

Government of Pakistan
Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division
Press Release

International development partners congratulate Dr. Sania for releasing the flagship report on Ehsaas Emergency Cash

July 30, 2020 -Islamabad: Today, Ehsaas hosted a webinar with donors, international development partners and UN agencies to share key findings of Ehsaas Emergency Cash Report penned by Dr. Sania Nishtar, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation. Convening the virtual meeting, Dr. Nishtar shared her experience around the design and implementation of Ehsaas Emergency Cash that will support 16.9 million families affected by the COVID-19 induced economic shutdown with cash handout of Rs. 12, 000 each. Dr. Nishtar was joined by country directors and heads of International Monetary Fund, The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and other agencies.

Narrating her experience, Dr. Nishtar shared, “Pakistan which is the fifth largest country in the world, there are 24 million breadwinners who rely on daily wages or are self-employed in the informal economy and life for them virtually came to a standstill with implementation of a lockdown in March 2020.” Adding further, she said, “To respond to this challenge, the Government of Pakistan created the Ehsaas Emergency Cash program, which is the largest social protection program ever in the country’s history. This end to end digital program was rolled-out within 10 days of the lockdown to deliver one-time emergency cash grants. 1.23 billion USD were allocated to support more than 16.9 million families, which cover around 109 million people which is approximately 50% of the country’s population.”

Elaborating about how Ehsaas digital infrastructure was leveraged for emergency cash, Dr. Nishtar continued, “Ehsaas Emergency Cash report takes stock of the digital systems and tools deployed in the design and roll out of the program, which built on digital capabilities established over the past year as part of the overarching Ehsaas framework. To ensure compliance with the rule -based procedures, a new biometric payment system, the demand side SMS and web service and wealth-profiling data analytics mechanism were ingrained in the roll out of Ehsaas Emergency Cash. It made the government more agile, data driven, experimental, and ambitious.”

The donors richly praised the report and congratulated Dr. Nishtar and the entire Ehsaas team for taking the lead to reach out to multi-million deserving households in a transparent, cost-effective and fast manner. The inclusive design of the program was lauded that it has strengthened safety nets and financial inclusion, both of which would bring lasting benefits to recipients and to Pakistan as a whole. They also acknowledged that the case of Pakistan and lessons learnt from the design and real time evaluation of Ehsaas Emergency Cash program provide learning that can also inform initiatives in other countries. It was suggested to convene another round of cross-country experience sharing session around Ehsaas Emergency Cash.