

11th South Asia Economic Summit
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Islamabad, Pakistan

Concurrent Panel B-7

Connecting for Trade and Development: Issues and Prospects of Land Transport Corridors of South Asia

Panel Organizers: UNESCAP South and South-West Asia Office and SDPI

The panel discussed issues of connectivity in the context of lack of adequate, accessible and affordable transport options in South Asia, particularly inland cross-border transport to connect the contiguous regions of the subcontinent. Inefficiencies in cross-border transport connectivity has led to high cost of doing trade and heavy loss of trade-led growth and development opportunities. Estimates show that the intra-regional trade in South Asia could potentially be three times as much the actual volume, if cost effective transport options are provided. Though South Asian countries are in the process of rebuilding and reconnecting the subregion's severed transport routes, the pace of such initiatives remain slow and inadequate. Based on a project led by UNESCAP-SSWA titled 'Strengthening connectivity of countries in South and Central Asia', the session examined the connectivity requirements of South Asia, with special emphasis on overland transport connectivity, with specific emphasis on the challenges faced by the Landlocked Least Developed Countries (LLDCs) of the subregion. Points for discussions included:

- Identification of main subregional multimodal corridors and policy priorities for their speedy operationalization
- Ways to synergize various regional connectivity initiatives at the national level and those led by subregional organizations such as ECO, SAARC and BIMSTEC
- Requirements of infrastructural and procedural reforms to operationalize subregional corridors and ways of investment mobilization
- Ways to utilize transport policy resources and expertise of UNESCAP, subregional think-tanks, transport service providers and operators, and other stakeholders
- Utilization of technological advancements to fast-track digitization of trade and transport procedures and implementation of single window systems
- Potential solutions to address the specific connectivity needs of LLDCs in the subregion

Chair: Mr. Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, Federal Minister for Railways, Government of Pakistan

Moderator: Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Head, UNESCAP South and South-West Asia Office, New Delhi

Speakers:

Mr. Joseph George, Research Associate, UNESCAP Sub-regional Office for South and South-West Asia, New Delhi

Ms. Hussan-Bano Burki, Chief of Party, Pakistan Regional Economic Integration Activity (PREIA), Islamabad

Dr. Paras Kharel, Research Director, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Kathmandu

Mr. Nazir Kabiri, Senior Advisor to the Finance Minister, Government of Afghanistan

Mr. Guntur Sugiyarto, Principal Economist, Asian Development Bank, Islamabad, Pakistan

Mr. Bipul Chatterjee, Executive Director, CUTS International, Jaipur, India