

Background Note: Sharing Best Practices and Lessons on Preparedness and Response from the East Asia Pacific Region

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Sharing Lessons for Resilient Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact globally, pushing millions of people into poverty and economies into recession. Although the East Asia-Pacific (EAP) region was the first to be affected, it was also one of the regions that responded quickly. The response strategies have ranged from border closings, lockdowns, and enforcement of COVID-appropriate behavior to testing, tracing, treatment, isolation, and quarantine. More recently, the region has rolled out vaccinations following the unprecedented speed with which they have been developed globally.

Several EAP countries have received World Bank financing and policy advice to help them respond to the pandemic and other human development challenges arising from it. As a result, many relevant experiences and lessons on COVID-19 preparedness and response have emerged that can be shared not only within EAP but also in other countries. The Republic of Korea-World Bank Group knowledge partnership seeks to document and share those experiences to help inform current and future pandemic preparedness and response. The region has also focused on resilient recovery to mitigate the socioeconomic challenges that have arisen from the pandemic and build back better through innovation and climate-friendly approaches.

The global demand to identify the best practices on COVID-19 preparedness and response is growing rapidly because, although successful policy instruments were created to combat the quickly evolving nature of the pandemic, preparedness and response measures continue to change. To facilitate knowledge sharing, the World Bank Group, in partnership with the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Republic of Korea, has supported an Advisory Services and Analytics (ASA) program on pandemic preparedness and response in the EAP region.

The program has three pillars: (i) knowledge generation, (ii) knowledge dissemination, and (iii) the development of a knowledge-exchange platform. Five countries from the region—Fiji, Malaysia, Mongolia, Vietnam, and the Republic of Korea—will collaborate to share their preparedness and response lessons. Each country will prepare in-depth case studies, guidance, and policy notes, addressing topics including contact tracing, lockdown measures, and vaccination. To better inform health experts and government officials, publicly available data and other resources, including the case studies and policy notes, will be shared publicly.

Through this project, the Bank hopes to highlight successful, practical approaches to tackling the pandemic and share them with other regions. “This partnership is an important instrument to facilitate the knowledge agenda on the COVID-19 response in the health sector for the region, and would complement the ongoing work on Universal Health Coverage,” said **Aparnaa Somanathan, Practice Manager, Health, Nutrition and Population for East Asia and Pacific Region.**

Increasing the Importance of ICT and Innovations in the Health Sector



(Diagnose checking covid-19 testing result with virtual screen in laboratory, Inhibition of disease outbreaks and Medical technology. © By PopTika/Shutterstock)

Daily caseload and fatality counts reveal that even the richest countries have not been able to circumvent the impact of COVID-19. Conventional methods of trying to contain the rapidly spreading pandemic was no longer effective. ICT platforms have played a significant role in controlling the spread of the virus through contact-tracing mobile applications and have allowed businesses and schools to continue operating despite the stringent lockdowns.

For example, leveraging the high penetration rate of smartphones, many countries in the EAP region, including [China](#), [Vietnam](#), and [the Republic of Korea](#), have delivered precautionary measures via text messages and social media and created mobile applications. In Vietnam, the Bank-financed digital transformation to electronic payment systems in the country's social assistance program for beneficiaries in remote areas has not only enabled them to reduce their visits to local offices, but also enhanced access to banking services and making it safer and more efficient. Additionally, telemedicine consultation has become a new channel for healthcare services in Southeast Asian countries such as the [Philippines](#) and [Malaysia](#).

The Republic of Korea has been a global leader in ICT during the pandemic by [providing information based on big data](#) and artificial intelligence. The Ministry of Science and Technology's Smart City Data Hub also moved quickly to facilitate contact tracing through [location pings and visual counts on the map](#), leveraging existing systems and integrating data from private sources. Additionally, the country's [universal health coverage data](#), designed to prevent inappropriate drug prescriptions, helped prevent the hoarding of face masks.

More recently, the government has accelerated the vaccination rollout process by partnering with the largest mobile and web-service companies, Kakao and Naver, to offer a platform for citizens [to sign up online for vaccines](#) leftover from canceled appointments from priority groups. These

examples demonstrate that integrated data systems and well-designed information technology platforms can play a vital role in the prevention and management of infectious diseases.

One of the projects aims is to highlight how each country has applied ICT to improve the effectiveness of containment practices such as contact tracing and vaccination rollouts, which are now likely to become permanent components of modern public healthcare service delivery.

Jason Michael Allford, Special Representative, WBG Korea Office, has observed: “The WBG Korea Office supports a broad range of development partnerships between the World Bank and Korea, with a focus on innovation and technology for sustainable development. As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this project will strengthen the WBG and the Republic of Korea’s collaboration through the Korean New Deal on digital and green innovation.”

Moving Forward

In the coming months, the project will focus on finishing the country case studies and developing a variety of thematic policy notes through the collaboration of the World Bank and regional experts in the field. A series of blogs will highlight our key findings which will be complemented by webinars and international events. Furthermore, the key objective is to create a collaboration platform for knowledge exchange, partnership engagement and organize technical assistance to developing countries on effective methods to prepare and respond to COVID-19 as well as other pandemics we will face in the future.

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