

19th CAREC Ministerial Conference, 7 December 2020 (Virtual Format)

"People-Centered Regional Cooperation in the Post-COVID Environment"

CAREC Institute's Statement

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world with an unprecedented devastating impact on individuals, societies, organizations, and economies. The ensuing abrupt lockdowns and travel restrictions presented CAREC Institute (CI) with a three-fold challenge: (i) to quickly adapt to the emergent changes in the work practices; (ii) maintain strategic focus and deliver the research and capacity building activities approved in annual Work Plan; and, (iii) to respond to the pandemic-induced knowledge needs of member countries effectively. The CI quickly shifted to work from home (WFH) modality to navigate the challenges, formed virtual teams, acquired crucial ICT tools, developed an E-learning platform for virtual knowledge service delivery, modified strategic and annual work plans and knowledge output to respond to unanticipated challenges. Despite the unprecedented challenges, the CI maintained its focus on institutional development and partnerships. The CI signed the Host City agreement with Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Urumqi City to facilitate its operations as an intergovernmental organization, entered into partnerships with research institutions, and obtained observer status with AIIB and the UN (expected in the current session of UN General Assembly)

Through the CI's Management and staff's concerted efforts, the CI held 11 cascaded virtual capacity building trainings leveraging newly developed E-learning platform. It is heartening to report that the number of participants in the virtual trainings jumped from 527 in 2019 to 1500 in 2020. The overall response to the E-learning platform is enormously encouraging. In under one year of operations, the platform has registered 20323 visits. In addition to the regular capacity building training, the CI organized seven webinars on various topics, particularly addressing the policy challenges induced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, under the annual work plan, ADB-CI Visiting Fellows Program (VFP) and CAREC Think Tanks Network (CTTN) Research Grants Program, the CI has completed/commissioned research on an array of topics that include Regulatory Framework for E-commerce development; Developing a Framework for Mutual Recognition and Electronic Exchange of Phytosanitary Certificates in CAREC; Exploring Exports Driven Growth Through Free Trade Agreements among CAREC Members: Learning from Pakistan-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA); Financial Inclusion in the CAREC Region: Promoting Fintech to Meet Underserved Needs in Trade Finance; Infrastructure in Central Asia and Caucasia; Identification and Spatial Mapping of Economic Clusters Across the CAREC Region: A GIS-based Analysis for China (XUAR), Pakistan, and Tajikistan; Regional Cooperation in Promoting Low-carbon Energy Development in CAREC: Challenges and Opportunities; Prospects of Tourism Sector Development in the Framework of Implementation of Almaty–Bishkek Economic Corridor (ABEC) Activities; Assessing the Economic Impact of Climate Change on Agriculture in Central Asia; Case Studies and Analysis of Technology Innovations and Diffusion for High-Value Crops in CAREC Region; Climate Insurance, Infrastructure and Governance in CAREC Region (Water, Agriculture, Energy); and Reviewing Migration and Development: The Role of Local Authorities in Central Asia. In addition to producing research papers, the CI has produced eight country-specific policy briefs drawing perspectives and lessons under the ADB-administered CAREC Corridor Performance

Measurement and Monitoring (CPMM). One of the briefs has led to policy responses and improvement in processes, which has improved efficiency on a particular corridor

The CI has quickly and effectively responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by delivering economic policy briefs to member countries addressing urgent policy issues that emerged during the pandemic, including topics such as Economic Implications of COVID-19 for the CAREC Region, Potential Effects of Global Uncertainties on Capital Inflows into the CAREC Region, Government Measures to Mitigate the Economic Impact of Pandemic, COVID-19 and the Economy; Prospects, Shocks, and Measures, Covid-19/Reaction Functions of COVID-19; Paradoxes, and Latest Economic Data, and the resurgence of the Pandemic and Economic Uncertainties: The Global Scramble for a Vaccine. Three more research products related to COVID-19 are in the pipeline: (i) COVID-19 and Micro-Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) in CAREC Region: Impacts and Policy Lessons (ii) COVID-19 and Tourism in the CAREC Region: Harnessing Role of Technology in Promoting Safe Tourism Destination; and, (iii) Analysis of Public Attitudes towards COVID-19 Vaccinations in Selected CAREC Countries.