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# Crisis Communication in the Time of Recovery from COVID-19 in Central Asia

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## **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The end of covid-19 pandemic in Central Asia, presumably would enhance the region of its robust economic recovery. But read from 2 policies briefing of the multilateral forums such as World Bank and UN ESCAP, we have known that there is still a long way to go those aims. Witer want to deploy these two multilateral forums in a crisis communication theories during and after the pandemic time.

**Methods:** Qualitative method research from second resources data analysis would be conducted, in order to find policies recommendations in the Central Asia as general.

**Results and Discussion:** In the discussion, we found out that three policy briefs from ESCAP need to be elaborated in depth line or wise development plans. Neighbors countries which have a same borders, mostly same products, and interdependent to each other, had to reconciled their differences and then manage their own interest, so there would be no conflicting interests arise in their region.

Since the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic spread on 2020, countries such as Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgystan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan swiftly responded, and they have to took emergencies measure in order to manage the spreading of the virus. They have to closed their borders, re-newed their health sector, and built a virus emergency centre.

While the World Bank stressed on three main objectives, for example widespread of vaccination, empowering labour market with increasing employment, and strengthening social programs for the most vulnerable citizens. These three policies have to be planned and implemented by these neighboring countries.

**Conclusion:** Both strategies have been conducted, so that it need a review to know if their targeted areas had been achieved so far.

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Author's tried to seek the difference approaches brought by few international forums regarding pandemic recovery actions in 5 Central Asia countries, which could be useful for its own revival process with crisis communication theory, and find out summary. It might be limited, since author do not live in these 5 countries. Regardless of its limitation, few policies recommendations are good to explore and implemented for other regions.

*Keywords: Economic recoveries; the World Bank--UN-ESCAP; economic cooperation; Government contribution.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“As stated by Bhutta, in south Asia, there are 1.97 billion people (25% of the world’s population), this region is no stranger to conflict and confrontation. In South Asia, widespread poverty is closely intertwined with social disparities, marginalization on the basis of an egregious caste system (especially in country like India), and vast inequities that perpetuate disillusionment, grass root rebellion, which could further conflict” [1].

“The history of conflict and vast inequities meant the region was a sitting duck for an infectious disease outbreak that took full advantage of social vulnerability. The covid-19 pandemic has clearly exposed the extreme fragility of health systems, the limitations of emergency response capacity, inadequate early disease warning capabilities, and miniscule social support systems in the region”. (Zulfiqar Bhutta, idem)

## 2. HEALTH DIPLOMACY IN THE VACCINATION PROGRAMME

After the spread of Covid-19 viruses across the region of South and Central Asia, many cooperation in order to avoid the diseases by vaccination programs, collide with political issues, long-standing or historical conflicts in the region.

The table shown the situation in the beginning of the pandemic in 5 countries of Central Asia (Feb to May 2020).

Long-term Policies and adjustment and its foreign policies’ status quo after the pandemic introduced by UNDRR, for example:

“Kazakhstan foreign policies: was designed to retain good economic relations with Moscow and Beijing, and regarding Climate Change, it was suggested to be profitable from hydrocarbon trade”. (Gleason and Baizakova, idem)

“Uzbekistan foreign policies increasingly robust and oriented on international partnership in all direction based on equal standing, increasing economic, social and political relations with all Central Asia region and harmonious relations with Beijin and Mosco”.

“Tajikistan and Kyrgystan foreign policies heavy relied on Moscow and Beijing for financing and market access, both countries are net energy exporters Turkmenistan develop “positive” neutrality” on its foreign policies”.( Gleason and Baizakova, idem, p.112).

**This policy briefs from UN ESCAP recommends three areas of subregional cooperation:** # Protect people and facilitate inclusivity in social services; Social services must be restored, for example health centres in remote areas.

**Table 1. Reported cases in the Central Asian States from WHO data (45 days after spread of virus Cvd-19)**

Country	Date of first cv19 report	Cases (1 May 2020)	Death (1 May 2020)	Population (million)
Kazakhstan	15 March 2020	3551	25	18,5
Kyrgyztan	19 March 2020	756	8	6,5
Tajikistan	1 May 2020	15	0	9,2
Turkmenistan	None reported	0	0	5,9
Uzbekistan	16 March 2020	2046	9	33,5

*Source: CSSE of WHO (Gleason, Gregory and Kuralay Baizakova, Connections OJ 19, 2020, page 101-114)*

#Digital transformation, can contribute to the double bottom line of economic transformation and achievement of social inclusivity. This is for example to develop facilities of digital connectivities in the country. Access to internet in rural and urban areas. Privacy rights among people must include multi stakeholders dialogues.

# Green economy strategies, need to be embedded in recovery efforts to ensure long-term sustainability. Government should be engage on low carbon financing strategies in order to ensure sustainable economic growth. (UN ESCAP Policy Brief 25 February 2021 (COVID-19 in North and Central Asia, Impacts, Responses & Strategies to build back better) [2].

While among World Bank's policy priorities to reduce poverty, the World Bank is focused on three key areas: widespread vaccination, increasing employment and wages, and strengthening social assistance programs to support the most vulnerable. To support labor market recovery, the World Bank economists outlined short-term and medium-term measures, including the need to invest in green jobs and encouraging the creation and growth of firms.

It was also stressed that employment alone will not address all drivers of poverty, and strong safety nets are essential to protect the most vulnerable. Compared with other middle-income countries, Central Asian governments typically provide smaller shares of their populations with social assistance.

"Along with ensuring fair, broad access to effective and safe COVID-19 vaccines, Central Asian countries need to urgently address vaccination hesitancy, as it threatens to slow down the recovery," said Tatiana Proskuryakova, World Bank Regional Director for Central Asia. "For every million people vaccinated, global GDP recovers on average nearly \$8 billion. We are expecting advanced economies with relatively high vaccination rates to demonstrate much better growth rates than developing economies with low vaccination rates."

Among the main reasons behind vaccine hesitancy in Central Asian countries are worries about vaccine contraindication and safety. While people with pre-existing health conditions in other countries are usually prioritized for vaccination, in the Central Asia region they are more likely to be hesitant to get vaccinated.

Providing the public with accurate information on the safety of vaccines and encouraging people with pre-existing health conditions to be vaccinated may help address hesitancy issues.

The World Bank stressed on three main objectives, i.e widespread of vaccination, empowering labour market with increasing employment, and strengthening social programmes for the most vulnerable citizens [3].

### 3. PRIORITY AREAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The OECD forum, for years has a fruitful collaboration with Kazakhstan. A number of projects have already provided recommendations and insights on how to strengthen different areas of Kazakhstan's skills system, including higher education policies, labor market policies and initiatives to foster skills use, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A recent OECD project has also looked in detail at measures to strengthen education evaluation and assessment policies. Skills Strategy project in Kazakhstan includes: improving the activation of skills for vulnerable populations; fostering participation in adult learning of all forms; building an effective skills information system; and strengthening the governance of the skills system.

Based on in-depth desk analysis, stakeholder workshops, pre-workshop surveys, discussion groups and several bilateral meetings in Kazakhstan, the OECD has selected opportunities and developed recommendations for Kazakhstan in each of the priority areas. (Policy Brief, BEYOND COVID-19: Prospect for Economic Recovery in Central Asia, @OECD 2021) [4].

*Through the global Making Cities Resilient initiative, known as MCR2030, UNDRR supports the five capital cities of the region to build disaster resilience with a special focus on health systems in the current COVID-19 context, and in line with priorities of the Socio-Economic Response and Recovery Plans at country level.*

MCR2030 initiatives is a very important policies, in facing with post pandemic Cvd-19 recovery steps. In health system of the region,. COVID-19 has been challenged in particular and shown governments in the region that there isa need to renovate all the management, arrangement of

health scopes, also all local and central governments, its public services.

*Thus, a number of Central Asian capital cities have taken significant steps forward in strengthening city resilience. Following the establishment of technical working groups, the cities undertook initial resilience assessments using Preliminary and Health System Resilience Scorecards to support the strategic development processes at the local level. The emphasis of the Health Systems Disaster Resilience Scorecard Assessment is on facilitating multi-sector approaches to integrating health issues in disaster risk reduction/resilience planning at the city level.*

The World Bank and GFDRR, as part of the COVID-19 response within the *Initiative*, provides technical assistance to selected countries in the region (3 countries – Kyrgyzstan Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) - to develop a more effective preparedness and disaster response by strengthening the social protection system and its flexibility to scale up in response to different types of shocks.

These policies focus in emergencies faced by the communities in the pandemic era. These policies would be include institutional and operational assessments of the social protection delivery systems and a proposed scaled-up road map to

set up to address future disasters or other shocks for each country's social assistance system. World Bank focusing on projects achievement in the 5 countries of Central Asia.

“As the COVID-19 crisis puts Central Asia's resilience to the test, under the *Initiative*, leaders take this opportunity to re-evaluate the current policies to improve the region's ability to build stronger preparedness and response to such shocks. Governments have to prioritising its policies, in order to get back on the level once they achieved before, at the least”. (UNDRR, The Central Asia Initiative of the European Union during the Covid-19 crisis: The Way forward in preparing for and managing crisis, UN Disaster Risk Reduction, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2022) [5]. The Central Asia Initiative of the European Union during the COVID-19 crisis: The way forward in preparing for and mCrisianaging risks.

#### 4. THEORIES AND WAY OF THINKING

There are 9 steps in crisis communication implementation: 1. Verify the situation, 2. Conduct notification, 3. Conduct assessment, 4. Organize assignments, 5. Prepare information and obtain approvals, 6. Release information to media, public, partners through arranged channels, 7. Obtain feedback and conduct crisis evaluation, 8. Conduct public education and 9. Monitor events.

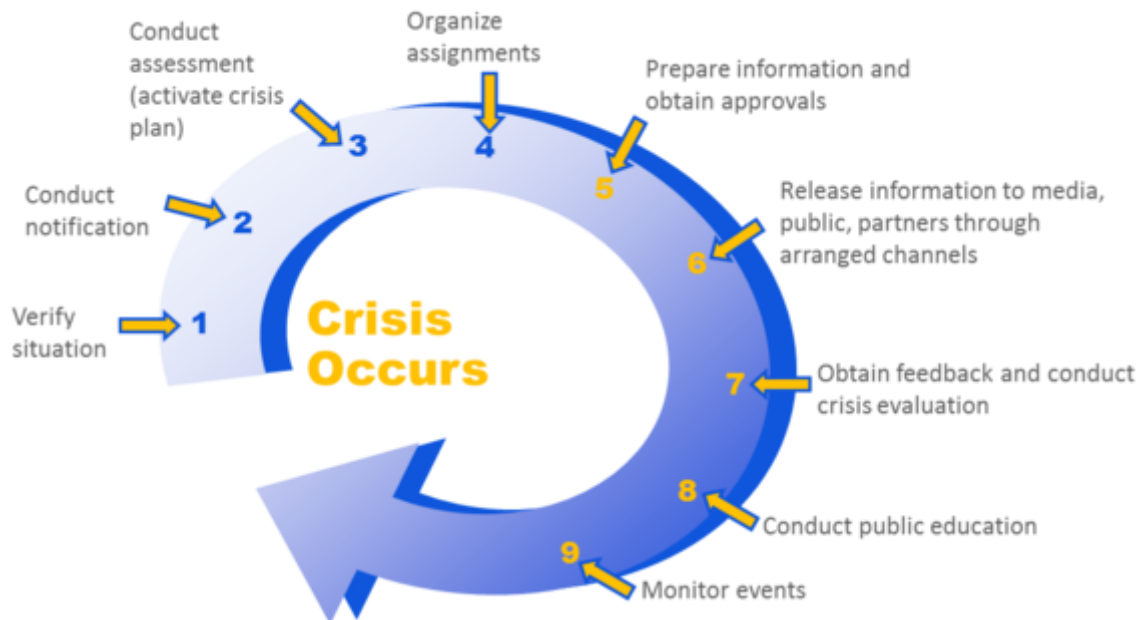
**Table 2. Crisis communication theory**

<b>Pre-crisis</b>	<b>&gt;&gt; Crisis</b>	<b>&gt;&gt; Post-Crisis</b>
1. Monitor crisis risk	1. Collect & process information for crisis decision making	1. Asses the crisis management eff
2. Make decision about how To manage potential crisis	2. Create & disseminate crisis messages	2. Provide follow up crisis manage
3. Train people who will be involved in the Crisis management process		

**Table 3. Summary of policies recommendations: On the time of crisis**

<b>World Bank:</b>	<b>UN ESCAP</b>
1. Institutional & operational assessment	1. Inclusive social services
2. Social protection delivery systems	2. 2.digital transformation
3. 3.scale-up future disaster management	3. 3.Green economic strategies
<b>Objective :</b>	
A. Having proper internal communication	
B. Maintaining dialogues with all stake-holders	
C. Explaining all damage and crisis management steps	

Source: <https://pagecentertraining.psu.edu/public-relations-ethics> [6]



**Fig. 1. Crisis occurs**

[www.emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/cerccorner/article\\_071516.asp](http://www.emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/cerccorner/article_071516.asp), *Nine steps in Crisis communication Implementation, March,23,2017. (Centre for Preparedness &Response /CPR).*

## 5. CONCLUSION

Writer would like to try to analysis some of the above inside a Table, recommendations from 2 global forums for 5 countries, because of their locus, these countries sharing some similarities, even though some differences also. The process of “learning”, digging informations and adaptation after the pandemic, would be influence each of their policies in the future. As stated before, three policy briefs from UN-ESCAP need to be elaborated in depth line or new development plans. Countries which are neighbors to each other, depend on their incomes and states of performances, should make a peaceful arrangement to each other, and not conflicting to each other.

Since the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic spread on 2020, countries such as Kazakshstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan swiftly responded, and they have to took emergencies measure in order to manage the spreading of the virus. They have to closed their borders, re-newed their Health sectors, and built a virus emergency center. One of the countries of Central Asia, Kazakstan has a number of project sponsored by OECD,.ie: revision of skill system in higher education, labor market policies, initiatives to foster skill’s capacities of the new graduated and skillfor Smal and Medium enterprises in Kazakhstan.

Communication during and after the pandemic crisis showed us some political steps such as:

- Open up its border in a slow phase
- Socialization of its vaccination programs, especially for remote areas
- Building up its medical treatment facilities, especially to cope with the new habits of covid-19 preventive steps.
- Developing ICT infrastructure, boosting labor market and repairing health system and its management, if any.

Communication in a crisis condition needs: analytical study for all aspects, regardless of its state or condition, since the shock of the pandemic rules out few policies been planned before. It needed to be in a binocular investigations, choosing what are priorities and what are necessary to be fixed (people with special health conditions, ICT infrastructure in the remote areas and so on). Each policy should not overlapped to each other and should be based on each country’s capacities. Steps are shown from 9 steps in crisis communication implemtenation theory above, each of the steps in each country is so different, but the closer examination could made things better off.

All of the above summary, might be less useful or in-effective for other regions, but seen from the implementation policies in the future, we could

compare that crisis communication theory, do existed in the process and seems benefitted these countries, since their economic performance is getting better off.

### COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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