

CAREC High-Level Session During the Annual General Meeting
“CAREC at 20: Reimagining Regional Cooperation Through Digital Transformation”
4 May 2021 (Tuesday), 15:30–17:30, Manila

Closing Remarks

James Patrick Lynch, Director General, EARD, ADB

As we bring this Session to a close, let me begin by thanking Mr. Tom Standage for being an excellent moderator for the panel discussions.

The discussions today highlighted the many roles digital technologies can play in responding to the pandemic, and in supporting longer term recovery.

We also learned that by working together, under the CAREC Program, we can harness digitalization to strengthen regional cooperation, to stimulate economic growth and to support more sustainable, inclusive and resilient development across Central Asia and beyond.

Let me share with you three takeaways from today’s session:

First, the CAREC program provides all of us with an ideal platform to promote digital cooperation. CAREC countries have already adopted their individual digital strategies, which is a commendable starting point.

As we heard today, the CAREC program provides a unique opportunity for members to share their technical “know-how” and lessons learned, and to tackle many common challenges through digital solutions.

Our cooperation on the *Information Customs Exchange* initiative, for example, has yielded significant improvements in customs information exchange and in simplifying and harmonizing systems and procedures.

Looking beyond IT applications that facilitate cross-border trade, digital tools, such as surveillance and early warning systems, can help CAREC members control and prevent transnational threats to public health, agriculture, and the environment.

A second takeaway is that there is a need to mobilize both private and public finance to support digital transformation in the region. We have seen how quickly the private sector has applied and reshaped digital technology in response to the pandemic. E-commerce, tele-medicine, and online education are just few examples.

As many participants mentioned today, partnerships between the public and private sectors play an increasingly essential role in developing, financing and applying new digital technologies.

For the CAREC Region, there is tremendous potential to promote PPPs and catalyze private investments in the digital space. ADB can serve as a facilitator, enabler and financier in this process, and responding to the digital needs and constraints of SMEs in the region is a priority.

Third, regional cooperation and digitalization can help CAREC build back better. Building back better will require continued investment in quality infrastructure, or the hardware, in all sectors.

But we have come to learn, the software is more important than ever. Not only digital software, but software in terms of new reforms and policies to create the enabling environment for innovation, application and investment.

In this context, regional dialogue is so important for harmonizing standards, responding to the challenges of privacy and cybersecurity, as well as addressing the digital divide, both in-country and region-wide.

Distinguished Guests, today's Session on *Reimagining Regional Cooperation Through Digital Transformation* represents a significant step forward as we begin to shape the *CAREC Digital Strategy*.

On behalf of ADB, I would like to thank everyone for their participation in today's session.

A sincere expression of appreciation goes to Minister Mikayil Jabbarov of Azerbaijan and ADB's Vice President Shixin Chen for their role as Co-Chairs.

And of course, to our CAREC country representatives and our development partners, thank you for your valuable insights and contributions this afternoon.

Finally, we are very grateful to those who worked hard behind the scenes to make this virtual Session possible—including the CAREC Secretariat, the ADB's Office of the Secretary, and our IT Department, to just name a few.

So everyone...thank you very much; stay safe; and enjoy the rest of the day.

This meeting is now adjourned.