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## **Developing the CAREC Gender Strategy**

**Consultation Meeting of CAREC National Focal Points  
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## Developing the CAREC Gender Strategy

### I. Rationale

1. Gender equality and women empowerment in economic activities are fundamental drivers for more inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. Women's equality and empowerment is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but also integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development.

2. In the CAREC region, inequalities between men and women persist in the areas of participation in economic and political activities, access to resources and services, and care work.<sup>1</sup> There are great potentials in raising the GDP growth across the region through tapping the huge underutilized resources of women by bringing them to the same level with men in participation of economic activities.

3. In 2017, the 16th CAREC Ministerial Conference endorsed CAREC's new long-term strategy—*CAREC 2030: Connecting the Region for Shared and Sustainable Development*. In the five driving principles of CAREC 2030 strategy, it was emphasized that *"more attention will be paid to gender equality as a cross-cutting issue"* to ensure both women and men equally benefit from the dividends of economic development and regional integration.

4. Effective implementation of CAREC 2030 requires active participation of both women and men living in CAREC countries. A regional approach on gender equality is highly desired to better align with gender activities among the CAREC countries across CAREC operational areas to achieve common objectives. The purpose of this CAREC gender strategy is to identify effective engagement modalities of women and men in the five operational clusters of CAREC 2030 strategy—economic and financial stability; trade, tourism, and economic corridors; infrastructure and economic connectivity; agriculture and water; and human development.

### II. Objectives: Bridging Gaps and Creating Gains

5. The adoption of all CAREC countries of the SDGs is a commitment to prioritize gender equality as articulated in the SDGs in national development agenda.<sup>2</sup> Gender equality and future economic development are interlinked. By securing equality of women's engagement in CAREC 2030's operational clusters, we hope to achieve the following goals:

- (i) **To increase women's access to decent employment and economic opportunities.** The business case for gender mainstreaming outlines strategic goals for the CAREC countries. These include working toward removing barriers to labor force participation, breaking occupational stereotypes, promoting women in management and leadership and reducing wage gaps. The ex-ante investment and expected gender dividend will be across the five CAREC operational clusters.
- (ii) **To reduce gender disparities to maximize human development gains.** In emerging and developing countries, unequal access to education, health services, and finance are inhibiting factors associated with income inequality. Investment in human development should aim at reducing barriers to equal access for women.
- (iii) **To improve support networks and policy environment for women's empowerment.** An enabling environment that encourages women's participation in

<sup>1</sup> UNDP. 2019. <https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/gender-equality.html>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations 2017. SDG 5 states "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls".

regional dialogues is key to increase visibility of women in decision-making. The CAREC gender strategy will inform on policy reform, areas and approaches toward improving support networks at the regional level. These include establishing platforms for collaboration in the public and private sector, creating opportunities in traditionally male-dominated professions (e.g., energy and transport sectors) and academia from across the region, and increasing opportunities in traditionally women-friendly sectors (e.g., tourism and border trade). The regional networks will increase women's contribution in decision-making processes that target policy reforms in removing social barriers to women's participation in economic activities.

- (iv) **To enhance women's access to information and communications technologies (ICTs).** ICTs can effectively amplify CAREC's regional approaches, knowledge solutions, and partnership expansion with the private sector and civil society. Knowledge hubs and research networks will be created to foster innovative ideas for gender mainstreaming in areas such as clean energy and financial transactions to benefit women.

6. Gender mainstreaming will be operationalized through the following process:

- Identification of gender gaps in projects and benchmarking best practices;
- Definition and agreement on minimum acceptable standards for meaningful participation of men and women in economic and social life;
- Investments in projects that remove barriers for men and women to participate as investors, workers and entrepreneurs in all CAREC operational clusters;
- Dialogue, policy research, and analysis to remove structural impediments through relevant legal, institutional and policy responses by the CAREC countries; and
- Learning and knowledge sharing on best practices of gender mainstreaming across CAREC countries and with countries in other regions.

### **III. Methodology and Process**

7. The CAREC gender strategy will be developed through a two-steps approach: the conduct of the gender assessment in CAREC operations as a first step, which will serve as a base and major inputs for the subsequent development of the CAREC gender strategy. A combination of desktop study and field research will be applied in the process.

8. For the gender assessment work, a selected number of CAREC projects (both technical assistance and loan projects) in the 11 CAREC countries with participation of ADB and other development partners will be analyzed. The assessment covers three main CAREC sectors including transport, energy and trade as CAREC investments were concentrated in these areas before the adoption of the CAREC 2030. Country level data gathering is ongoing. Consultations have been conducted in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

9. The CAREC gender assessment is being developed as a diagnostic framework that analyzes the gender situation in the region, applying gender lens to people, policies and projects to align with the CAREC 2030 mission. This gender sensitivity analysis investigates the interface of the CAREC Program with various local contexts to identify opportunities for diverse groups of women living in CAREC countries. These dynamics are further illustrated through performance and best practice benchmarking from CAREC projects. Outline of the CAREC gender assessment is in the Annex.

### **IV. Outline of the CAREC Gender Strategy**

10. The CAREC gender strategy will promote gender equality and women's empowerment across the full range of CAREC operations—from policy work to the design and implementation of gender-inclusive projects and programs. It is proposed to include the following key sections:

- (i) **Introduction.** This includes a rationale, guiding principles and objectives of the strategy.
- (ii) **CAREC operational clusters: entry points.** For each of the five operational clusters, gender issues hindering women's participation will be illustrated, approaches and/or actions or entry points to address the gender issues will be proposed, and gender results to be achieved will be listed.
- (iii) **CAREC gender institutional framework.** A mechanism for CAREC to mainstream gender in its operations will be recommended.
- (iv) **Action plan.** Stakeholder responsibilities will be identified and activities for CAREC countries to integrate gender in the CAREC 2030 operational clusters will be proposed, including a monitoring and evaluation plan.

11. Instead of focusing on all gender-related aspects and interventions in all CAREC countries and technical/thematic priority areas, the CAREC gender strategy will map out common priority areas to which CAREC countries can contribute.

#### **V. Issues for guidance of the CAREC National Focal Points**

- (i) How to mainstream gender in the five CAREC operation clusters?
- (ii) What should be the institutional mechanism to support CAREC gender mainstreaming?
- (iii) What should be the country-level responsibilities in gender mainstreaming?

## Key components of the CAREC Gender Assessment

The CAREC gender assessment is a stand-alone output comprising the following sections:

- (i) **Introduction:** This includes the rationale, purpose and methodology.
- (ii) **CAREC gender context:** This includes the norms, practices, opportunities and outcomes at an aggregated level to deliver a picture of emerging regional gender dynamics in the context of CAREC programming. It includes a comparative analysis of the CAREC countries in terms of gender equality, building upon the existing Country Gender Assessments conducted by ADB, and taking into account commonalities, differences and challenges.<sup>3</sup>
- (iii) **Gender integration in CAREC initiatives:** analysis on how gender issues have been addressed in past CAREC projects and initiatives and identify missed opportunities for gender inclusion. This is a three-pronged analysis respectively focusing on people-to-people contacts, policies and projects. Analysis will focus on the following gender equality dimensions: (i) access to decent work; (ii) financial inclusion and entrepreneurship development; (iii) access to infrastructure and public services; (iv) participation in decision-making and leadership formation; and (v) access to education.
- (iv) **Mainstreaming gender in CAREC operations:** based on the previous findings, identification of entry points for gender inclusion in projects and policies across the five operational clusters of the CAREC 2030 strategy.

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<sup>3</sup>Country Gender Assessments build on the experience gained by the programs of the ADB in supporting gender equality, social inclusion, and women's empowerment. These reports provide an overview of gender and social inclusion issues in the ADB's developing member countries and analyse the various social identities and their impact on development outcomes. See more details at <https://www.adb.org/themes/gender/country-gender-assessments>