**Questions**

**Q-1. What approaches and examples of good practices are available to increase Internet access and digital literacy of women and girls, including in decision-making processes on Internet public policy?**

One example of good practices to increase Internet access and digital literacy of women and girls is the program “ICT for Girls” being executed by Ministry of IT & Telecom (MoITT), Government of Pakistan. This program is a direct outcome of policy objective of promoting inclusiveness and empowerment of girls/ young women to enable them contribute to and benefit from the value chain of ICTs including decision making skills.

The following approach is adopted to increase Internet access and digital literacy of women and girls in this program:

1. Provision of access to ICT infrastructure and ICT tools.
2. Access to Customized ICT Education for Specific Skill Development
3. Access to mentorship and funding for potential startups & entrepreneurs.

**Q-2. What approaches and examples of good practices are available to promote the access and use of ICTs by SMEs in developing and least-developed countries, particularly those owned/managed by women, in order to achieve greater participation in the digital economy?**

The following streams of the program “ICTs for Girls”, have been defined to promote the access and use of ICTs by SMEs owned/managed by women:

1. First stream of this program offers access to basic digital infrastructure and customized digital skills to primary/secondary school girls under the age of 15 years.
2. Second stream of this program equips girls/young women aged between 15-25 years belonging to impoverished segment of the society from remote areas of Pakistan, with pertinent ICT tools such as coding and computing to enhance probability of employment and entrepreneurship. This part of the program is also built on top of providing digital infrastructure.
3. The third stream of the program is aimed at nurturing the entrepreneurship potential of young women by providing them enabling environment through mentorship and all required facilities and infrastructure where they could practically test their ideas and convert them to commercially viable businesses.

**Q-3. Which are the available sources and mechanisms for measuring women's participation in the digital economy with focus on SME's and micro-enterprises?**

There are three potential sources of evaluation are as under

* Baitulmal led over 120 Centres Pakistan wide will maintain a record from local SMEs and Microenterprises to measure the impact on digital economy

### **Q-4. What measures/policies could be envisioned in order to foster the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs, specifically in developing and least-developed countries?**

The following activities/projects are being implemented under the “ICT for Girls” Program order to foster the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs.

### **ICT for Girls-Women Empowerment Centers**

MoITT has very successfully implemented this project countrywide for the impoverished segment of society by establishing state-of the-art Digital Labs at Women Empowerment Centers (WECs) of Bait-Ul-Mal (an autonomous organization contributing toward poverty alleviation through providing assistance to the destitute, widows, orphans, invalids and other needy persons). At these centers the girls with minimal education and very limited access to ICT infrastructure are being trained on Microsoft’s delivered 4Cs program including Coding, Computing, Communication and Coaching. Through this program thousands of girls (approximately 5000 per year) from remote and geographically disadvantaged areas of Pakistan are benefitting.

### **ICT for Girls-Islamabad Schools**

MoITT has embarked upon establishing, state-of-the-art digital infrastructure at 226 Girls’ schools of Islamabad combined with provision of comprehensive digital skills program under the auspices of Microsoft. The content of the course has been designed by Microsoft on 4Cs including, Computing, Coding, Communication and Coaching skills to uplift the employability scope at a very young age.

### **Women Entrepreneurship**

The National Incubation Centre, established by MoITT at Islamabad provides state-of-the-art facility and mentorship to startups and entrepreneurs. Innovative ideas/projects are cultivated and enriched to give them commercial viability. Special quota of 30% has been reserved for women entrepreneurs to help bud their entrepreneurial skills. Every year 40 teams comprising 4-5 members will be inducted to the program.

**Q-5. What are the gaps in addressing these challenges? How can they be addressed and what is the role of governments?**

### **Gaps and Solutions**

The entire program is unique in Pakistan which is pragmatically and objectively designed with a view to develop optimized skillset amongst the targeted audience. However, keeping in view the environment and constraints, significant innovation has been integrated into (i) Formulation of customized course contents and; (ii) Promoting contemporary skills and ownership through community inclusion in ICT for Girls-Women Empowerment Centers initiative.

The customized course has been designed in consultation with “Microsoft” considering the constraints and limitations of target audience. The idea was to make trainees proficient in computer skills in minimal time period. The contents of the course mainly revolves around the concept of “4Cs”- Computing, Coding, Coaching and Communication. Results so far have indeed testified that course contents and its design have struck right balance between learning curve of the trainees and gradient of difficulty level. The concept was to start with basics of computing and coding, followed up by escalation through hands on programming skill development and enhanced communication skills within a short span of seven months which is a remarkable achievement.

WECs, where the said initiative has been implemented used to provide skill development courses related to knitting, handicrafts and similar traditional arts. MoITT envisioned catalyzing this opportunity of an established environment for training of dis-advantaged women to transform the traditional skillset to more relevant and market oriented ICT skillset. In this regard, MoITT entered into this program with Bait-ul-Mal and Microsoft. The Ministry was cognizant, that while there may be less resistance to women being trained in traditional skills, modern skill teaching which entailed access to internet may face stiffer resistance. Realizing that, continuity could only be achieved by participation and ownership by the local community, MoITT took measures for building local ownership of the program such as inauguration of digital labs by local elders and leaders, where they were briefed about the potential benefits of the program. As a result, sense of ownership for this initiative has been promoted among the local communities which has also overcome social barrier for girls /young women to a great extent enabling them to pursue with the program.

### **Role of Government of Pakistan**

“ICT for Girls” Program is indeed based on pertinent partnerships and high level of cooperation among various organizations. Every partner has played effective role in integration of this program. Ministry of IT and Telecom and organizations under its control have played pivotal role in conceiving and implementing the program while joining hands with organizations whose expertise were required.

### ICT for Girls- Women Empowerment Centers

Ministry of IT & Telecom is spearheading the initiative through its organization, Universal Service Fund Company (USF Co.). The project was conceived in Ministry of IT & Telecom. Ministry of IT & Telecom is directly monitoring the project and maintaining close liaison with Bait-Ul- Mal and Microsoft for smooth execution of the project. On behalf of Ministry of IT & Telecom, USF Co. is establishing Digital labs at WECs of the Bait-Ul-Mal scattered across Pakistan.

### ICT for Girls- Islamabad Schools

Ministry of IT & Telecom is executing this initiative through Universal Service Fund Company (USF Co.). USF Co. is responsible to establish digital labs in the designated schools by the Federal Directorate of Education. The USF Co. is also hiring master trainers/resource for training the students under this initiative. Ministry of IT & Telecom has dedicated senior level officials to monitor overall execution of the project.

### Women Entrepreneurs

The Ministry of IT & Telecom has conceived this program and is executing through its organization “Ignite- National Technology Fund”. In order to establish incubation centers, tenders are floated and after a thorough evaluation and selection process, a suitable partner from private sector is selected who manages the operation of center while funding is provided by the Ministry. As mentioned earlier, so far one such center has been established at Islamabad in partnership with largest cellular mobile operator of Pakistan (Jazz). The contracts for Lahore and Peshawar, capitals of Punjab and KPK provinces respectively have been signed with private sector partners while process of selecting suitable partners in Sind and Baluchistan provinces is underway.