

**Greater Mekong Subregion
Economic Cooperation Program**

**FIFTH MEETING OF THE TRADE FACILITATION WORKING GROUP
16-17 May 2007
Bangkok, Thailand**

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Introduction

1. The Fifth Meeting of the Trade Facilitation Working Group (TFWG-5) was held on 16-17 May 2007 in Bangkok, Thailand. The Meeting was chaired by the Ms. Pranee Siriphand, Director of the Bureau of Border Trade and Special Initiative, Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand for sessions I-IV and Mr. Sun Yuanjiang Director, Department of International Trade and Economic Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, People's Republic of China (PRC) for sessions V-VII. Mr. Jaseem Ahmed, Director, Governance, Finance and Trade Division, Southeast Asia Department, Asian Development Bank (ADB) co-chaired all the sessions.

2. The objectives of TFWG-5 were (i) to review the progress of the implementation of ADB regional technical assistance (RETA) 6328: Support to Trade Facilitation and Capacity Building in the GMS; and (ii) to discuss the initial technical report of RETA 6328, with a view to reaching consensus on the key issues under the four priority sectors that need to be tackled at the subregional level; The Meeting agenda is attached as **Appendix 1**.

3. GMS senior officials responsible for customs, transport, quarantine and inspection, and foreign affairs attended the Meeting. Representatives from the private sector and other development partners also attended. ADB staff and consultants also participated in the Meeting. The list of participants is in **Appendix 2**.

Opening Session

4. In his opening statement, Mr. Laohoua Cheuching, Lao PDR expressed that progress in trade facilitation will greatly benefit business community. He further stated that the GMS countries should aim for full Customs modernization in the long-term and in the short-term work towards simplification and harmonization of documents. In his opening remarks, Mr. Jaseem Ahmed, ADB, cited the accelerated growth of the GMS economies and the important role being played by trade, including intraregional trade, in this regard. In her welcome remarks, Ms. Apiradi Tantraporn, Director General, Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand highlighted the importance of trade facilitation to achieve the full benefits of improved physical infrastructures. The statements of Mr. Cheuching and Mr. Ahmed are attached as **Appendices 3A, 3B, and 3C**.

Session IA: Overview of RETA 6328

5. Ms. Lingling Ding, Senior Regional Economist, Thailand Resident Mission, ADB briefed the participants on the background of the Strategic Framework for Action on Trade Facilitation and Investment (SFA-TFI), including its formulation, objectives, and priority areas. She also discussed planned activities under regional technical assistance to support the implementation of the SFA-TFI, including: (i) in-country consultations; (ii) development of programs/project outlines; (iii) follow-up regional workshop; and (iv) programs/projects covering capacity building, regulatory reforms and/or investments. Ms. Ding's full presentation is provided as **Appendix 4**.

Session IB. National Actions and Regional Plans and Update on the Four Priority Areas

6. Country delegations provided the Meeting with updates on the implementation of the SFA-TFI under the four priority areas. Highlights of country statements are as follows:

- (i) Cambodia informed the meeting that the following are being undertaken:
 - Streamlining of border agencies;
 - Simplifying and harmonizing Customs documents;
 - Strengthening cooperation among agencies concern with quarantine/SPS;
 - Drafting of multimodal transport law to allow the licensing of multimodal transport operators for cross-border transport operations.
- (ii) The PRC informed the Meeting that progress has been achieved in implementing the SFA-TFI, which includes:
 - A core group¹ was set up to monitor the implementation of SFA-TFI. The core group formulated a national action plan (NAP) outlining the actions to achieve the goals indicated in the SFA-TFI. This NAP has already been approved and endorsed by the State Council.
 - Amendment of domestic laws in accordance with requirements of SFA-TFI and in line with the requirements of the Revised Kyoto Convention.
 - Dissemination of information on existing regulations through posting in website, particularly in the area of customs, quarantine and inspection, and mobility of business people.
 - Simplified customs procedures.
 - Improved procedures to allow easier visa application.
- (iii) Lao PDR informed the Meeting of the following progress in implementing the SFA-TFI:
 - Streamlined the number of border agencies to only 3 agencies.
 - Improved trade facilitation procedures to allow easier movements of goods and people.
 - Implemented single-stop inspection at the Lao Bao-Dansavanh border crossing under the GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement initiative.
 - Improved visa application and issuance procedures to allow greater business mobility.
- (iv) Lao PDR also informed the Meeting of the need to (i) provide assistance in developing the capacity of officials in both the software and hardware aspect of trade facilitation; and (ii) carry out a study to establish appropriate information and information linkages between customs and trade.
- (v) Myanmar informed the Meeting of the following activities related to the implementation of the SFA-TFI:
 - Modification of Customs laws and regulation in line with the requirements of the World Customs Organization and ASEAN
 - Harmonization of standards covering inspection, quarantine and SPS.
 - Transport logistics – infrastructure of roads – container depots, gateway ports we are already accomplished. From Thai to India – roads already done
 - Discussion to improve mobility of business people.
 - Designation of the Ministry of Commerce to serve as the focal agency to facilitate the implementation of the SFA-TFI.
- (vi) Thailand informed the Meeting that:

¹ The core group is composed of representatives from the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Communications, Ministry of Public Security, General Administration of China Customs, General Administration of Quality Supervision and Quarantine.

- Single window inspection is already being implemented at quarantine stations of Mukdahan-Savannakhet border crossing points.
 - One stop service is already in place at 9 border checkpoints.
- (vii) Viet Nam raised the following issues relating to implementation of the SFA-TFI:
- Importance of raising public awareness on food safety issues.
 - Agreement to allow exchange of traffic rights among Viet Nam, Lao PDR, and Thailand is currently underway.
 - Need to eliminate the requirement for bond deposit for goods in transit.
 - Importance of conducting national seminar on the implementation of SSI,

Session II. Customs

7. Mr. Guillermo L. Parayno, RETA 6328 Consultant for Customs presented the customs component of the initial draft of technical report covered the ongoing national and regional Customs Trade Facilitation defined initiatives on customs modernization, which highlights (i) result of the gap analysis conducted; and (ii) interim trade facilitation measures needed for GMS. The full presentation is attached as **Appendix 5**.

8. A summary of the comments made by the Meeting participants are as follows:
- (i) PRC noted that the SFA-TFI Customs component is forward looking. Some of the recommendations in the report should be reviewed closely to determine if these issues have already been addressed by existing initiatives. Prioritization should also be made on the proposed recommendations to determine what is achievable in the immediate term.
 - (ii) Lao PDR expressed agreement on the results of the technical report however stated that more concrete recommendations on how to improve procedures should be included.
 - (iii) Myanmar supports the findings of the paper but raised the need to clearly identify what are the next steps to move forward in improving Customs trade facilitation.
 - (iv) Thailand informed the Meeting that currently only 10% of import goods are subjected to physical inspection.
 - (v) Viet Nam stated the importance of implementing single-stop inspection at increasing number of border crossing points. Focus should also be made in providing additional assistance to improve the facilities and capacities of officials at the border checkpoints.

9. By way of responding to the question on what the priorities should be in Customs Trade Facilitation, Mr. Parayno recommended that GMS focus on three major areas: (i) Intervention by exception; (ii) Review of ICTs and possible re-design to make these support trade facilitation measures; and (iii) Transparency and partnership with business and trade. He also suggested that GMS Customs' capacity for data management and business analytics be upgraded as this is essential tools for risk management and intervention by exception.

10. Mr. Parayno informed the Meeting that all comments from the Country delegations will be reflected in the technical report. He also stated that a second round of country field visits will be conducted this month and in June to reconfirm the findings of the gap analysis.

Session III. Quarantine and Inspection, SPS standards

11. Mr. David Parsons, RETA 6328 Consultant for quarantine and inspection, SPS standards - briefed the participants on the results of the technical report, including (i) SPS best practices; (ii) findings of the gaps analysis conducted in each GMS country; and (iii) recommendations for the SPS program. Full presentation is attached as **Appendix 6**.

12. A summary of the comments made by the Meeting participants are as follows:
- (i) Cambodia informed the Meeting that institutional arrangements relating to SPS are currently in place. Cambodia further stated that the challenge is to implement proposed recommendations under the area of SPS/TBT given limited resources.
 - (ii) PRC raised the following issues:
 - risk assessment under the Customs regime and under SPS are not the same;
 - the principle of due diligence is a very new concept for PRC;
 - there is a need to put in place an information sharing mechanism;
 - PRC recognize the importance of involving the private sector; and
 - recognize the different levels of capacity of the GMS countries in the area of risk assessment.
 - (iii) Lao PDR expressed the importance of addressing risk management in the area of illegal trading of animals, bearing in mind the porous borders.
 - (iv) Myanmar informed the Meeting that they are currently updating laws and regulation pertaining to quarantine and SPS, but require assistance.
 - (v) Thailand noted that the recommendations are rather ambitious and need further adaptation to country situation. Thailand expressed the need to develop concrete program, such as harmonization of standards and implementation of food safety program.
 - (vi) Viet Nam informed the Meeting of the importance of:
 - developing an assessment of training needs with a clearly defined priorities, such as English and local language training, and risk assessment; and
 - developing a sustainable mechanism to maintain and monitor a GMS trade facilitation website that will contain information relevant to facilitating trade in the subregion.
13. Mr. Ahmed, ADB noted that the difficulties expressed by the countries with regards the recommendations may be attributed to the need for more detailed guidance on how these recommendations are to be achieved.

Session IV. Trade Logistics Development in the GMS

14. Mr. John Arnold, RETA 6328 Consultant (Team Leader) presented the findings of the technical report on ongoing national and regional initiatives on trade logistics development in the GMS, including (i) evolution of the domestic logistics industry; (ii) integration of supply chains to improve competitiveness and security; (iii) integration of border functions; (iv) freight corridor development; and (v) performance monitoring and benchmarking. Mr. Arnold's presentation is attached as **Appendix 7**.

15. A summary of the comments made by the Meeting participants are as follows:
- (i) Cambodia informed the meeting on the following issues:
 - Making efforts to set up their own logistics planning;
 - Given the larger role played by the private sector in trade logistics, raised the question as to whether there is still a need for logistics planning at the national and local levels;
 - lacks capacity in terms of formulating an adequate logistics plan;
 - request for training from international donors for training of staff to acquire necessary skills for logistics;
 - (ii) PRC informed the meeting, in reference to paragraph 445 of the technical report, that since 2005, there are no longer restrictions on foreign ownership or restrictions on investment areas. The question was also raised as to the

urgency for integrated services if service providers are primarily single function enterprises.

- (iii) Lao PDR cited the difficulty in expanding roads and the need for ICT to be able to improve logistics at borders. The issue for providing training to border officials was also raised;
- (iv) Myanmar expressed their views on continuing to protect the country image and culture, the agriculture sector, and the continuing importance of securing customs revenues. They also reiterated their importance as the link between Southeast Asia and South Asia.
- (v) Thailand noted that the principal gap in transport and border continuity is being addressed by the CBTA. They also expressed concern regarding road safety with the trend of larger vehicles.

Session V. Business Mobility

16. Mr. John Arnold, RETA 6328 Consultant presented the findings of the technical report on ongoing national and regional initiatives on business mobility in the GMS, (i) serving the needs of different types of business travel; (ii) potential benefits from new ID technologies; and (iii) opportunities for coordination and information exchange. Mr. Arnold's presentation is attached as **Appendix 8**.

17. A summary of the comments made by the Meeting participants are as follows:
- (i) Cambodia and Thailand are already implementing a single visa scheme under the ACMECS initiatives.
 - (ii) PRC raised that a study should be conducted on the need to develop a new visa scheme given the various existing visa facilitation initiatives. PRC suggested that it may be more pragmatic to make efficient the existing system for visa application rather than develop a new scheme.
 - (iii) Viet Nam suggested that to move forward, a two phased approach may be adopted. Under phase one implement visa exemption scheme within the GMS and under phase two provide single-visa for business people that are not GMS nationals.

18. Mr. Ahmed informed the Meeting that the technical report will be further improved to reflect the comments and suggestions provided by the country delegations. The revised report will also reflect the different visa facilitation initiatives.

Session VI. Remarks/Updates from the Private Sector and other Development Partners

19. Representatives of Development Partners brief the Meeting on their activities related to trade facilitation, including: Mr. Zhang Shujie for the World Customs Organization-Regional Officer for Capacity Building; and Mr. Peng Bin, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). Presentations are provided as **Appendices 9A and 9B**.

20. Dr. Jingjai Hanchanlash, Chairman of the GMS-Business Forum brief the Meeting of the views of the private sector on the issue of trade facilitation in the GMS. Dr. Jingjai highlighted the need to make the GMS business environment more attractive for SMEs. His presentation is provided as **Appendix 9C**.

Session VII. Key Issues and Next Steps and Consideration of TFWG Meeting Summary

21. The Meeting discussed the possible areas for cooperation under the four priority areas:

- (i) Customs.
 - Intervention by exception;
 - Review of ICTs and possible re-design to make these support trade facilitation measures; and
 - Transparency and partnership with business and trade.
- (ii) Quarantine and Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Standards.
 - Strengthening communication among GMS countries through information sharing;
 - Supporting further international accreditation certification and mutual recognition of laboratories;
 - Greater private sector involvement in (i) contributing to standard-setting (ii) becoming compliant (iii) obtaining certification for production, processing and manufacturing activities (iv) building capacity in SPS management (v) creating an effective lobby and (v) developing secure supply chains
- (iii) Transport Logistics
 - Prepare a national logistics action plan that focus on domestic, regional and international trade facilitation, identifies roadblocks to efficient logistics and develop national logistics service providers that can be addressed through public policy and investments, including those related to major GMS economic corridors and the CBTA implementation.
- (iv) Business Mobility
 - Establish mechanism for information sharing;
 - Build on existing arrangements for facilitating business travel; and
 - Develop a subregional compliance mechanism.

22. The Summary of the Meeting adopted by the TFWG is provided as **Appendix 10**.

Session VIII. Other Matters

23. Viet Nam delegation raised the importance of ensuring relevant agencies are represented in future TFWG meetings. To ensure proper coordination, the Meeting agreed that future communications relating to activities of the working group, including invitations will be addressed to the relevant TFWG focal points.

24. The Meeting agreed to hold a workshop to discuss priority programs in the first week of September 2007 in PRC. The Meeting also agreed to hold the Sixth Meeting of the TFWG in November 2007 in Lao PDR. ADB will coordinate with the GMS countries on the detailed arrangements in due time.

25. The participants thanked the Royal Thai Government and ADB for hosting and organizing the Meeting in Bangkok.

**Greater Mekong Subregion
Fifth Meeting of the Trade Facilitation Working Group (TFWG-5)
Bangkok, Thailand
16-17 May 2007**

PROVISIONAL ANNOTATED AGENDA

Objectives of the Meeting:

- (i) To review the progress of the implementation of the RETA for Support to Trade Facilitation and Capacity Building in the GMS
- (ii) To discuss the initial technical report, with a view to reaching consensus on the key issues under the four priority sectors that need to be tackled at the subregional level
- (iii) To update the participants on recent key developments in the GMS and enhance their awareness on the role of trade facilitation activities/initiatives in the overall GMS Program
- (iv) To enhance participants' awareness and knowledge of key areas in subregional trade facilitation, which are important elements in enhancing the overall connectivity and competitiveness of the subregion, e.g., trade logistics development, risk management for inspection and quarantine and customs

16 May 2007 (Wednesday)

08:30-08:50 **Registration**

08:50-09:15 **Opening Session**

Opening Remarks:	Mr. Laohoua Cheuching Deputy Director General Import and Export Department Ministry of Industry and Commerce Lao PDR
Opening Remarks:	Mr. Jaseem Ahmed Director Governance, Finance and Trade Division (SEGF) Southeast Asia Department (SERD) Asian Development Bank (ADB)
Welcome Remarks:	Ms. Apiradee Tantraporn Director General, Department of Foreign Trade Ministry of Commerce, Thailand

09:15-09:35 **Session I-A: Overview of the Regional Technical Assistance (RETA) to Support Trade Facilitation and Capacity Building in GMS**

The RETA to Support Trade Facilitation and Capacity Building in the GMS, approved in July 2006 is supporting the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Action on Trade Facilitation and Investment (SFA-TFI). The session will: (i) brief the TFWG on the timeline, and outputs of various activities under the RETA; and (ii) discuss the main elements of the draft technical report that covers trade logistics development, customs procedures, quarantine, inspection and sanitary/phytosanitary (SPS) standards, and business mobility. A presentation of the highlights of the RETA and future plans will be made by ADB staff.

Chair: Mr. Ittipol Changlum
Deputy Director General
Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce
Thailand

Co-chair: Mr. Jaseem Ahmed
Director, SEGF/SERD, ADB

09:35-09:45 Coffee/tea Break

09:45-10:45 **Session I-B: National Actions and Regional Plans and Update on the Four Priority Areas**

Heads of delegations from each GMS country will provide an update on their plans under the four priority areas of the SFA-TFI. The meeting will also discuss the development of national actions and regional plans that will assist in implementing the SFA-TFI.

10:45-12:45 **Session II: Customs**

The session will discuss the findings of the technical report with regard to ongoing national and regional initiatives on customs modernization. The discussion will focus on current efforts at modernization and international practices that are intended to facilitate trade, including (i) the increasing role of customs in matters of security; (ii) risk management and business analytic techniques; (iii) inland clearance; (iv) performance monitoring; and (v) opportunities for mutual assistance among the GMS countries.

A short presentation will be made by the ADB consultant on Customs. The presentation will be followed by an open discussion of interventions by each of the GMS countries to ensure their views and concerns are fully addressed.

Chair: Mr. Laohoua Cheuching
Lao PDR

Co-chair: Mr. Jaseem Ahmed
Director, SEGF/SERD, ADB

12:45-13:30 Lunch

13:30-15:45 **Session III: Quarantine and Inspection, SPS standards**

The session will discuss the findings of the technical report, with regard to quarantine and inspection, sanitary and phyto-sanitary issues at both the national and sub-regional levels.

Topics to be covered include: (i) gaps in protection provided by current systems for imports and exports; (ii) improvements in regional risk assessment, intelligence and management information sharing and collaboration and how to build up effective regional surveillance and a risk warning system; (iii) coordination between multilateral and bilateral lenders and donors in developing SPS and technical barriers to trade (TBT) capacity and ensuring equivalence to meet evolving international requirements; (iv) intra GMS mutual assistance in laboratory accreditation and certification to achieve diagnostic and analytical capability, strengthening, and harmonization; and (v) role of the private sector and its interface with the public sector.

A short presentation will be made by the ADB consultant on SPS. The presentation will be followed by an open discussion of interventions by each of the GMS countries to ensure their views and concerns are fully addressed.

Chair: Mr. Khlauk Chuon
Deputy Director of Camcontrol
Cambodia

Co-chair: Mr. Jaseem Ahmed
Director, SEGF/SERD, ADB

15:45-16:00 Coffee/tea break

16:00-18:00 **Session IV: Trade Logistics Development in the GMS**

The session will discuss the findings of the technical report with regard to logistics issues at both the national and sub-regional levels, and how these issues relate to evolving international practices.

Topics to be covered include: (i) evolution of the domestic logistics industry; (ii) integration of supply chains to improve competitiveness and security; (iii) integration of border functions; (iv) freight corridor development; and (v)

performance monitoring and benchmarking.

A short presentation will be made by the ADB consultant on trade logistics, which will include a comparative analysis of trade logistics development among the GMS countries, and specific areas where mutual assistance could be beneficial. The presentation will be followed by an open discussion of interventions by each of the GMS countries to ensure their views and concerns are fully addressed.

Chair: Mr. Nguyen Anh Tuan
Department of Asia and the Pacific
Ministry of Trade
Viet Nam

Co-chair: Mr. Jaseem Ahmed
Director, SEGF/SERD, ADB

18:00 – 18:15 First Day Wrap Up

18:45 – 20:45 Dinner hosted by ADB

17 May 2007 (Thursday)

08:30-10:00 **Session V: Business Mobility**

The session will discuss the findings of the technical report with regard to opportunities for improving business mobility. Topics to be covered include: (i) serving the needs of different types of business travel; (ii) potential benefits from new ID technologies; and (iii) opportunities for coordination and information exchange.

A short presentation will be made by the ADB consultant. The presentation will be followed by an open discussion of interventions by each of the GMS countries to ensure their views and concerns are fully addressed.

Chair: Mr. Sun Yuanjiang
Director, Department of International Trade and Economic
Affairs, Ministry of Commerce
PRC

Co-chair: Mr. Jaseem Ahmed
Director, SEGF/SERD, ADB

- 10:00-10:15 Coffee/tea break
- 10:15-11:15 **Session VI: Remarks/Updates from the Private Sector and other Development Partners**
- The session will provide an opportunity for representatives of the private sector to inform the TFWG-5 on related issues, and for development partners to provide information on their trade facilitation activities and to give comments/reviews on the technical report. The session is an effort to further refining and enhancing coordination on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Action on Trade Facilitation and Investment in the GMS.*
- WCO, Mr. Zhang Shujie
 - UNESCAP, Mr. Peng Bin
 - UNIDO, Ms. Ayumi Fujino
 - GMS-BF, Dr. Jingjai Hanchanlash
- 11:15-12:30 **Session VI: Key Issues and Next Steps and Consideration of the TFWG Summary Report**
- Based on discussions on the four priority areas, the TFWG-5 will provide direction and aim to agree on concrete elements required to finalize the technical/sector report.*
- The TFWG-5 will also discuss discrepancies in the findings of the report and identify areas where further research would need to be undertaken.*
- The TFWG-5 will seek to discuss and agree on a plan identifying possible projects, which will be further developed during the planned in-country "brainstorming" sessions. The TFWG Summary Report will be considered and adopted by the Meeting during this session.*
- 12:30-12:45 **Session VIII: Other Matters**
- The session will discuss other matters that may be raised by the meeting, including the date and venue of the next TFWG meeting (TFWG-6).*
- 12:45-13:00 Closing Session
Group Photo Session
- 13:00 – 14:00 Lunch

**Greater Mekong Subregion
Economic Cooperation Program
Fifth Meeting of the Trade Facilitation Working Group (TFWG-5)
16-17 May 2007
Bangkok, Thailand**

List of Participants

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