

An Overwhelming Role of ICTs during COVID-19 Era and Beyond*

With its mass destruction and economic rout, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about technological transformation in every walk of life. Technology has never been used before at such a massive scale to keep people engaged and updated regarding the hovering threats and counter measures being taken to eradicate the harmful effects of this virus. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have positively impacted healthcare, education, e-commerce and the governance systems.

UNESCO estimates that over 1.5 billion students across the world have been affected by COVID-19. Distant learning has enabled a significant number of students to benefit from online learning. Although, this is no match to face-to-face learning, yet various studies indicate that even after COVID-19, online learning will continue to pick up momentum, and by 2025, it will have a market value of USD 325 billion (McCue 2018). Healthcare system is another area where ICTs are being widely used. Telemedicine is of great help to provide medical services on telephones and through audio visual aids. Virtual and SMART clinics are now extending online services and handling patients' queries round the clock. There has been a large surge in online video conferences. The evolving technologies are also prominently being applied in other sectors. 5G technology has made the Internet dependable, effective and the high speed means of communication can carry and instantly transfer a large amount of data. A Global Market Insight report (2019) estimated that online learning businesses will have a market share of USD 300 billion by 2025.

However, there is a downside to the silver lining. In addition to problems of connectivity, there are significant challenges to achieve readiness to completely switch to online learning, telemedicine and e-commerce. State of the art e-learning platforms, training of faculty members, course designs, safe and secure online payment systems for e-commerce and motivation of stakeholders are some of the problems that will need solutions on priority basis.

A warning comes from the World Health Organization that there may not be a post-COVID 19 environment, because the pandemic may become a part of our future life. We have to think about how the world would be then. Governments, particularly of developing countries, will continue to grapple with the two major challenges: saving human lives and dealing with sinking economies. The role of ICTs would become even more crucial for dealing with these challenges.

This panel will closely look at these challenges and come up with pertinent solutions and recommendations. It will also look at the crucial role of ICTs even beyond the COVID-19 era.

* Part of this write-up has been taken from co-organiser's own opinion article, Yasin, M. 2020.

References

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Panel Organisers

Brig. Mohammad Yasin (retired), Senior Advisor for Capacity Building, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: yasin@sdpi.org

Mr Shahid Minhas, Head Learning and Development, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: shahidminhas@sdpi.org

Mr Hassan Murtaza Syed, Research Coordinator, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: hassanmurtaza@sdpi.org