

Government of Pakistan
Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division
Press Release

The Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition lauds the constitution of Inter-ministerial Nutrition Taskforce under Ehsaas

October 22, 2019: The Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, which is funded by the UK Department for International Development, invited Dr. Sania Nishtar, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation to join the Global Panel's High Level Stakeholder Group (HLSG) meeting in Windsor, UK. Dr. Nishtar attended the meeting through video conferencing. The main objective of the meeting was to seek the critique of members on the Global Panel's second foresight report on positioning food systems to deliver healthy and sustainable diets. Virtually addressing the meeting as a panel member, Dr. Nishtar elaborated the strategic approach of the government of Pakistan under the Ehsaas framework to address nutrition.

"Tackling malnutrition is embedded in the strategy of Ehsaas," said Dr. Nishtar, speaking to the international stakeholders and policy makers from governments, civil society, academia and industry from different sectors in the food system. She emphasized that Ehsaas which is government's new antipoverty programme aims to promote equalities, which amongst other things centers on human capital development, of which healthy diet is a core component. Nutrition, therefore, is very important part of Ehsaas framework and the programme looks at it holistically at both ends of the spectrum i.e. under nutrition and overnutrition.

Further, Dr. Nishtar stated, "The Government of Pakistan has institutionalized the inter-ministerial nutrition task force, headed by the Prime Minister and there are six cabinet ministers sitting on the task force. It is quite unique as this is the first time that inter-ministerial set up has been created to shepherd nutrition. The other exciting step is that Ehsaas has recently notified an agriculture value chain building expert group in which we have invited all UN agencies that crosscut with agriculture and in its first meeting to be held later this week."

Apprising the panel members and HLSG about the recent policy formulation on Nutrition under Ehsaas, Dr. Nishtar highlighted several Ehsaas policies and programmes are aimed at tackling malnutrition across Pakistan. These include enhancing a conditional cash transfer scheme centered on nutrition outcomes in safety net initiative, a poverty graduation initiative which has an emphasis on asset transfers of goats and chicken predicated on the improved nutrition outcomes of poor families, a kitchen gardening initiative to help low income families to supplement vegetables and fruits intake, and soup kitchen initiative for labourers in neighborhoods. She particularly stated that these policies have been embedded in the mandates of Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation, Ministry of Agriculture and several other ministries because Ehsaas follows a multisectoral approach to addressing nutrition.

Bringing agricultural perspective of Ehsaas to the HLSG table, she reflected that agriculture is the backbone of our economy, but the sector faces many challenges at different levels. Therefore, under Ehsaas there is also an emphasis to make deep rooted changes at level of agriculture through incentives, subsidies and by engaging private sector to build value chains and eliminate the role of middleman that exploits the farmers.

The Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition highly lauded the commitment and resolve of government of Pakistan to address malnutrition. The Panel works with international, multi-sector stakeholders, to help governments in low- and middle-income countries develop evidence-based policies that make high-quality diets safe, affordable and accessible.