Regional Cooperation and Integration (RCI) Conference 2026: Leveraging RCI for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth[1]

4-5 November 2026
Asian Development Bank Headquarters Auditorium Halls 3-4

Agenda

I. Introduction

1. Asia and the Pacific faces a critical juncture. The open regionalism that helped lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty built on trade, connectivity, and collective action is under pressure from rising protectionism and geopolitical tensions. Productivity is stagnating and diverging, posing the risk of trapping many developing members in the middle-income status. Moreover, transboundary challenges are escalating across both environmental and economic domains, including climate change and disaster risks, digital fragmentation, biodiversity loss, pandemic risks, and water and food insecurity.

2. Against this background, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved in March 2026 the Operational Approach for Revitalizing Regional Cooperation and Integration (RCI) to guide regional engagements of ADB to meet the pressing needs and rising expectations of its members for ADB's leadership. Aiming to boost productivity through optimized economic integration and inclusion and strengthen resilience by reducing interdependence risks and addressing transboundary vulnerabilities, ADB is recalibrating the focus of its RCI operational priority areas by scaling up and upgrading connectivity, broadening and deepening trade, investment, and finance cooperation, and bolstering regional public goods.

3. Every two to three years, ADB hosts a major conference on RCI to connect with stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific, share knowledge, explore innovative RCI initiatives, and implement ADB's RCI strategies.

4. The objectives of this RCI Conference are to:

(i) Formally launch the Operational Approach for Revitalizing RCI and disseminate it to key stakeholders in ADB's developing members, development partners, relevant international organizations, and the private sector.
(ii) Obtain the views of ADB's DMCs on innovative and effective ways to implement the Operational Approach–how they can support its implementation, what their priorities are, and what resources and collaborative efforts are needed to operationalize this approach.
(iii) Explore potential partnerships among ADB, DMCs, development partners, international organizations, and the private sector in implementing the RCI Operational Approach; and
(iv) Stimulate dialogue and discussion on how deeper regional cooperation and economic integration can help the region navigate challenges posed by the evolving geopolitical landscape without losing sight of the long-term vision of a more green, inclusive, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific.

[1] The 2026 RCI Conference is co-organized by the Regional Cooperation and Integration and Trade Division, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department and the Regional Cooperation and Integration Division, Economic Research and Development Impact Department, ADB.

II. Conference Program

Day 1: 4 November 2026 (Wednesday)	
8:30 am-8:50 am	**Registration**
9:00 am-9:20 am	**Opening Session: Keynote Address and Welcome Remarks** **Keynote Address** and Launch of ADB's Operational Approach for Revitalizing Regional Cooperation and Integration by Masato Kanda, President, ADB **Welcome Remarks** by Wempi Saputra, Vice President, Sectors and Themes, ADB **Group Photo with President Kanda**
9:20 am-9:30 am	**Short Video on RCI Operational Approach** **Group Photo with Vice President Saputra**
VIEWS OF ADB'S DEVELOPING MEMBERS ON THE RCI OPERATIONAL APPROACH IMPLEMENTATION	
9:30 am-11:00 am	**Moderator**: Eugenue Zhukov, Director General, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department (CCSD), ADB *A representative of each delegation will deliver 2-3-minute statement on what they see as opportunities and challenges, as well as priorities for RCI in Asia and the Pacific and how ADB and other development partners can support RCI.*
11:00 am-11:15 am	**Coffee/Tea Break**
THEME 1: RCI OVERVIEW	
11:15 am-12:30 pm	**Session 1: RCI Trends, Emerging Challenges, and ADB's Operational Approach for Revitalizing RCI** *This session will examine the changing landscape of regional cooperation and integration amid growing geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty, digital transformation, climate risks, and other cross-border challenges. It will introduce the key priorities of ADB's new Operational Approach and explore how deeper regional cooperation can support productivity, resilience, and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific. High-level panel discussion will immediately follow the presentations.* **Moderator**: Safdar Parvez, Deputy Director General, Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships Department, ADB **Presenters:** ▪ Jong Woo Kang, Director, Regional Cooperation and Integration Division, Economic Research and Development Impact Department (ERDI), ADB

	▪ Yuebin Zhang, Principal Regional Cooperation Specialist, Regional Cooperation and Integration and Trade Division CCRC/CCSD, ADB
	High-Level Panel Discussion on ADB's Operational Approach for Revitalizing RCI *The panel will discuss how the recently approved RCI Operational Approach of ADB, particularly the recalibrated focus of its three RCI operational priority areas and transformative regional initiatives, can help ADB's DMCs overcome global and regional challenges and progress toward faster and more sustainable and resilient growth and development.* **High-Level Panel** ▪ Ekaterine Guntsadze, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Finance, Georgia ▪ Kosal Oum, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Commerce, Cambodia ▪ Shu Zhan, Alternate Executive Director for the People's Republic of China, ADB ▪ Lei Lei Song, Senior Training Advisor, ADB Center of Excellence ▪ Fauziah Zen, Senior Specialist, Sectors and Themes Department B, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
12:30 pm-1:30 pm	**Lunch Break**
THEME 2: SCALING UP AND UPGRADING CONNECTIVITY	
1:30 pm-3:45 pm	**Session 2: Greater and High-Quality Connectivity Infrastructure** *Connectivity remains a cornerstone of regional integration. This session will explore how investments in transport, energy, and digital infrastructure can improve connectivity between economies, facilitate the movement of goods, services, and people, and create new opportunities for trade, investment, and innovation. Discussions will highlight regional power grids, economic corridors, multimodal transport systems, and digital platforms that support more inclusive and sustainable growth.* **Moderator**: Hideaki Iwasaki, Director General, Sectors Department 1 (SD1), ADB *The Moderator will provide a brief overview of key trends, opportunities, and challenges related to transport, energy, and digital infrastructure connectivity.* **Panel 1: Transport Connectivity** ▪ Masato Nakane, Principal Transport Specialist, SD1-TRA, ADB (Brief presentation to set the scene for the sector discussion) ▪ Chuda Raj Dhakal, Project Director, Project Directorate (ADB), Department of Roads, Ministry of Infrastructure Development, Nepal

	▪ Firuz Khodjimatov, Head of the Transport and Logistics Department of the Ministry of Investment, Industry and Trade, Uzbekistan ▪ Kadir Basboga, Associate Manager, Regional Integration Cooperation and Capacity Development Department, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) **(virtual)** ▪ Yuebin Zhang, Principal Regional Cooperation Specialist, CCRC/CCSD, ADB **Panel 2: Energy Connectivity** Priyantha Wijayatunga, Deputy Director General, SD1, ADB (Brief presentation to set the scene for the sector discussion) ▪ Kanat Ayapbergenov, Managing Director for National Grid Development of Kazakhstan Electricity Grid Operating Company **(virtual)** ▪ Daniel Weidmer, Director, Infrastructure Finance Division 2, Private Sector Department, ADB ▪ Claudia Vasquez, Energy Practice Manager for East Asia & Pacific, World Bank **(virtual)** ▪ Fauziah Zen, Senior Specialist, Sectors and Themes Department B, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank ▪ Lisa Sachs, Director, Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment, Columbia Climate School, Columbia University **(virtual)** **Panel 3: Digital Connectivity** ▪ Pratish Halady, Director, Digital Sector, Sectors Department 2 (SD2), ADB (Brief presentation to set the scene for the sector discussion) ▪ Darren Philips, ASEAN Cyber Lead, EY Singapore ▪ Merali Bodurshozoda, Deputy Director, Agency for Innovation and Digital Technologies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan ▪ Mike Lott, Senior Digital Specialist, World Bank ▪ Chaemee Kim, Head, NextGen Trade Platform, Korea International Trade Association
3:45 pm-4:00 pm	**Coffee/Tea Break**
THEME 3: BROADENING AND DEEPENING TRADE, INVESTMENT, AND FINANCE COOPERATION	
4:00 pm-5:30 pm	**Session 3: Trade, Value Chains, Investment, and Financial Cooperation** *Amid growing uncertainty arising from geopolitical tensions, economic shifts, and climate-related risks, economies across Asia and the Pacific face increasing challenges to trade and global value chains. This session will explore how the region can strengthen trade and investment*

	integration, diversify supply chains, deepen financial cooperation, expand regional capital markets, and enhance disaster risk financing. **Moderator**: Jong Woo Kang, Director, Regional Cooperation and Integration Division (ERCI), ERDI, ADB *The Moderator will provide a brief overview of key trends, opportunities, and challenges related to trade, investment, and financial cooperation* **Panel 1: Trade Reforms, Free Trade Agreements, and Value Chains** ▪ Neil Foster-McGregor, Principal Economist, ERCI, ERDI, ADB (Setting the scene for the sector discussion) ▪ Zulfia Karimova, Principal Regional Cooperation Specialist, Regional Cooperation and Integration Unit, Central and West Asia Department, ADB ▪ Julian Clarke, Senior Regional Cooperation Specialist, CCRC, ADB ▪ Nurbek Maksutov, Head, Representative Office of Ministry of Economy and Commerce of Kyrgyz Republic in Geneva on WTO Affairs ▪ Albert Hayrapetyan, Head of Economic Research Department, Ministry of Economy, Armenia ▪ Mehdi Mehamha, Senior Regional Integration and Trade Promotion Specialist, IsDB **Panel 2: Regional Financial Cooperation** ▪ Alessandra Donini, Economist, ERCI, ERDI, ADB (setting the scene for the sector discussion) ▪ Kelvin Lester Lee, Senior Financial Sector Specialist, SD3-FIN, ADB ▪ Jiangyan Yu, Group Head and Lead Economist, Policy and Review Group, ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO)
6:00 pm-8:00pm	**Cocktails, The Plaza, Staff Hub, ADB**

Day 2: 5 November 2026 (Thursday)	
8:30 am-8:50 am	**Registration**
THEME 4: BOLSTERING REGIONAL PUBLIC GOODS	
9:00 am-10:30 am	**Session 4: Nature and Environment, Climate Adaptation and Resilience, and Disaster Risk Management** *This session will discuss how a strategic approach to the management of shared natural resources and disaster risks and strengthening of regional institutions can address climate and environmental challenges faced by ADB's DMCs.* **Moderator:** Eugenue Zhukov, Director General, CCSD, ADB *The Moderator will provide a general overview of key trends, opportunities, and challenges related to climate, environment, disaster risks* **Presentation on Environment and Biodiversity** by Yoko Watanabe, Director, Nature and Environment Division, CCSD, ADB **Panel 1: Environment and Biodiversity** ▪ Au Shion Yee, Director, Agriculture, Food, Nature, and Rural Development (SD2-AFNR), ADB ▪ Marc Perez Casas, Urban Development Specialist, Water and Urban Development Sector Cluster (SD2-WUD), ADB ▪ Tipamat Upanoi, Marine Resources Management Specialist, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Department of Marine and Coastal Resource, Thailand **Presentation on Climate Resilience** by Kathryn Milliken, Senior Climate Change Specialist, Adaptation and Resilience Division, CCSD and **Disaster Risk Management** by Samantha Cook, Director, Disaster Risk Management Division, CCSD **Panel 2: Climate Resilience and Disaster Risk Management** ▪ Kathryn Milliken, Senior Climate Change Specialist, Adaptation and Resilience Division, CCSD, ADB ▪ Samantha Cook, Director, Disaster Risk Management Division, CCSD, ADB ▪ Thomas Kessler, Principal Finance Specialist, SD3-FIN, ADB ▪ Merewati Leba, Senior Environment Officer, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Fiji ▪ Lisa Sachs, Director, Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment, Columbia Climate School, Columbia University **(virtual)**
10:30 am-10:45 am	**Coffee/Tea Break**
10:45 am-12:15 pm	**Session 5: Cross-Border People Mobility**

	This session will discuss how regional cooperation and capacity building of regional institutions can support cross-border people mobility by strengthening regional health security, improving regional education services, promoting mutual recognition of skills, providing social protection, and advancing tourism competitiveness and sustaining remittances. **Presentation on People Mobility** supported by Health, TVET, and Social Protection, Sofia Shakil, Director, SD3-HSD, ADB **Panel 1: Labor Mobility (Moderated by Sofia Shakil)** ▪ Manuela Prina, Principal Education Specialist, SD3-HSD, ADB ▪ Francis Ron de Guzman, Assistant Secretary, Department of Migrant Workers, Philippines ▪ Marja Paavilainen, Technical Specialist, TRIANGLE Partnerships for Fair and Effective Labour Migration in ASEAN (TRIANGLE Partnerships), International Labour Organization **(virtual)** ▪ Tristan Burnett, Chief of Mission, International Organization for Migration, Philippines **Presentation on Sustainable Tourism**, Jessie F. McComb, Senior Tourism Industry Specialist, Water and Urban Development Sector Office, SD2-WUD, ADB **Panel 2: Sustainable Tourism (Moderated by Jessie McComb)** ▪ Ashish Narain, Principal Public Sector Economist, SD3-PSMG, ADB ▪ Verna Buensuceso, Undersecretary, Department of Tourism, Philippines ▪ Feruz Dodiev, Tourism Expert, CEO, "IZEL Travel" tour operator and CEO, Praga Hotel, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
12:15 pm-1:30 pm	**Lunch Break**
THEME 5: RCI KNOWLEDGE AGENDA	
1:30 pm-2:30 pm	**Session 6: Supporting Operations through RCI Knowledge Work** *This session will examine how evidence-based knowledge work can support RCI operations by identifying cross-border constraints, opportunities, and collective action challenges. The session will also explore how ADB can further strengthen the use of knowledge and diagnostics to support the design, prioritization, and implementation of future RCI initiatives.* **Moderator**: Abdul Abiad, Deputy Chief Economist, ERDI, ADB *The Moderator will provide a brief overview of ADB's knowledge work in RCI and development impact.* **Presentation on Leveraging RCI Knowledge for Greater Development Impact**, Kijin Kim, Senior Economist, ERCI/ERDI, ADB

	Panelists ▪ Dorothea Lazaro, Senior Regional Cooperation Specialist, Regional Cooperation and Integration Unit, Central and West Asia Department, ADB ▪ Thakshila Karunarathne, Director, Department of National Planning, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Sri Lanka ▪ Mehdi Mehamha, Senior Regional Integration and Trade Promotion Specialist, IsDB
2:30 pm-2:45 pm	**Coffee/Tea Break**
2:45 pm-4:45 pm	**Interactive Session: Way Forward–Priority National and Regional Actions and Required Support from ADB and other Development Partners** **Moderator:** Yuebin Zhang, Principal Regional Cooperation Specialist, CCRC, ADB **Breakout - Group Discussions (one hour)** DMC participants will be divided into subregional program groups [ASEAN (GMS/BIMP-EAGA/IMT-GT), CAREC, SASEC, Pacific Islands]. Discussions covering institutional arrangements, financing models, and project design, among others, will be facilitated by: **ASEAN**: Said Zaidansyah, Regional Head, Regional Cooperation and Integration Unit, Southeast Asia Department, ADB **CAREC**: Dorothea Lazaro, Senior Regional Cooperation Specialist, Regional Cooperation and Integration Unit, Central and West Asia Department, ADB **SASEC**: Joonho Hwang, Regional Head, Regional Cooperation and Integration Unit, South Asia Department, ADB **Pacific Islands**: Thiam Hee Ng, Regional Lead Economist, Economic Research and Development Impact Department, ADB **Group Presentations (one hour)** One or two representatives from each group will provide a summary of the discussions and highlight priority needs of DMCs in terms of support from ADB and other development partners.
4:45 pm-5:00 pm	**Closing of the Conference** **Key Takeaways and Closing Remarks:** Eugenue Zhukov, Director General, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department (CCSD), ADB