Special Issue on Health Capacity to Work among Older Persons in Asia

Population data bear out that developing Asia is experiencing demographic change at an unprecedented pace. Rapidly aging countries in the region must find ways to strengthen affordable, adequate, and sustainable health care; social security systems; and pension schemes for their expanding older populations. Equally important is the imperative for countries to harness the potential gains arising from extended longevity and increased health capacity to work.

There is no doubt that good health is a prerequisite to a longer working life. In developing Asia, life expectancy has risen quite dramatically in many countries. However, there has not been a corresponding increase in healthy life expectancy among older Asians. It is important to examine the state of health and mobility among older people and the related impacts on employment.

This Asian Development Review special issue presents the outcomes of regional comparative research led by the Asian Development Bank to generate comparable data and analysis on population aging across the region. Teams of experts from seven Asian countries assessed the health and employment status of older persons and quantified the evolution of their health capacity to work. To our knowledge, this is one of the first large-scale comparative studies in the region on the topic of population aging.

Beginning with the kick-off research meeting in March 2022, the seven country teams met several times to develop harmonized data and empirical methodologies to evaluate the health capacity to work among older persons. Given wide differences in the stages of demographic transition and the policy environments shaping labor force participation across the region, policymakers can benefit from coherent cross-country
studies that yield comparable evidence and provide reliable benchmarks for policy assessment.

The first paper of this issue, “Health Capacity to Work among Older Persons in Asia: Key Findings from a Regional Comparative Study,” presents the harmonized methodologies used to estimate the health capacity to work across the region and provides a summary of findings from each of the seven country papers. It also distills the policy implications by comparing findings across the different countries. The first paper is followed by the seven country papers. We would like to thank each of the contributing authors listed below for their participation in this thematic research effort:

- Zeyuan Chen and Albert Park (People’s Republic of China)
- Ni Wayan Suriastini, Ika Yulia Wijayanti, and Dwi Oktarina (Indonesia)
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