  - Leveraging technology for transparency and operational efficiency
  - Showcase of Pakistan Single Window (PSW)
- 4. **Energy Transition and Green Investment**
  - Role of regional partnerships in energy trade and transition projects
  - Investment eco-system for Renewable energy and other green infrastructure projects
  - Case studies on successful green investment initiatives
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- 5. **Private Sector Engagement and Regional Cooperation**
  - Encouraging public-private partnerships in trade and transport development
  - Role of private investment in enhancing connectivity and logistics
  - Corridor Performance Measurement and Monitoring (CPMM)
- 6. **Multimodal Logistics**
  - Policies, Strategies and Standards to Develop Multimodal Logistics
  - Role of the Seaports: Issues, Actions and Investment
  - Containerization in the CAREC Region
  - Railways – Expanding Freight Traffic and Reshaping Corridors
  - Inland Waterways: Time to Rethink Its Potential?
  - Multimodal Logistics Center

### III. Organization of the Conference

The conference will last two days, consisting of three *thematic sessions*, *panel discussions*, and *opening and closing sessions*. Each thematic session comprises three to four paper presentations, with a chair/moderator and discussant of the sessions. Similarly, the panel sessions will consist of 4 to 5 panelists, including a panel moderator. The selected manuscript/papers will be presented, critically analyzed, and further developed before being considered for the planned publication – the CI Annual Book<sup>1</sup>. Conference proceedings and selected policy briefs will also be published.

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<sup>1</sup> Three books based on first, second and third conferences are already published. The fourth book based on 4<sup>th</sup> conference is in a pipeline for publication. These publications are highly appreciated by the member countries and development partners.

Also, key policy recommendations for the conference will be presented at the next meeting of the CI's Governing Council, Senior Official Meeting, and Working Group Meetings to suggest research-based policy perspectives. Also, it will be shared with the CAREC Secretariat, ADB, and respective member countries to be suggested to consider in policy designing and formulation.

The CAREC Institute (CI) Annual Research Conference is a flagship knowledge event that serves as a critical platform for stakeholders across the CAREC region to deliberate on pressing issues, share insights, and foster regional collaboration. Following the success of last year's conference in Almaty, the 5th Annual Research Conference will be held in Islamabad, Pakistan on 29-30 May 2025.

The conference will bring together representatives from CAREC member countries, international organizations, think tanks, academia, and the private sector. By fostering in-depth discussions and collaborations, the 5th Annual Research Conference will play a pivotal role in advancing regional cooperation and sustainable development in the CAREC region.