Girls in ICT Day is all about encouraging girls and young women to take up the exciting potential of a career in information and communications technology. It is also about urging governments, industry and academia to develop strategies to equip and support girls who want to embark on such a career.

The unprecedented global COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, much more effectively than any statement I could make, the vital importance of information and communications technology to society. With billions of people now confined to home, with businesses shuttered from New York to Nairobi, with health services strained to breaking point, digital networks are playing a crucial role in keeping the world working. They are keeping us connected, supporting health workers treating the sick, and enabling researchers who are collaborating to develop a vaccine.

Digital technologies will be the key to our success. Digital molecular analysis is helping teams understand the virus, so we can target its weak points. Digital epidemiological modelling is helping us understand the behaviour of the virus, to help us curb its spread. Yet, when women are excluded from such work, we replicate and deepen inequalities and gender stereotypes, we create products that don’t adequately address the needs of half the population, and we further the gender digital divide.

So, to today’s girls and young women, I say: digital solutions are going to be central to every major challenge facing your generation. The world cannot afford to lose your talent. What career choice could be more rewarding than mastering the digital skills that will help you to save our planet and its people?
UNDP supports the National Health Hackathon for local health care tech-solutions for communicable diseases including COVID-19

April 22, 2020, Islamabad — UNDP partnered with National Incubation Center (NIC), Jazz xlr8, and Ministry of National Health Services Regulation and Coordination to support the National Health Hackathon. The online Hackathon was launched in response to finding preventative and curative local solutions on communicable diseases including COVID-19. The online hackathon provided an opportunity for social entrepreneurial ecosystem to contribute to solutions for COVID-19, while still practicing physical distancing.

The focus of the hackathon was on both preventive (nutrition, hygiene and disease/health awareness, panic control) and curative (diagnosis, service delivery, support mechanisms for isolated patients) side of health, but with a particular focus on communicable diseases (infectious or viral/bacterial, etc.) including COVID-19. The hackathon aims to look for ideas, prototypes, and available solutions that are relevant, practical and scalable.

More than 1200 applicants applied for the hackathon, out of which 123 were shortlisted for interviews. After further shortlisting, 20 finalists were provided mentorship from some of the prominent industry experts. Final pitches brought forward numerous solutions, including: machine learning to detect cough patterns to see if it matches COVID-19 cough; using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and thermal detection for control and prevention of COVID-19; using UV light in masks to provide protection against the virus; using tech to address mental health challenges; low cost breathing assistance machine; and mass production of certified N-95 masks to meet the market demand.

“Due to COVID-19, the need for low cost and quality health care technologies has increased amidst the current health care crisis.” Ignacio Artaza, Resident Representative, UNDP Pakistan stated, “The online hackathon has brought all tech-based startups to join our efforts to control the spread of communicable diseases.”
“UNDP and NIC have a shared vision of innovation and promoting social entrepreneurship”, stated Zouhair Khaliq, Co-Founder of Team-Up and National Incubation Center (NIC). “The National Health Hackathon is an opportunity for the innovation ecosystem to bring tech-based solutions for communicable diseases, especially COVID-19. NIC would like to thank UNDP Pakistan for their continuous support”

The winning solutions will receive cash prizes to implement their ideas, along with wild card entry for NIC Pakistan’s 8th cohort, and a chance to be part of the Jazz xlr8 Programme. The winners will also have access to mentorship and assistance in implementing and scaling their solutions from UNDP AccLab Pakistan, and access to UNDP’s global network of Accelerator Labs.

For additional information, please contact Ayesha Babar at ayesha.babar@undp.org or +92 (51) 835 5650