



**SDPI**  
Sustainable Development Policy Institute

# Recap of the Year



# 2021



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## MESSAGE FROM SDPI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



In the year 2021, one of our major achievements is that SDPI maintained its relevance in terms of providing research-based policies to the departments concerned. Especially, the policies regarding fiscal measures for small and medium entrepreneurs amidst COVID-19, monetary policy, economy & how Pakistan can move on from the macroeconomic issues. Most importantly, food security dashboard, which was approved by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, was institutionalized by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research. Now, the data collected from all the

provinces is being shared through this dashboard.

Furthermore, we have formulated a renewable energy network and through our research findings we remained pioneer in this context as we provided the platform before the Conference of Parties 26 (COP 26). In this connection, a delegation of SDPI was sent to COP 26 along with parliamentarians. During this year, when most of the think tanks lost their relevance due to certain reasons, including financial crisis, SDPI conducted its annual sustainable development conference in hybrid mode for the first time where Prime Minister of Pakistan shared his message on the concluding day of the conference. I am quite proud of team SDPI, who despite of constraints and limited resources, remained relevant.

Another big achievement of SDPI is the data collection for National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) from 21 districts of the Punjab. We are the only vendor, who completed the task.

SDPI has a tradition where our researchers provide services on different policy-based forums. In 2021, I worked on Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, which was formulated by Mr. Shaukat Tarin, the Finance Minister of Pakistan, and I got selected. Then finance minister developed his macroeconomic policy group and made me a part of it. Then National Disaster Risk Management Fund was launched, which is an important forum. The objective behind was disaster preparedness, mitigation, and adaptation and I was also selected on its Board of Directors. Another important task is that I was appointed as a Convener of National Coordination Committee for PM's Agriculture Transformation Plan in which I will be coordinating with all provinces and federal government for the successful implementation of agriculture related plans. It is important to serve in these policy-based forums as they serve as a tool for us to bridge research-policy gap, which provides us an opportunity to not only connect and provide the policy makers with SDPI's research but also share with them our stakeholders' research findings, their opinions and suggestions. So is the way that turns SDPI more relevant as a policy think tanks as we can consult with stakeholders, collect their input and try to link their suggestions with policy making.

I wish everyone a very happy, peaceful, and safe new year.

**DR ABID QAIYUM SULERI**



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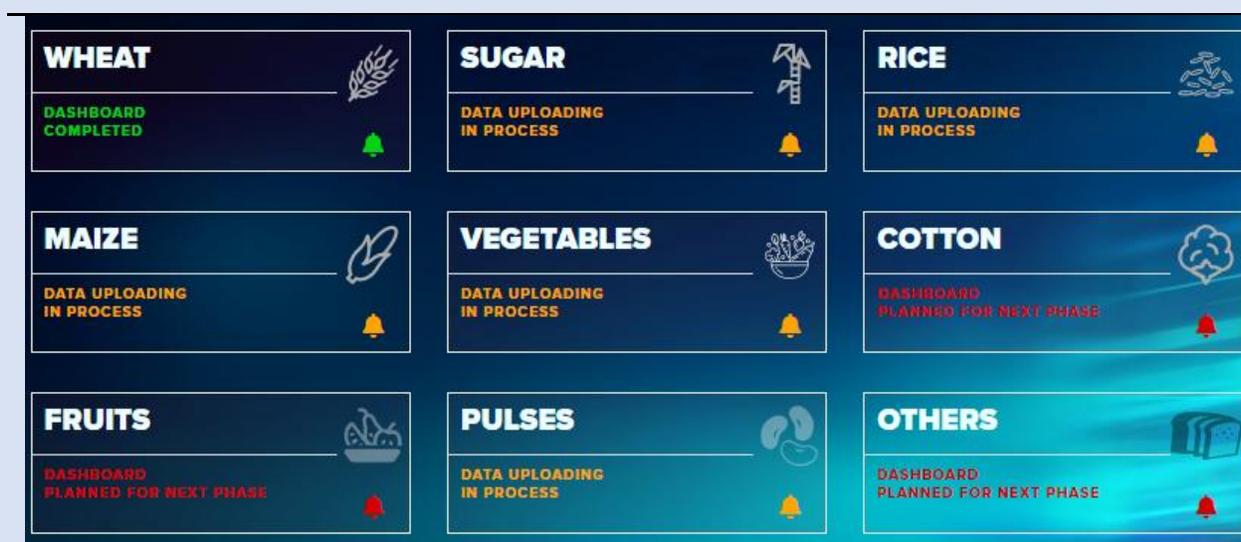
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## FOOD SECURITY PORTAL

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Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) made the Food Security Portal (FSP), which contains many dashboards for monitoring prices, stocks, and supply chain of food items. The portal has an in-built capacity of district level analyses and comparisons.

After its successful completion, SDPI handed it over to the Federal Government. Currently, the Ministry of National Food Security & Research is utilizing the portal for its policy decisions. (To view the portal, click [here.](#))



## 24<sup>TH</sup> SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE (SDC)

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Since 1995, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) has been organising of its annual Sustainable Development Conference (SDC), which is a flagship event of the Institute. It not only provides a forum for SDPI's own research but also invites other researchers, practitioners, policy makers and academia from the region to share their work and engage in a dialogue with fellow panellists and participants. The event is viewed as a prime get together of researchers and policy circles not only in South Asia but also beyond.

SDPI's Twenty-fourth Sustainable Development Conference was held from 6 - 9 December 2021 in Islamabad, Pakistan. The overarching theme of this Conference was: **Beyond the Pandemic: Leaving No One Behind.** His Excellency, President of Pakistan Dr Arif Alvi inaugurated the Conference on 6

December 2021 at the Aiwan-i-Sadr. A special message was received from Prime Minister Imran Khan at the last day's plenary focussing specifically on inclusive development. Ministers and parliamentarians were invited in various sessions to engage them in the policy debate.

It was a forward-looking Conference and a reflection on the two years since the COVID-19 pandemic. What lessons were learnt during these challenging years? What could be done to catch up with the missed targets and how could they be compensated for the time loss; and how well are we prepared for future disasters? What were some of the opportunities gained or lost during this timeframe and as seen through the prism of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? What midcourse correction strategy can be adopted to steer towards

sustainable development in the coming years? These were some of the questions that were addressed.

A total of 38 sessions were organized of which ten were plenary sessions and 28 concurrent sessions. A total of 2,365 in-person and online audience attended the Conference. Some 200 speakers from 21 countries participated in this year's SDC. Besides Pakistan, speakers joined the sessions from Canada, Ecuador, Fiji,

Germany, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, Peru, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the Netherlands, the UK, and the USA.

*Sustainable Development in a Digital Society* is the title of the peer reviewed anthology that was launched at this Conference. One whole section consists of the key policy recommendations that were shared during the SDC 2020.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN PAKISTAN: KEEPING PACE WITH THE EVOLUTION**

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Since 1993, the SDPI's Study Group on Information Technology and Telecommunications has been meeting periodically to discuss the challenges that Pakistan is likely to face because of this rapidly evolving field. So far, the group has held 62 meetings and done some studies. The emphasis of such studies has been on the efficiency and efficacy of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) infrastructure and services, regulatory issues, taxation, connectivity, and support to institutions. The Study Group has been bringing to bear the experience, opinions and ideas of engineers, scientists, economists, academics, businesspeople, and other relevant experts' knowledge in the field.

The recommendations made by the SDPI's Study Group on IT and Telecom over the years were compiled. Some recommendations had been implemented, some are in the process of implementation, and some have not been taken up. The Current Status was shared with the Policy Makers, Regulator, and other Civil and Military stakeholders.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to prevail. No one knows how long we will be facing it. In this time of the pandemic, IT and Telecom industry is playing a central role as life

saviour and facilitating other businesses to grow. This implies that special measures will have to be taken to enhance the pace of growth of this industry.

In Pakistan, the growth trajectory though has shown an upward trend during the last few years, there is a long way to go to harness the industry to meet the emerging demands.

In this context, experts at a webinar, organized by SDPI on August 11, 2021, discussed and addressed the following questions.

- Is our IT and Telecom Industry ready to meet the current and future challenges?
- Are we heading towards the right direction?
- If not, what policy and planning steps are needed to cope with the impending challenges?

In the light of the discussion, recommendations on unlocking untapped IT potential, increasing broad capacity, providing sufficient spectrum, extending IT infrastructure to rural areas, removing digital inequalities. Focusing on artificial intelligence and reducing taxation on IT and telecom services. were made for consideration by the government and policy makers.

The most important activity during past 12 months was the conduct of an experimental study, a **Randomized Control Trial (RCT)** on economically marginalized in South Punjab, Pakistan, titled “Investigating the Impact on Learning Outcomes Through the Use of EdTech During Covid-19 Evidence from an RCT in the Punjab province of Pakistan”. The study was awarded under COVID-19 Global Research Grant-2020-21 by EdTech Hub Consortium, funded by World Bank and UK-Aid, where we reported to EdTech Hub and faculty of University of Cambridge, UK.

The objective of this study was to explore the effect, a set of EdTech interventions had on improving the learning outcomes of students; to test the impact of using low-tech devices on the literacy and numeracy outcomes of secondary school students during school closures in Pakistan. The study was conducted over the period when intermittent school closures occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic and our target population was Grade 8 students attending private schools in Bahawalnagar district. This is an economically deprived area situated in the Southern part of Punjab province. We tested the impact of three interventions, which were administered online on students in 5 Administrative units/Tehsils of South Punjab. These three interventions were as follows:

- Computer-assisted Teaching at The Right Level (TaRL) interventions,
- Fortnightly assessments (FAS)
- Digital teacher training sessions (DTS)

The primary research questions which this study was interested to probe were:

- What were the key issues regarding access, barriers, and usage of EdTech by students during school closures?

- What were the separate and combined effects of delivering TaRL, fortnightly assessments, and digital training sessions online on student learning outcomes in Urdu, English, and maths? online learning.
- What did stakeholders identify as the key barriers relating to access to technology for online learning during the closure of schools?

As per global literature, RCTs are considered the “Gold Standard” of Impact Evaluations and the most reliable form of Evidence. This proved to be the first RCT done by SDPI. Further, we also tested and implemented the globally renowned intervention of Teaching at The Right Level (TaRL), a pedagogical approach for enhancing learning levels of school children, introduced by Pratham, India and explored by Noble laureates like Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee in developing countries. Our findings offer some useful lessons for policymakers to help improve the learning outcomes for the most disadvantaged groups. These include:

- Actively involving school actors in the design of a technology-assisted TaRL is important for the long-term buy-in of teachers and students.
- Understanding the complexities involved when it comes to implementing technology assisted TaRL interventions and how this can impact their level of success is essential.
- Considering factors relating to access & use of devices that go beyond mere device ownership is key.
- Community perceptions of technology must be factored into the planning of any technology-supported education programs.



*Pictures from the field under Ed-Tech*

## **CONVENOR OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION'S SUB-GROUP ON INDUSTRY AND ENTERPRISE**

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SDPI, being the convenor of the Planning Commission's Sub-Group on Industry and Enterprise, organized an online discussion of business leaders with the members of Private Sector Development in March 2021. The aim of the meeting was to assist the government in making an after pandemic recovery through evidence use provided by the business leaders. The business community put forth their recommendations and subsequently respective government departments responded by deciding on the following policy changes.

- Establishment of an Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMC) test facility in Pakistan for Gulf Marking Standard for electric fans exports. Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR) has been directed to act and upgrade setups so that product certification and CE, SASO, and G-

Mark could be given to manufacturers in Pakistan.

- Establishment of LVD and EMC testing facility in PCSIR Lahore so that manufacturers won't have to send fans to China to get that certification.
- Essential raw material for high energy-efficient fans and motors is the Cold Rolled Non-Grain Oriented Electrical Steel Sheet (CRNGO-ESS) has a high sales tax. The government has requested the Minister for S&T and Adviser for Commerce and Investment to raise the issue in the Senate and other relevant forums.
- Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) as requested by the industry would be made mandatory.

## **ACTION-ORIENTED DIAGNOSTIC ON EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY MAKING FOR THE NATIONAL TARIFF COMMISSION (NTC)**

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SDPI conducted a diagnostic exercise with the purpose of identifying challenges and opportunities faced by the National Tariff Commission (NTC) in the production, communication, and use of evidence in addition to identifying interventions and activities for overcoming these challenges, which would also lead to improving evidence handling across the organization. The

diagnostic was also aimed at studying how the NTC can better function as a think tank for the government in trade space.

Based on findings of the diagnostic exercise, following major recommendations were made:

- A detailed change plan with activities and methods to approach the prioritized areas for change on

information and data production and use.

- Improved use of data, data sharing, and incentives for thinking and working innovatively.
- Systems to manage and retrieve knowledge.
- Training in production and use of evidence.

One of the recommendations of the diagnostic exercise was to establish a Center of Excellence on Tariff and Trade Policy, which has been approved by the Chairperson of NTC. The establishment of this center is very much in line with NTC's Rules of Business, which demands NTC to provide evidence-based advice on

matters relating to international trade. Such a center will be expected to contribute to:

- Developing NTC's capacity to use high quality and big data for policy decisions
- Strengthening key relationships between NTC and local information and data producers and users including think tanks locally and abroad
- Designing of a workplan with possible activities to improve the use of information and data in NTC and to acquire relevant data from abroad
- Regularly evaluating the progress and results to improve organizational learning

## **PENSION REFORM AGENDA OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA**

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SDPI is collaborating with Sustainable Energy and Economic Development (SEED) to conduct online meetings on public sector pensions in Pakistan. The objective behind this is to bring together government officials and independent experts to highlight fiscal policy challenges presented by the growth in public sector pensions (which are not funded) and to evolve reform options based on evidence from national and international experiences. The

project specifically addresses the pension liabilities of Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that are a large and growing drag on the provincial budget. Through advocacy and stakeholder engagement, the project brings forth a fruitful discussion around pension reforms. The policy papers on pension reforms provided guidelines to Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to make tangible improvements in pension reform process.

## **MONETARY AND FISCAL POLICY**

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Responding to the pressing issues facing the country, SDPI's Policy Solution Lab mainly focused on two important areas in 2021: monetary and fiscal policy. Though much work has been done regarding monetary policy, two major works are worth noting here. The Policy Review "First response to SBP Amendment Act 2021" was literally the first detailed analysis of SBP's Act providing suggestions for improvement. The review was widely discussed and quoted in electronic and print media. Most importantly, the revised version of SBP bill has some very important improvements suggested

in the review. Take example of the need for clear definition. The review noted that "The proposed amendment provides a new set of objectives of monetary policy in a better order compared to the Act updated in 2015. It however lacks a clear definition of price stability". The revised version of the bill now clearly mentions price stability refers to "lower and stable inflation". Similarly, this review proposed that final authority on setting the inflation target is with the government, which is part of the revised version of the bill. Many of the recommendations provided in the review are likely to continue to set the

foundations for future debate and improvement in the SBP amendment Act 2021.

Second work on monetary policy brings to the discussion the Social Footprint of Central Banking and Monetary Policy in Pakistan for the first time. The work argues that monetary policy affects the day-to-day life of the common man and influences poverty, inequality, and other social outcomes. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), therefore, needs to assess, consider, and communicate the side effects of monetary policy to the public for greater transparency, as well as to the government in order to align fiscal and regulatory policies to counter these unintended consequences. This work has generated at least three immediate impacts which include i) bringing monetary policy into mainstream discussion like other public policies ii) creating a much-needed debate around the social considerations of central banking and monetary policy in Pakistan, hence linking monetary policy to issues of public at large and iii) broadening and deepening the monetary policy audience in Pakistan (which is almost absolutely missing). In medium to long term this work is likely to influence the thinking about and conduct of monetary policy in Pakistan.

The work-related fiscal policy was linked identifying priorities for fiscal policies and associated fiscal needs for fair, green and forward-looking recovery from the COVID 19 in Pakistan. This work, aiming to promote

evidence-based policies for recovery from COVID 19, identifies 5 major areas of interventions and simulates the impact on key social and economic indicators using a 100-equation macroeconomic model developed by UNESCAP and particularly tailored for Pakistan. This work very clearly builds economic case for investment in people and environment. It matins and shows that social spendings have economic gains and must not be treated as benevolence are residual policy. More than 30 representatives from different ministries and departments of federal and provinces have been given an orientation workshop to build the capacity to use the macroeconomic model. SDPI team met with high ups in ministry of finance, Planning Commission of Pakistan and ministry of climate change and have received the interest in using the evidence based work and associated model to formulate respective policies. The follow up work is likely to i) bring the social spendings into priority focus ii) promote evidence-based policy making, iii) lead to a more effective use of limited fiscal resources with highest gains. Publications are:

- [Socioeconomic Impact of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in South Asia: Fiscal Policy Response and Fiscal Needs for Supporting the Economic Recovery](#)
- [Priorities for a fair recovery from COVID-19 in South Asia](#)

## **NETWORK FOR CLEAN ENERGY TRANSITION: RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY**

In the year 2021, the Energy Unit successfully produced substantial research outputs with an assertive advocacy around clean energy transition. We launched a “Network for Clean Energy Transition: Research and Advocacy” which has a participation from the government, private sector (Businesses and Developers), CSOs, NGOs, think tanks, academia, and media personnel to address the

risks posed by climate change and delivering a smooth transition to low-carbon economy and clean energy transition in Pakistan. During this year, SDPI conducted around 20 stakeholder consultations (PPDs, FGDs, roundtables) to further the cause of energy transition and green economic recovery amid COVID-19. Moreover, we established a “Green Parliamentary Caucus” which aims to equip

parliamentarians with relevant information and build their capacity to spearhead and enable environment friendly policies.

## **CLIMATE-INDUCED MIGRATION IN PAKISTAN**

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With support from Bread for the World (BftW), SDPI has recently completed the project titled: “Promoting Protection and Solidarity for Climate Migrants and Displaced Communities in South Asia”. The project aimed to build solidarity for climate-induced migrants through evidence-based research and sensitizing policy makers and other stakeholders regarding climate-induced migration in Pakistan. Under this project, research was conducted to understand climate-induced migration patterns, causes and consequences, well-being, and gender-related outcomes. Rural and urban communities in flood prone areas of Muzaffargarh and drought-affected regions of Tharparkar were under scrutiny.

Fieldwork was conducted by involving displaced and migrant communities through focus group discussions, interviews as well as consultations with key public and private stakeholders at local to national level.

The key output of this study was to highlight potential limitations as well as opportunities to consider migration as an adaptation strategy for vulnerable communities in Pakistan. The project recommendations sensitized climate-

induced displacement and migration among stakeholder concerned, particularly, Ministry of Climate Change of Pakistan and can contribute ongoing process of national and provincial climate change adaptation planning. Some key recommendations include:

- Develop the risk assessment and monitoring capacities of provincial and local administration to identify location-specific climate change adaptation priorities.
- Focus on (internal) migration planning and management, considering the potential social and economic challenges and opportunities for the migrants and their families in areas of origin and destination; and
- Implement a migrants registration system across different administrative boundaries by the government to gain insights regarding internal migration flows and patterns for informed policy decisions and implementation. This would also help improve federal to local level institutional support for aid distribution and resettlement.

## **CENTRE FOR PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT (CPSE)**

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SDPI’s Centre for Private Sector Engagement (CPSE) was involved in research, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives in 2021. With regard to evidence creation, our prime focus was on investment, social enterprise development, and energy sector reforms. This evidence was used to continue the evidence based public private dialogue series with geographical and sectoral diversity. A total of 34 dialogues were conducted in 2021 with primary focus on business regulatory

environment, services sector development amid COVID, international trade policy, energy reforms, and macroeconomic policies of Pakistan. A total of 867 stakeholders were engaged in the past year with 23% belonging to the government, 37% to the private sector and remaining to academia and civil society. Additionally, CPSE team was involved in capacity building and mentoring of start-ups and young entrepreneurs in addition to engaging universities for better industry-

academia linkages. This year we established new partnerships with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Board of Investment and Trade, National Textile University Faisalabad, Sukkur IBA University, Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur, Karachi University, Beaconhouse National University, Government College University Lahore, and Lahore Economic Journalist Association. At the end of 2021, the National Network of Economic Think tanks was revived with a geographical and sectoral focus on Business Regulatory Environment of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The members of the network include: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Board of Investment and Trade (KP-BoIT), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA),

University of Science and Technology, Bannu, University of Malakand, Hazara University, Gomal University Dera Ismail Khan, IMSceinces Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chamber of Commerce, relevant business associations and senior economic journalists. A total of 32 policy recommendations were made by CPSE in the past year. Our recommendations have been used as advice in several of the government policies and initiatives including the Strategic Trade Policy Framework, Pakistan Regulatory Modernization Initiative, Revenue Mobilization, Investment and Trade (REMIT), and Pakistan National Single Window.

## **WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 2021**

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Pakistan was the global host for World Environment Day in the year 2021 hosted on June 5. SDPI was the key partner with Ministry of Climate Change Pakistan and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in

the implementation of World Environment Day activities.

Four provincial events and one federal event was organized by involving media, academia, and policy makers.

## **VERIFICATION OF TWITTER ACCOUNT**

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In the year 2021, SDPI's social media platform Twitter got the [blue tick](#).

## **ADVOCACY:**

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In 2021 SDPI initiated a series of webinars and keynote sessions to discuss and create awareness on different aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The topics of the sessions ranged from vaccinations to the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Various policy reviews were compiled based on those discussions that were shared with the policy makers for the policy and decisions making process.

Another major accomplishment of the year for SDPI is the World Environment Day events across Pakistan in collaboration with UNEP and Government of Pakistan. SDPI organized seven seminars, i.e. four in the provincial capitals in collaboration with Benazir Bhutto

Women University, Peshawar, Government College, Lahore, Lahore College for Women University, Balochistan University, S K Bahadur Women University, Quetta, and Iqra University Karachi.

SDPI organized a series of consultations with parliamentarians and diplomats Pre-COP-26 as well as on Pakistan's transition to Clean Energy that were attended by Members of National Assembly and Members the Senate of Pakatan, Members of International Organizations, European Union, and UK parliament.

The consultations lead to the formation of a Parliamentary Groups on Clean Energy during the year. An extensive team, including researchers and members of advocacy attended

and engaged high profile development practitioners to form global networking during the COP-26 in UK.

## **RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

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In 2021, SDPI has worked on several projects from community resilience to violent extremism and to climate risks/hazards. On climate resilience part, the programme conducted awareness seminars in provinces and federal capital Islamabad on Ecosystem Restoration, commissioned four key policy papers on “Ecosystem Restoration” under the UNEP launch of the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration coinciding with the observance of the World Environment Day 2021 led by Pakistan.

On community resilience to violent extremism, the programme finalized the already commissioned 29 research papers on various themes of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) across the country. These papers have been submitted to various research journals (national and international) by the respective authors. The programme also commissioned and published a book of the Policy Papers on the Community Resilience to Violent Extremism. These research and policy papers have been part of SDPI’s research grant initiative under the “Community Resilient Research Network (CRRN)” project. The President of Pakistan, at the inaugural ceremony of the Sustainable Development

Conference 2021, officially launched the Policy Papers Book developed under the CRRN project. The President appreciated the work. For continuation of the Resilient Development Programme’s work on CVE related issues, SDPI in collaboration with the Department of Social Work of the University of Peshawar organized a hybrid webinar at the University of Peshawar (15th December 2021) on CVE related topics where a book comprising policy papers was published and distributed among the stakeholders.

The programme team conducted a third-party evaluation of the ‘Safe, Peaceful and Resilient Community’ (SPARC) programme and projects of the VSO Pakistan to analyze good practices with a suggested way forward. The team lead contributed a chapter on emigration trends from Pakistan and influence of Pakistani Diaspora to a book being jointly published by SDPI and FES in early 2022.

## **NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON DIGITAL TRADE INTEGRATION IN PAKISTAN**

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In collaboration with UN-ESCAP, SDPI has conducted a study which concludes that Pakistan has relatively restrictive digital-trade policy environment. Removing trade obstacles on investment in digital sectors, digital goods, and services would serve Pakistan’s interest to fully utilize the opportunity brought by digital technology. It will allow firms to seize digital trade opportunities and create productivity

effects. The success of Pakistan in digital transformation will depend on whether the country can overcome the barriers to adopt the latest technologies made available through growing FDI and increase openness to digital trade and technology ideas.

This National Action Plan is endorsed by relevant ministries (especially of Ministry of Commerce), TDAP, NTC, PSEB, and MoITT.

Recommendations have also been adopted in the draft of data Protection Law and Regulations Bill 2021. As per one of the recommendations, a separate body is being introduced, namely 'Personal Data Protection Authority' that would be responsible for the

data protection and related issues. Another crucial step taken on recommendations of the report is the permanent deletion of data once the data retention time ends so that data management and protection can be enhanced.

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