



## OPENING REMARKS

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I welcome you all to this subregional workshop on “Investing in Women: Advancing the Transformative Gender Agenda in a Post-COVID Environment in Central and West Asia”. This event is CWRD’s main activity to celebrate International Women’s Month.

In the past two years, our countries have faced grave challenges as a result of the global pandemic. This has affected everyone differently and may be deepening existing inequalities in society, not to mention the economic losses resulting from the pandemic. This crisis has been more pronounced for some of our member countries who are encountering added challenges, such as Afghanistan, as well as those member countries that may be feeling insecure with the crisis in Ukraine. During this period, ADB is sustaining its efforts to ensure that development projects continue to be implemented, and that populations affected by these crises, especially the most vulnerable, are provided with safety nets.

Governments and other development stakeholders are taking exceptional measures to end the pandemic and revive their economies. Since the pandemic began in early 2020, ADB initiatives in Central and West Asia have provided support to governments in developing member countries and other development partners for targeted interventions to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. ADB’s total allocated resources across all regions has reached \$29-billion. From the \$20-billion COVID-19 response package, \$6.96-billion or 34.8% have been allotted for Central and West Asia. An additional \$9-billion have been earmarked for Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility or APVAX, of which about a quarter has benefited our region.

However, not all recovery strategies benefit women and men equally. Women disproportionately make up the informal sector, as well as the workers in small service enterprises, and are often the first to be laid off in times of crises. As development actors, we cannot discount the emerging evidence that the crisis has disproportionately affected women and other vulnerable sectors, including the negative impacts on women’s economic situation, increasing gender-based violence, interrupted access to health and other social services, and exacerbated burden of unpaid care work on women and girls.

Second among ADB’s seven operational priorities, is Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality. Operational Priority 2 promotes a transformative gender agenda that address gender inequalities, promote women’s empowerment, and ensure that ADB projects and programs benefit everyone. Our gender mainstreaming work in the region plays a significant role at this juncture. As long-time partners in pursuing development for all member countries in the region, we strive to ensure that no one is left behind in our recovery initiatives. We can do this by placing gender equality as an important guidepost in identifying development goals and implementing programs and projects in the new normal. In the next two days, we will deepen our understanding on the gendered impacts of the pandemic and learn from the different initiatives on gender-responsive pandemic response within the region. We will also examine barriers to gender-responsive program and project design and implementation. I greatly appreciate that inclusivity is promoted in our conversation as we gather partners from government, civil society, private sector, and other development organizations in this event.

In closing, I would like to express my deep gratitude to our government partners in Central and West Asia, who cooperated with us in the conduct of the study that will be presented and discussed today. I would like to acknowledge the valuable assistance extended by the Resident Missions in both the conduct of the study and the organization of this workshop. Last but not least, special recognition must be given to the SDCC Gender Thematic Group for supporting this important event. I trust that we will sustain these partnerships as we forge ahead to carry out a transformative gender agenda in the region. Thank you very much.