

ESCAP Regional Dialogue
“Strengthening Trade and Economic Ties
between Afghanistan and Central Asia”
10-11 March 2015
Almaty, Kazakhstan

Concept note

ESCAP Regional Dialogue “Strengthening Trade and Economic Ties between Afghanistan and Central Asia” is the final meeting within the framework of the project “Strengthening Economic Ties Between Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries”, implemented by ESCAP.

Expected accomplishments

- Strengthened economic ties, reduced trade and transport barriers, increased joint activities between entrepreneurs of Afghanistan, Central Asia and Russia resulted in increased trade, local production and employment.
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Participating countries

- Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Russian Federation

Target group

- Government officials and policy makers, business communities and regional authorities in Afghanistan and Central Asian countries

The project strategy involves:

- Developing regional plan of new economic projects for Afghanistan that would lead to local production and employment generation, especially among women.
- Raising awareness and support from governmental structures for the implementation of new joint economic projects and regional cooperation to support development of Afghanistan
- Emphasizing the regional approach to economic development in Afghanistan, thus building on and complementing the work of local business and expert communities, as well as national governmental structure in the countries neighbouring Afghanistan.
- Strengthen processes leading to identifying, selecting, structuring, promoting and implementing new joint economic projects in Afghanistan with focus on regional economic cooperation.

The first workshop entitled "Strengthening trade and economic relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia" was held on 14-15 November 2012 in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. **The workshop discussed the following questions:**

- Issues of economic cooperation and future directions for the implementation of regional and bilateral trade and economic projects in Central Asia, and Russia, for the economic development of Afghanistan.
- Main barriers to trade between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries.
- Participation of the business community in Afghanistan's economic development and employment generation.
- Perspective and effective areas of investments in regional and bilateral economic projects.

About 50 senior Government officials, members of parliament, experts and private business representatives from Afghanistan's capital and various provinces, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russian Federation participated in the workshop. Special attention was given to attracting women participants.

ESCAP Regional Dialogue seeks to support Afghanistan's economic development by promoting economic ties, reduce barriers to trade, increase interest and joint activities between entrepreneurs of Afghanistan,

Central Asia and Russia, which will strengthen trade and result in local production and job creation for sustainable development.

The meeting will focus on identifying possible regional economic projects, which could be implemented by joint efforts of entrepreneurs from Afghanistan and neighboring countries. The primary economic outcome for Afghanistan should be in creating local jobs and basis for local taxation. This demands serious commitment on behalf of Governments of neighboring countries and Afghanistan authorities to support such economic projects.

Participants of the meeting are policymakers from the Ministries of Economic Development, Trade, Heads of Chambers of Commerce from the subregion, International Organizations, UN agencies, Financial Institutions, business and expert communities from identified countries, Research Institutes involved in the development of trade and economic relations with Afghanistan. The nature of issues stated above requires the direct involvement by policymakers and their increased awareness. The Regional Dialogue and cooperation among officials from different Ministries and business communities will contribute to development and promotion of new economic projects for Afghanistan.

ESCAP also has prepared an Analytical Report that assesses current patterns of trade and investment, as well as, prospects for enhanced cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asia. It presents an overview of the economic situation and challenges, trade and investment flows of Afghanistan with neighboring countries, and Afghanistan's export potential. Moreover, it discusses barriers to trade, investment and regional integration. It also presents recommendations and priorities for reform; those potentially should improve economic growth and increase entrepreneurial activities. It is expected from the participants and country representatives to express their opinion and recommendations to better assist Afghanistan in overcoming its economic challenges. All recommendations of the Regional Dialogue will be included into the final report and shared with all participants.

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