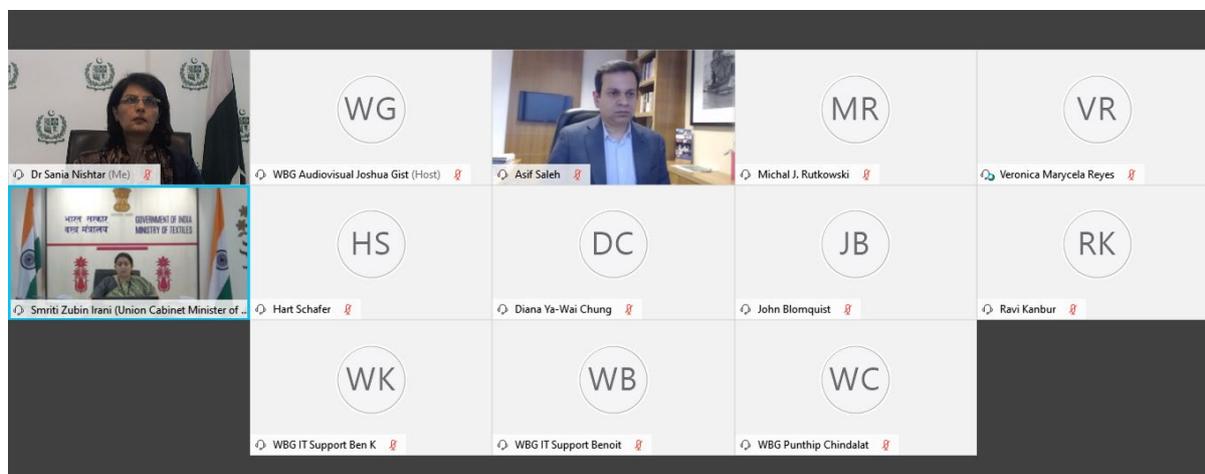


Government of Pakistan
Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division
Press Release

Sania addresses high-level South Asian event at World Bank – IMF Annual Meeting



October 13, 2020: During the World Bank Group-IMF Annual Meeting today, SAPM Dr. Sania Nishtar was invited to participate as a panellist in an event, ‘Protecting South Asia’s Poor and Vulnerable Against COVID-19 and Beyond’. The South Asian event focused on the social protection programs as a cornerstone of relief and longer-term recovery. This virtual event was a direct contribution to the central theme of the Annual Meetings of Supporting a Resilient Recovery: building resilience, improving inclusion, promoting economic growth, and sustaining businesses and jobs.

At the high-level panel, Dr. Nishtar was joined by Special Economic Advisor to the PM of Nepal, Executive Director of BRAC Bangladesh, Professor of Cornell University and Indian Minister for Textiles and Minister for Women and Child Development. Through an engaging discussion with policymakers, practitioners, scholars and international experts, the panel highlighted the relief efforts in the South Asia region and shared views on how social protection could be designed to reach all and support a resilient recovery and inclusive long-term growth.

Sharing the scale and ambition of Ehsaas Emergency Cash, Dr. Nishtar said, “The impact of Ehsaas Emergency Cash on ground which meant getting cash into the hands of millions of families at a time of extreme uncertainty was truly humbling. COVID-19 negatively impacted around 160 million people in Pakistan. In response, the Government of Pakistan delivered Cash assistance to 15 million families in distress.”

Continuing, she said, “Digital capabilities established in 2019 as part of Ehsaas, were adapted to deliver Ehsaas Emergency Cash, in particular, a new biometric payment system, a demand side SMS based request seeking platform and a new wealth-profiling big data analytics mechanism.”

Concluding the discussion, Dr. Nishtar added, “Many challenges were encountered during the disbursements. Ehsaas Emergency Cash was rolled out with lockdowns in effect, public transport suspended, and risk of disease spread looming. Additional challenges related to

issues of logistics, connectivity, liquidity, cyberattacks, biometric failures, and limitations of data-driven messaging. A whole of government approach and real time evaluation helped to successfully address these challenges with speed. Fiscal measures were adopted to incentivize retailers to work in a difficult environment; communication measures were taken to address low financial and digital literacy.”

The COVID-19 crisis has hit South Asia hard, deepening poverty, exacerbating inequality, and creating new poor South Asia is expected to have the largest increase in the number of extreme poor due to COVID, and this discussion with policymakers from South Asia as well as practitioners, scholars and international experts was timely and urgent as countries are developing plans for economic recovery and building the resilience of households against current and future shocks.