

Improving healthcare, alleviating poverty & much more with Rajesh Khullar, ED-WBG



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Rajesh Khullar, Executive Director at the World Bank Group, chairs the Committee on Development Effectiveness. His expertise lies in bilateral economic diplomacy, poverty alleviation, infrastructure financing, and strategic

communication. Currently, Mr Khullar represents Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Sri Lanka at the World Bank.

Mr Khullar spoke exclusively to Annika Dhariwal, a 17-year-old Cheltenham Ladies College, UK student. Given her early diagnosis of celiac disease, Annika's mission is to empower others to rise from adversity be it through sports, awareness campaigns, or real policy reform. She is interested in pursuing political science, international relations and business at the university level.

How does the World Bank aid the development of Asian countries, particularly India?

In its work in every country, the World Bank is guided by a CPF (country partnership framework), which highlights the areas of concentration for a country for years. India's current CPF is from 2018 to 2022.

The focus of this CPF is on:

1. Promoting resource-efficient growth, including in the rural, urban, and energy sectors, as well as addressing disaster risk management and air pollution.
2. Enhancing competitiveness and enabling job creation, including improving the business climate, access to finance, connectivity, logistics, and skilling, and increasing female labor force participation.

What are the World Bank's priority sectors for lending? Has this changed since the pandemic? Which sectors are prioritized now and how?

The World Bank's response to the COVID-19 crisis in India witnessed the allocation of \$2.8 billion in World Bank financing to strengthen healthcare services, provide support to small and medium enterprises, and enhance social protection for the poorest and most vulnerable, especially women and migrant workers. The initial \$ 2.75 billion lending support covered:

1. Supporting India's health sector: Support to the country's immediate health needs through a \$1 billion COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Project.

How does the World Bank assist Indian states frequently affected by natural calamities?

The World Bank has assisted Indian states in the following ways:

- The World Bank Board of Executive Directors has approved a \$125 million program to support Kerala's preparedness against natural disasters, climate change impacts, disease outbreaks, and pandemics
- The World Bank, the Government of India, and the Government of Uttarakhand (GoUK) signed a \$96 million agreement in 2019 today to provide additional funds to the state in its post-disaster recovery plans,

ongoing since the floods of 2013, as well as strengthen its capacity for disaster risk management.

How can the World Bank leverage its position to empower women in India, especially those in rural areas?

The World Bank focuses on four key areas where countries like India and companies can focus on investments and new policies and policy reform efforts to ensure equal economic participation by women:

1. Improving human endowments - health, education, and social protection.
2. Removing constraints to more and better jobs for women, focusing on safe transport to and from work, services for child and other family care.
3. Remove barriers to women's ownership and control over assets and improve access to finance, technology, and insurance services needed to make such assets productive.
4. Enhancing women's voice and agency, including by engaging men and boys to tackle challenges related to women.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerabilities of traditionally excluded groups. What is the World Bank doing to improve the lives of the marginalized?

With regards to India, the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved a \$1 billion Accelerating India's COVID-19 Social Protection

Response Program to support India's efforts at providing social assistance to the poor and vulnerable households severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these projects were in the form of cash transfers and food benefits, as well as providing social protection for vulnerable groups.

**What is the World Bank doing to tackle climate change at a global level?
Are there any Asia-specific measures for the same?**

The WBG has greatly stepped-up action on climate and development in client countries. The WBG's Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) 2021-25 focus is on:

- (i) Integrating climate and development
- (ii) Identifying and prioritizing action on the largest mitigation and adaptation opportunities, including via diagnostics, in the five key systems transitions
- (iii) Using those to drive our climate finance and leverage private capital in ways that deliver the most results.

How is the World Bank assisting the distribution of vaccines to low-income countries?

The Bank has signed COVID-19 vaccine contracts worth \$2.8 billion for 265 million doses in 38 countries. To date, the WB has supported the delivery of 62m doses to 32 countries and is expected to deliver 96m more doses in the remainder of Q4 of 2021.

An additional 96m doses are scheduled for 2022, but this will likely increase as more projects are approved.

The Bank has earmarked a total of \$ 20 billion for vaccine operations, including vaccine logistics and associated strengthening of health systems, and projects of \$5.8 billion have been committed already. It is expected that more projects will be taken up this year and the next as the supply constraints ease.

What is the World Bank doing to improve the quality of healthcare services in India?

Some of the important bank projects currently underway in the health sector in India are:

- The development objective of the Tamil Nadu Health System Reform Program Project for India is to improve the quality of care, and strengthen the management of non-communicable diseases and injuries, and reduce inequities in reproductive and child health services in Tamil Nadu.

How will the World Bank's Global Tax Program strengthen the economies of developing countries like India?

The Global Tax Program (GTP) seeks to strengthen the tax systems of developing countries by facilitating the design and implementation of evidence-based tax reforms.

The GTP provides an umbrella framework for tax support and leads an ongoing program of activities at both international and individual country levels focused on strengthening tax institutions and mobilizing revenues at the international and domestic levels.