



## Strengthening Regional Cooperation on Skills Development under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (TA-6806)

### Concept note and agenda for the First Meeting of the CAREC Working Group on Skills Development

29 February – 1 March 2024

Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Hilton hotel, Tashkent 1-2 conference-room

#### A. Background information

For much of the last half-century, member countries of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (CAREC) have followed diverse strategies for strengthening skills development. These distinct strategies are now slowly converging as CAREC countries recognize more than ever the value of meeting international and developing regional standards. This applies particularly to the standardization and harmonization in the higher education (HE) and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sectors.

Nonetheless, HE and TVET sectors in the CAREC region continue to face significant challenges, reflected in the overall low quality of skills, the mismatch between the skills provided by HE and TVET institutions, and labour–market needs. The absence or weakness of national qualifications systems, resource constraints, outdated educational infrastructure and training systems, and weak governance impose further difficulties. Given these challenges, the region urgently needs to improve its skill standards to be more competitive in global markets and to provide a strong basis for increased foreign direct investments, human capital development, and people-to-people connections.

In this context, **the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is currently implementing a knowledge and support technical assistance initiative that aims to strengthen regional cooperation and integration on skills development in HE and TVET in the CAREC region.** In particular, the project is supporting the development of (i) standardization and harmonization in HE, (ii) standardization and harmonization in TVET, (iii) governance and regulation of recruitment systems, and (iv) labour market database and information system. The expected key outcomes from these four main outputs are strengthened regional cooperation and integration on human capital development, which will subsequently lead to enhanced quality, mobility, and productivity of the labor force of the CAREC member countries aligned with the industry needs.

Considering the above, ADB plans to arrange a series of meetings, workshop seminars, and conferences with the CAREC participating countries to facilitate the collaboration, development, and result dissemination to generate strong buy-in and institutionalization of the developed expertise.

To promote policy dialogue, regional cooperation, and knowledge sharing in HE and TVET among CAREC member countries, **ADB has initiated the establishment of the CAREC Working Group on Skills Development (CAREC SDWG).** The theme and focus of the CAREC SDWG for 2024 is suggested as **“Skills for climate action, climate-smart agriculture and water resources management.”**

**The first meeting of the Working Group is planned for 29 February-01 March 2024 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.** The event is expected to gather about thirty participants (two high-level officials and decision makers) representing the Ministry of Education and (one representative) of a major agriculture university from each CAREC participating country, in addition to academia, think tanks, ADB staff and consultants, and national partners of the hosting country.

## **B. Objective and expected outputs**

The objective of a 2-day meeting is as following:

- (i) **to officially launch CAREC Working Group on Skills Development (SDWG)**, agree with CAREC participating countries on its future role and action plan for 2024.
- (ii) **to discuss and agree on priority areas in strengthening regional cooperation in skills development** and **to define convergence areas for TVET and HE systems.**
- (iii) **to share the selected knowledge products' key findings and international best practices**

As a result of a 2-day meeting, the following expected outputs will be achieved:

1. Improved knowledge of the participants on institutional and regulatory challenges in convergence of HE and TVET systems and on mapping results of HE and TVET partnership in the CAREC region;
2. Improved knowledge of the participants on food security challenges (*climate change, regenerative and climate smart agriculture, water resources management*) in the CAREC region and the role of skills development system in their solution;
3. Agreed list of convergence areas in TVET and HE systems from among CAREC participating countries for future joint cooperation interventions;
4. Shared international best practices on Regional Skills Development Working Group and University Network initiatives;
5. Agreed tasks and functions of the CAREC Working Group on Skills Development and needs assessment for the CAREC University and TVET network.

## **C. Format and schedule of the meeting**

The meeting will consist of plenary sessions followed by interactive discussions and practical learning. Participants can freely share opinions, knowledge, and information to contribute to the discussions.

## AGENDA

### Day 1, 29 February 2024, Thursday - Inception of the CAREC Skills Development TA and launching the CAREC Working Group on Skills Development

| Time               | Activity   |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>08:30-09:00</b> | <b>Registration of participants, welcome coffee</b>  |
| 09:00-09:45        | <p><b>Opening remarks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ms. Lyaziza Sabyrova, Regional Head, Regional Cooperation and Integration, Central and West Asia Department</li> <li>- Mr. Komilzhon Hamidovich Karimov, First Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovations of the Republic of Uzbekistan</li> <li>- Ms. Kanokpan Lao-Araya, Country Director, Uzbekistan. Asian Development Bank Resident Mission</li> </ul> <p><b>Moderator: Ms. Altyнай Arapova, Economist, Regional Cooperation and Integration, ADB</b></p>   |
| 09:45-10:00        | <p><b>Introduction of participants and key objectives of the meeting</b><br/> <i>Ms. Altyнай Arapova, Economist, Regional Cooperation and Integration, ADB</i></p>   |
| <b>10.00-10:15</b> | <b>Group photo</b>   |
| 10:15-11:30        | <p><b>Session I: Reinforcing Convergence to strengthen common regional standards</b></p> <p><b>How countries can benefit from harmonization of TVET systems: importance and need for convergence/ harmonization: missing opportunities and what could be achieved, Ms. Dovelyn Mendoza, Consultant, ADB</b></p> <p><i>Interventions: Representatives of Ministries of Education from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan</i></p> <p><b>Mapping adherence to regional integration frameworks for the higher education sector in the CAREC region, Ms. Elizabeth Colucci, Consultant, ADB</b></p> <p><i>Interventions: Representatives of Ministries of Education of Azerbaijan, Georgia, PRC, Mongolia, Turkmenistan</i></p> <p><b>Moderator: Ms. Liliia Kachkinbaeva, TVET, employment and labour market consultant, ADB</b></p> <p><i>The session will present key findings of two above mentioned knowledge products, elaborate discussions on existing challenges in the TVET and HE systems of the CAREC participating countries (governance structures, reforms, integration aspects, skills gaps, skills anticipation, labour market needs, practices used for development of occupational standards, assessment tools, quality assurance, qualification frameworks, etc.). The session will result into defining a list of convergence areas in TVET and HE systems and selected CAREC participating countries that are closer in practices used and need peer-to-peer assistance.</i></p> |
| 11:30 – 13:00      | <p><b>Session II: Reinforcing convergence to develop regional standards – insights from policymakers and academia</b></p> <p><b>Short interventions: List of TVET and HE system areas that require improvements from regional perspective and expression of interest on the list of CAREC participating countries for joint cooperation (10 min per country):</b></p>  |

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|                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Azerbaijan</u>: Mr. Nicat Mammadli, Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of science education;</li> <li>- <u>PRC</u>: representative from the Ministry of education;</li> <li>- <u>Georgia</u>: Ms. Anna Baramia, Head, European Union Integration and International organizations division, Department of International Relations and Strategic Development, Ministry of Education; Ms. Nino Kakulia, Team leader, Skills and Partnership development Agency;</li> <li>- <u>Kazakhstan</u>: Ms. Rysgul Kudretullayeva, Head, Division for the Content of Higher and Postgraduate Education of the Committee for Higher and Postgraduate Education, Ministry of Science and Higher Education;</li> <li>- <u>Kyrgyzstan</u>: Mr. Azamat Naimanbaev, Head, Higher, Secondary Vocational and Postgraduate Education Department, Ministry of education and science;</li> <li>- <u>Mongolia</u>: Mr. Choisureen Erdene, Senior specialist, Department of Higher Education, Ms. Altanzul Ganbaatar, Department of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, Ministry of Education and Science;</li> <li>- <u>Pakistan</u>: Mr. Abdul Sattar Khokhar, Sr. Joint Secretary (HEC); Mr. Sohail Akhtar, Sr. Joint Secretary (PT), Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training;</li> <li>- <u>Tajikistan</u>: Ms. Lutfiya Abdulholiqzoda, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education and Science</li> <li>- <u>Turkmenistan</u>: Mr. Azat Ataev, Deputy Minister of Education for Higher and Secondary Specialized Education</li> <li>- <u>Uzbekistan</u>: Mr. Farrukh Azimov, Head, Department for the Development of the Vocational Education System, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of Uzbekistan.</li> </ul> <p><i>This Session will be focused on establishing partnership relations between CAREC participating countries and expression of interest and areas.</i></p> <p><b>Moderator: Ms. Dovelyn Mendoza, Consultant, ADB</b></p> |
| <b>13:00-14:00</b> | <b>Lunch break (Venue: Shosh Restaurant, 1<sup>st</sup> floor)</b>  |
| 14:00-15:30        | <p><b>Session III: Launching the CAREC Working Group on Skills Development</b></p> <p><b>Opening remarks</b>, Ms. Sofia Shakil, Director, Human and Social Development Sector Group, Asian Development Bank</p> <p><b>International best practices:</b> enhancing regional cooperation in skills development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr. Kenji Mishima, JICA, Senior Representative, Tashkent,</li> <li>- Ms. Amanda Crowfoot, Secretary General, European University Network (online)</li> </ul> <p><b>Q&amp;A and Interventions:</b> Representatives of each participating CAREC country will express their ideas on potential tasks and functions of the CAREC Working Group on Skill Development (<i>draft Action Plan for discussion and TOR sent to all participants</i>). <i>To ensure participatory approach and high level of commitment, participants will be welcomed to propose tasks for the Working Group.</i></p> <p><i>Proposed order or as speakers express their interest:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Azerbaijan</u>: Mr. Nicat Mammadli, Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of science and education;</li> </ul>   |

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|                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>PRC</u>: representative from the Ministry of education;</li> <li>- <u>Georgia</u>: Ms. Anna Baramia, Head, European Union Integration and International organizations division, Department of International Relations and Strategic Development, Ministry of Education, Ms. Nino Kakulia, Team leader, Skills and Partnership development Agency</li> <li>- <u>Kazakhstan</u>: Ms. Rysgul Kudretullayeva, Head, Division for the Content of Higher and Postgraduate Education of the Committee for Higher and Postgraduate Education, Ministry of Science and Higher Education;</li> <li>- <u>Kyrgyzstan</u>: Mr. Azamat Naimanbaev, Head, Higher, Secondary Vocational and Postgraduate Education Department, Ministry of education and science</li> </ul> <p><b>Moderator: Ms Liliia Kachkinbaeva, TVET, employment and labour market consultant, ADB</b></p>  |
| <b>15.30-15.45</b>  | <b>Coffee break</b>  |
| 15.45-17.00         | <p><b>Session III (continued):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Mongolia</u>: Mr. Choisuren Erdene, Senior specialist, Department of Higher Education, Ms. Altanzul Ganbaatar, Department of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, Ministry of Education and Science;</li> <li>- <u>Pakistan</u>: Mr. Abdul Sattar Khokhar, Sr. Joint Secretary (HEC); Mr. Sohail Akhtar, Sr. Joint Secretary (PT), Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training;</li> <li>- <u>Tajikistan</u>: Ms. Lutfiya Abdulkholiqzoda, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education and Science;</li> <li>- <u>Turkmenistan</u>: Mr. Azat Ataev, Deputy Minister of Education for Higher and Secondary Specialized Education;</li> <li>- <u>Uzbekistan</u>: Mr. Farrukh Azimov, Head, Department for the Development of the Vocational Education System, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of Uzbekistan.</li> </ul> <p><b>Moderator: Ms Liliia Kachkinbaeva, TVET, employment and labour market consultant, ADB</b></p> |
| 17:00 – 17.15       | <p><b>Wrap-up and summary of key findings of Day 1</b></p> <p><b>Moderator: Ms. Dovelyn Mendoza, Consultant, ADB</b></p>   |
| <b>18:00- 19:30</b> | <b>Networking dinner (Hilton Hotel, “City 21” restaurant at the 21<sup>st</sup> floor)</b>   |

**Day 2, 01 March 2024, Friday – Skills for climate action, climate-smart agriculture and water resources management in the CAREC region**

| Time               | Activity   |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>08:30-09:00</b> | <b>Registration of participants, welcome coffee</b>  |
| 09:00-09:30        | <p><b>Recap of Day 1 and objectives of Day 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ms. Alтынay Arapova, Economist, Regional Cooperation and Integration, ADB</li> </ul>   |
| 09:30-10:30        | <p><b>Session IV: Enhancing regional cooperation in skills needed for development of climate-smart agriculture, water resources management and green skills in the CAREC region</b></p> <p><b>Regional Cooperation in skills development for water resources management, Ms. Niloofer Sadeghi, Water Resources Specialist, ADB</b></p> |

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|                      | <p><b>Water-Agriculture-Energy Nexus in Central Asia through the lens of climate change, Dr. Kuat Akizhanov, Deputy Director, CAREC Institute</b></p> <p><b>Q&amp;A session, open discussions involving universities' representatives</b></p> <p><i>The sessions IV-VII will review existing water recourses, climate change and environmental sustainability challenges in the CAREC region, perspective regional interventions in capacity building and strategic planning. The main objective of the session is to identify which skills are needed to respond to the emerging impacts of climate change on agriculture and water resources, how we can scale-up research and skills development and enhance regional cooperation. Meeting participants, including representatives from respective HE institutions will elaborate on the role of TVET and HE systems in sorting out existing regional challenges.</i></p> <p><b>Moderator: Mr. Md. Abul Basher, Senior Natural Resources and Agriculture Specialist, ADB</b></p> |
| 10.30-11.30          | <p><b>Session V: Skills needed to scale up climate-smart agriculture in the CAREC region: challenges and opportunities</b></p> <p><b>Climate change, agriculture and food security in the CAREC member countries, Mr.Md. Abul Basher, Senior Natural Resources and Agriculture Specialist, ADB</b></p> <p><b>Agricultural/ agribusiness development and strong market system analysis: perspective of Higher education institutions, Ms. Monika Sopov, Senior Advisor Sustainable Food Systems at Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation</b></p> <p><b>Q&amp;A session, open discussions involving universities' representatives</b></p> <p><b>Moderator: Ms. Nilofar Sadeghi, Water Resources Specialist, ADB</b></p>  |
| 11:30 – 12:45        | <p><b>Session VI: Supporting Green Skills Development in the CAREC region</b></p> <p><b>Capacity building strategy and green skills development, Dr. Iskandar Abdullaev, Visiting Professor Centre for International Development and Environmental Research, Justus Liebig University Giessen</b></p> <p><i>Interventions: Representatives of Ministries and universities of all participating countries</i></p> <p><b>Moderator: Ms. Monika Sopov, Senior Advisor Sustainable Food Systems at Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation</b></p>   |
| <b>12:45 - 14:00</b> | <b>Lunch break (Venue: Shosh Restaurant, 1<sup>st</sup> floor)</b>  |
| 14:00-15:30          | <p><b>Session VII: Role of the higher education system in building new skills for climate-smart agriculture and water resources in CAREC region</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Azerbaijan</u>: Mr.Nurali Yusifbayli, Vice-rector, Azerbaijan Technical University;</li> <li>- <u>PRC</u>: university representative;</li> </ul>  |

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|                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Kazakhstan</u>: Ms. Dani Sarsekova, Dean, Faculty of Water, Land and Forest Resources, Kazakh National Agrarian Research University;</li> <li>- <u>Kyrgyzstan</u>: Mr. Almazbek Ibrashev, First deputy rector, Kyrgyz National Agrarian University named after K.I.Skryabin;</li> <li>- <u>Mongolia</u>: Mr. Enkhbayar Gonchigdorj, Vice President, Mongolian University of Life sciences;</li> <li>- <u>Pakistan</u>: Mr. Iqrar Ahmad Khan, Vice chancellor, Faisalabad university of Agriculture</li> </ul> <p><b>Q&amp;A session, open discussions involving universities' representatives</b></p> <p><i>The session will discuss issues of developing new skills in agriculture- new energy (renewables) for agriculture processing and operations, (ii) development of climate-sensitive cropping - agronomic skills, (iii) developing climate-proof water management- water expertise. The main aim would be to exchange current developments in higher education related to these focus areas, "best practices," gaps, and potential interventions.</i></p> <p><b>Moderator: Ms Liliia Kachkinbaeva, TVET, employment and labour market consultant, ADB</b></p> |
| <b>15:30 – 15:45</b> | <b>Coffee-break</b>  |
| 15:45 – 17:00        | <p><b>Session VII (continued):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Tajikistan</u>: Mr. Tohir Mirzoalizoda, Deputy Rector, Tajik Agrarian University;</li> <li>- <u>Turkmenistan</u>: Mr. Shamuhammet Shahyev, Vice-Rector for Research, Turkmen Agricultural University named after S.A. Niyazov;</li> <li>- <u>Uzbekistan</u>: Mr. Abdulhakim Salokhiddinov, Vice-rector/professor, Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers, National Research University.</li> <li>- <u>Uzbekistan</u>: “Developing Climate Knowledge hub and Education”, Dr. Jasur Salikhov, Rector, Central Asian University for the Study of Environment and Climate Change (Green University).</li> </ul> <p><b>Q&amp;A session, open discussions involving universities' representatives</b></p> <p><b>Moderator: Ms Liliia Kachkinbaeva, TVET, employment and labour market consultant, ADB</b></p>  |
| 17:00-17:30          | <p><b>Wrap-up, discussion of next steps</b></p> <p><b>Ms. Altynay Arapova, Economist, Regional Cooperation and Integration, ADB</b></p>  |

ADB = Asian Development Bank; CAREC = Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation; HE= higher education, TA = technical assistance; TBC= to be confirmed; TVET = technical and vocational education and training.