

First Working Group Meeting on the Development of Seamless Connectivity
22-23 December 2014
Bangkok

Highlights of the Meeting

Participants

Chair: Mr. Muhammad Shahid Chaudhury, Ministry of Planning Development and Reform, Pakistan

Mr. Yuwei Li, TD, ESCAP
Mr. Peter O'Neill, TD, ESCAP
Ms. Tiziana Bonapace, IDD, ESCAP
Mr. Hongpeng Liu, EDD, ESCAP

Mr. Farid Valiyev, Ministry of Transport, Azerbaijan
Mr. Bhimlal Suberi, Ministry of Information and Communications, Bhutan
Mr. Zhao Ruyu, Ministry of Transport, China
Mr. Somasundram Ramasamy, Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water, Malaysia
Mr. Kamal Pande, National Planning Commission, Nepal
Mr. Muhammad Shoaib, Ministry of Communications, Pakistan
Ms. Irina Smygalina, Ministry of Economic Development, Russian Federation
Mr. Konstantin Kozlov, Embassy of the Russian Federation
Mrs. Oketevi Savea, Computer Services Limited, Samoa
Mr. Joao Freitas, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Timor-Leste
Mr. Prasert Sinsukprasert, Ministry of Energy, Thailand
Mr. Aniruth Hiranraks, CAT Telecom Public Company Limited, Thailand
Dr. Poonpat Leesombatpiboon, Ministry of Energy, Thailand
Mr. Eric Kemp-Benedict, Stockholm Environment Institute, Bangkok
Dr. Wathanyu Amatayakul, Stockholm Environment Institute, Bangkok

Mr. Abdelmoula Ghzala (Consultant), TD, ESCAP
Mr. Abu Saed Khan (Consultant), IDD, ESCAP
Mr. Derek Atkinson (Consultant), EDD, ESCAP

Mr. Kohji Iwakami, EDD, ESCAP
Mr. Sergey Ivlinov, EDD, ESCAP
Mr. Pierre Chartier, TD, ESCAP
Mr. Madan Bandhu Regmi, TD, ESCAP
Ms. Joy Blessilda Sinay, TD, ESCAP
Ms. Sujinda Suntisuktavorn, TD, ESCAP
Ms. Kanlaya Kamonwatin, TD, ESCAP
Ms. Manisha Rani, TD, ESCAP

Purpose of the Working Group

The development of seamless connectivity across the region in the areas of transport, energy and information and communications technology, among others, including through the full realization of key regional initiatives.

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The meeting was organized to discuss issues and challenges in regional connectivity. The discussion will guide the report to be prepared by the three (3) resource persons, for input into the preparatory meetings for the second Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific in 2015. The report will take stock of current efforts, identify gaps and issues, agreed content for Recommended Actions in the report. The Working Group will then submit the report of the working group to the preparatory meeting.

Meeting considerations

1. The Group is not a venue for official dialogues but an informal platform where participants can share their own personal opinions. Official deliberations will be done during the preparatory meetings for the ministerial conference.
2. The discussion should focus on new avenues of cooperation and issues at the regional level, looking at the broader picture instead of specific issues. The participants also need to find a common framework and agree on the outline of the report.

Coverage of the report

1. The Working Group is formed under Resolution 70/1, which is on deepening economic integration in the region. Hence, the report should focus on developing infrastructure networks in support of regional economic integration.
2. Since the report is a research outcome and not an official plan of action, it was suggested that it be called Recommended Actions and not Action Plan.
3. To be influential, the report should highlight the benefits of seamless regional connectivity, such as economic development and increased competitiveness through lower connectivity costs, in order to get the support of the ministers.
4. The report should start at the principles and norms (universal level) then work on the finer details. Each sector - energy, ICT, transport – will have a chapter, and there will be a fourth chapter for the synergies or where there are possible mutual benefits derived from a multi-sectoral approach. Mr. O'Neill, Mr. Liu and Ms. Bonapace will come together to discuss how to integrate the different synergies identified from the three sectoral chapters into the synergy chapter.
5. To identify infrastructure gaps and avoid duplication of efforts, existing subregional initiatives/agreements/action plans (e.g. transport corridor along Russian Federation, China, Mongolia) should be checked for important elements (e.g. financing arrangements, regional architecture, operational gaps). Another suggestion was to assess the current situation in the countries/regions in all three areas to identify infrastructure gaps.
6. Recommendations need to be pragmatic.

Timeline of activities

1. Participants are requested to submit their inputs to the report to the sector leads (bonapace.unescap@un.org, liu4@un.org, oneillp@un.org) by the second week of January (14 January 2015). Inputs on cross-sectoral issues can be sent to Mr. O'Neill (oneillp@un.org). The sector leads will forward the inputs to the Consultants. Consultants can also get in touch with the Secretariat or the sector leads if additional information from the participants is needed.
2. The draft report will be sent out to the participants by the last day of February 2015.
3. The second WG meeting, to discuss the draft report, will be on 25-26 March 2015.
4. The completed report will be finalized by the last day of April 2015.

Transport

1. Transport needed to plan a balanced approach to sustainable development outcomes.
2. The importance of inter-modality seamless connectivity between roads, rails and ports should be emphasized with the equal importance of effective transfers creating efficient supply chains with economic and environmental considerations balanced.
3. The need to bring together organizations involved in transport for development was agreed with a suggested role for ESCAP TD as the coordinating agency.
4. There is a need to identify future initiatives in transport – for example, the Silk route cooperation and for ESCAP to coordinate the various country's optimal contribution in terms of mode and harmonization.
5. The role of maritime shipping should be explored to promote improved connectivity.
6. Cooperation for standardization and harmonization of practices and specifications was emphasized as an important area for recommendation in the report.
7. There is a priority for enhanced coordination of all the agencies and Ministries involved for cross-border facilitation.
8. Priority areas of support were identified such as capacity building for statistics and research, data collection and distribution, harmonization, with customization where appropriate, and thus ownership of regulatory and competition frameworks.
9. The need for countries of the region to sign up to the conventions, agreements and treaties of the UN and to implement the operational actions in those agreements, conventions and treaties.
10. The access to funds that are allocated for enabling regional connectivity, and proposing a project, such as the silk route and the maritime silk route.
11. There was a need for greater cooperation between the various sub-regional transport initiatives and also the stakeholders involved such as financial, research institutions and trade organizations.
12. The availability of innovative technology knowledge to improve transport systems.
13. There is a need for monitoring and evaluation of the progress of transport connectivity and this will entail a baseline and information database. Development Bank's information would also be required with regular multi-stakeholder participatory forums.

Energy

1. There is a need to harmonize power trade and develop regional energy markets. For example, Malaysia's power purchase arrangement with Singapore is pure system connectivity, while with Thailand it is a trading system (power purchase agreements, etc.). Another example is Laos, which has plenty of power but not much demand. Therefore, greater transmission networks will provide greater connectivity for Laos to Singapore for example.
2. Explore optimal working technologies that member countries could adopt.
3. Look at alternative scenarios for the energy mix and the global energy situation. Define how to balance countries' development goals vis-à-vis the energy mix (for sustainability), given that governments have limited budgets.
4. Priority will be given to the power grid connectivity (compared to oil and gas) because it is easier for regional connectivity.
5. Renewable energy should be defined. Note that sustainable energy is different from renewable energy. Better connectivity can distribute renewable energy and thus create a larger percentage contribution.

Information and communications technology (ICT)

1. Connectivity cost is a major issue in ICT, especially in Asia where broadband cost is very prohibitive. In places where costs are relatively lower, the government has implemented policies and installed infrastructure in order to lower costs. For example, in Hong Kong and Singapore the government allotted land for end-to-end open access, bringing down the cost of broadband. In Europe, the cost is lower because, with regional integration, networks can connect to each other across countries.
2. A significant barrier to lower broadband costs has been incumbent publicly-owned telecoms companies, as it has limited competition and provision of value-added services in the market. Under the right policy environment, increased number of carriers could increase competition, increase transit traffic, and thus lower cost.
3. Governments should recognize the opportunities offered by the co-deployment of optical fiber in major infrastructure sector, such as roads, railways, power grids, to minimize right of way issues and should allow the use or lease of these resources to networks/telecom providers.
4. Unlike energy or transport, the telecoms product is global in nature and there is a need for regional networks to integrate seamless into global infrastructure in planning, for enhancement of connectivity.
5. A number of countries, for example, Thailand, Samoa among others are in a good position to emerge as ICT hubs. The telecoms infrastructure is good. However, cross border security is not.
6. The APIS does not require additional costs for right of way and hard infrastructure. The APIS depend on the goodwill of member-states to allow the use of empty ducts in order to establish connectivity. For example, to connect from Beijing to Bangkok, it is only necessary to connect from the Thai border to the Lao border.
7. Important developments in linking the Pacific to regional and global networks were underway, as reflected in the interactive (web-based) AP-IS map, which was launched in 2013. The secretariat was requested to reflect these updates in the next edition of the printed version of the AP-IS map.

Cross-sectoral

1. A long-term development strategy is important in regional cooperation and political commitment is necessary in making long-term infrastructure projects possible. Thus, connectivity in this sense is not only physical connectivity (hard infrastructure) but also soft infrastructure, such as policy and government commitment. Therefore, searching for commonalities to improve connectivity should focus more on the soft side and not on the hard side of infrastructure.
2. Common linkages, such as fibre optic cable running along power grids and transport network infrastructure, provide opportunities for achieving sustainable development objectives in all

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