



**Statement by Minister for Science and Technology of Pakistan at
25th Annual Session of the United Nations
Commission on Science & Technology for Development (CSTD)
28 March 2022**

High-level roundtable

Theme: *“The role of Science, Technology and Innovation in building back better from the corona virus disease while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.”*

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed a great pleasure to join this round table.

I would like to commend the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development for organizing this session on a very topical theme.

This meeting comes at a time when the world is gradually recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. In many ways, this recovery owes a great deal to science, technology and innovation.

And the evidence is before us. From rapid development of personal protection equipment to testing kits and from medicines to vaccines, we saw innovation at the centre of saving lives.

Excellencies,

Where science, technology and innovation largely succeeded in mitigating one of the most pressing global public health policy challenge of our times, its transformational role in accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development Goals remains modest.

The economic contraction, disruption caused to international trade and reduced FDI inflows during the pandemic have increased debt burdens and reduced fiscal space for developing countries.

As a result, the pandemic has deepened social and economic inequalities among and within countries. Developing countries have been hit the hardest. More than 150 million people have fallen back into extreme poverty and more than 250 million jobs have been lost.

Cumulatively, these developments have not only eroded previous development gains, they have also slowed progress towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Systemic imbalances in the global economic and financial system are now more evident than ever before. There is insufficiency of debt relief but abundance of vaccine inequity.

Even as use of digital technologies became more pervasive overall, gaps in digital connectivity also became more visible during the pandemic.

This state of affairs necessitates a big push to develop and disseminate the necessary STI tools, policy advice and technical know-how to those lagging behind.

Excellencies,

States, enterprises and entrepreneurs across the world have helped accelerate the pace and volume of several technological applications and innovations that underpin economic activities. Teleworking, virtual meetings, video conferencing and distant learning have, in many ways, changed the world of work.

Barely a year after the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the on-set of COVID-19, several highly effective vaccines became available. More than 1.5 billion vaccine doses have already been administered as of today. This is a classic example of bringing together scientific knowledge to fight a global challenge. Going forward, it is essential to share technology freely across national and disciplinary boundaries and between the public and private sectors so that everyone everywhere can benefit from it.

Excellencies,

Technologies should not perpetuate inequalities. They should instead be deployed to reduce them, in support of social protection, health-care and learning. Harnessing technologies for these public goods is essential to build resilience and preparedness for any pandemic in the future.

In Pakistan, we are according high priority to both science, technology, innovation and health-care system within the budgetary and financial means available. We have deployed ICT tools to determine eligibility criteria for fully subsidized health insurance cards.

We also established a technology-centered National Command and Operations Centre to coordinate federal, provincial and district level monitoring, information and data sharing and awareness purposes.

We mobilized and harnessed our research and development institutions to manufacture Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), sanitizers, testing kits and ventilators. We were able to produce these materials in a short time at scale and competitive pricing.

We are investing in Biomedical Research and Development. We have recently established a Medical Devices and Development Centre at National University of Science and Technology with a cost of PKR. 331 million.

We have also formulated a new Science, Technology, and Innovation policy last year. A key policy goal is to establish smart cities in a phase-wise manner. The policy also recognizes the importance of ICT based services, such as internet, for societal development in the era of fourth industrial revolution.

The Ministry of Science & Technology is leading national efforts to mobilize research organizations, universities and industries and creating conditions for these stakeholders to synergize and collaborate including in the area of health.

Excellencies,

To build forward better thorough enhanced and smart use of science, technology and innovation, let me suggest five points;

First, A robust global development financing framework is essential to enable and accelerate investments in STI and health-care sector. This requires inter alia fairer international tax, trading and investment regimes for developing countries, as a means to improve their fiscal space and to enable them to achieve progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Second, Enhanced international collaboration in scientific research, capacity building and technology transfer is vital to reduce the existing digital divide. Frontier technologies such as big data, Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, gene-editing, tele-medicine and medical robotics hold immense potential to shape the world in post Covid era.

Third, equitable and affordable access to life saving medicines and vaccines to everyone, everywhere remains imperative. This requires urgent removal of undue restrictions on intellectual property rights and early waiver of patents on COVID-19 patents to accelerate production of vaccines and medicines.

Fourth, increase in STI-related official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries is necessary. STI-related ODA to developing countries has stagnated over the last decade. In 2010, it was \$4.7 billion, compared with \$4.8 billion in 2017.

Fifth, North–South, South–South and Triangular cooperation and partnerships on STI are essential. The Commission on Science and Technology should continue building partnerships and enhance its interface with universities, innovation incubators and private sector entities to promote breakthrough innovations and facilitate two-way exchange of real-time information, and policy insights.

Finally, I wish to commend the excellent work of the Commission. We look forward to contributing and benefitting from its work.

Thank you.
