

**UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD), twenty-third session (virtual meeting)
Geneva, 10-12 June 2020**

**High-level segment on “Harnessing science, technology, and innovation to
accelerate progress on the SDGs and addressing COVID-19”**

Statement submitted by

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Video Statement by Minister for Science and Technology of Pakistan
at the
23rd annual session of the United Nations
Commission on Science & Technology for Development (CSTD)
10-12 June 2020

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

This year, the Commission is meeting at a challenging time for our societies and states. The corona virus has unleashed unprecedented health, social and economic crisis across the globe.

While the virus does not discriminate, its impact does, especially for developing countries. Apart from the human loss, developing countries face mounting debt burdens, growing poverty, rising unemployment, among others. The shrinking fiscal space will impede their ability to meaningfully pursue Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Science, research, technology should be at the centre of global and national responses to fight this pandemic.

We therefore welcome this opportunity to discuss how science, technology and innovation (STI) can be harnessed in ways that accelerate progress towards the SDGs as well as to combat the COVID pandemic.

Excellencies,

Let me briefly share Pakistan's national efforts in leveraging these tools to overcome this deadly virus and in doing so making progress towards the SDGs.

The Ministry of Science & Technology has led national efforts to mobilize research organizations, universities and industries. We have created conditions for these key actors to synergize and collaborate.

As a result, we have been able to leverage technology and make new strides in innovation. I am pleased to note that we have successfully harnessed domestic material and resources to produce PPEs, hand sanitizers, testing kits and ventilators. In doing so, we have changed the paradigm: from being an importer of these items to be now a in a position to export at scale and competitive pricing.

We have also collaborated with research partners in China, Germany and the US to mass produce testing kits at affordable rates. Today, 6 ventilator prototypes are ready for production by the local industry.

We have developed apps including tele-school, tele-health as well as a screening app. The screening app is one of the world's first bilingual Android-based app for COVID-19, that allows self-screening.

We have also developed a national dashboard to provide real-time view of the geographic spread of positive cases, infection rates, deaths, new cases and more.

Excellencies,

On the socio economic front, we have leveraged technology and data analytics to successfully implement a national social protection programme for the most marginalized people. Through the Ehsaas- Compassion- programme, we have disbursed emergency cash assistance to 6.6 million families throughout the country. Majority of these beneficiaries are women.

The entire design, application and execution of this programme are a practical example of using STI to mitigate the economic and social effects of this pandemic. Using this digital platform, we are now launching another cash assistance programme for informal workers who have lost jobs due to pandemic related lockdown effects.

Excellencies,

At the global level, a major goal should be to expedite development of therapeutics and vaccines for COVID-19. We are pleased to note the launch of initiatives such as Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) and Technology Access Pool. These are the kind of initiatives that truly capture the essence of our deliberations: platforms that use innovation in research and technology for global public health goods.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has joined other leaders and civil society in calling for a people's vaccine against corona virus. I take this opportunity to reiterate that call for an affordable vaccine for everyone, everywhere.

Hopefully, these national and global initiatives would help in accelerating progress towards SDGs. But real SDG gains for most countries will be achievable through debt relief, increased market access, affordable vaccines and above all by recommitting to multilateralism. Only then we will be able to realize our collective vision of leaving no one behind.

Thank you.
