



PROJECT PROFILE



South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) – PTB Project

‘Strengthening regional integration and cooperation in the field of quality infrastructure in South Asia’

Background and rationale

Despite economic liberalization, solid growth and preferential trade agreements, the intra-regional exchange of goods within the *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation* (SAARC) is still limited. **Technical barriers to trade** play a substantial role in this respect, which in turn are primarily due to non-harmonized standards and conformity assessment procedures, as well as insufficient metrology, testing and accreditation systems – in short: a lack of quality infrastructure.

SAARC is aware of the relevance of technical barriers to trade, having established the core elements of a *Regional Action Plan on Standards, Quality Control and Measurement* in 1999. This action plan’s primary element is an approach based on **division of work and regional exchange**; the approach aims to make effective use of the resources available in the region for the benefit of smaller member states. In order to coordinate this exchange, the *South Asian Regional Standards Organization* (SARSO), was founded in 2011. SARSO is responsible for standardization, as well as for interdisciplinary subjects related to quality infrastructure.

Within the framework of two previous projects, funded by the German **Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development** (BMZ), the German National Metrology Institute (PTB) has built upon the initiatives taken by SAARC and supported the strengthening of regional cooperation in quality infrastructure. Among other activities, PTB facilitated partnerships between national metrology institutes and national accreditation bodies and implemented information and training measures in close cooperation with national partner institutions in SAARC. Furthermore, PTB supported SARSO in its development phase with regards to harmonizing standardization procedures in accordance with international good practice.

An independent evaluation undertaken in the last quarter of 2016 acknowledged the progress that has been achieved so far, but also highlighted the need for a third phase to ensure impact and sustainability.

Objective

The aim of the project is to sustainably improve access to trade- and demand-oriented quality infrastructure services through regional cooperation and division of work.

Approach

The project focuses on capacity development in quality infrastructure by facilitating sharing of expertise and information among SAARC Member States. In pursuit of this approach, four inter-related intervention areas are targeted:

- a) Strengthening of the South Asian Regional Standards Organization (SARSO) as a regional coordination structure
- b) Expanding regional cooperation in metrology
- c) Consolidating regional cooperation structures in accreditation and
- d) Networking and awareness raising to sensitize key stakeholders from the public and private sector. Envisaged activities include regional and sub-regional workshops, trainings, coordination meetings and consultancy visits.

Impact

An improved access to quality infrastructure services such as measurement and accreditation will enable businesses to demonstrate compliance with regional and international market requirements. At the same time, regional approaches to capacity development in quality infrastructure are expected to help smaller economies in saving scarce resources whereas larger economies could strengthen their role as know-how provider and regional network partners. Thus, the project strengthens the process of regional economic integration by reducing technical barriers to trade and promoting partnerships among institutions of quality infrastructure.

Cooperation

The project is carried out in close collaboration with the network of National Metrology Institutes and National Accreditation Bodies within SAARC. On regional level, the project's main cooperation partner is the South Asian Regional Standards Organisation (SARSO), a specialized body of SAARC.

Financing

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Term

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