**For a greener future**

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The world we live in seems to be under constant assault. From unprecedented shifts in global alliances, threats to formerly secure political hegemonies, sky-rocketing inflation across world economies to calamitous climate change, challenges abound in a magnitude previously unwitnessed.

While it is easy to be overwhelmed and subsequently defeated by all that confronts us, the hallmark of the brave has always been to never give up without a fight. Undoubtedly, there is much that lies beyond our personal spheres of influence but climate change is one area where we all, as individuals and as organizations, can contribute positively towards alleviating the threats we face. It is precisely with this mindset that the Universal Service Fund (USF) Pakistan seeks to take a lead and be an inspiring example for others to emulate.

Climate change has become a catch phrase in modern times but do we truly understand what it implies? The United Nations defines climate change as the long-term shifts in temperature and weather patterns. What these shifts have produced are record tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, landslides, deadly heat and a contribution towards seismic activity provoking earthquakes by inducing rising sea levels through glacier melting which aggravates what scientists term as the ‘isostatic rebound’ effect.

While some of these shifts may be natural, induced by variations in the solar cycle, most of the changes observed have human activities as the main driver behind them. Burning of fossil fuels to generate power, explosion in manufacturing and industry, cutting down of forests and excessive use of transportation are just some of the human factors that add to the greenhouse gas emissions that blanket the Earth, trapping the sun’s heat which then disastrously affects climate change.

In the face of alarming scientific data and the destruction perpetrated through natural disasters brought on by climate change; measured in terms of lives lost, economic devastation and the consequent disruption of social fabric; one is forced to question whether it is even possible to achieve the sustainable development required to keep our economies and societies functioning optimally without further adding to this looming threat we face? At the risk of being termed an unreal optimist, I believe the answer to that question is a resounding yes. We can sustain and augment economic and social growth without adversely contributing to furthering harmful climate change. Is it an easy goal to aspire to? Absolutely not. Is it an achievable one? Absolutely yes.

What does aspiring to such a lofty goal actually entail in real terms beyond mere rhetoric? It necessitates a critical conversion from the dependency on consuming fossil fuel based energy sources to the usage of clean and renewable ones throughout all sectors of our economic and social activities. This will not only require a shift in physical terms but more importantly, a critical modification in our established mental paradigms.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 7 (UNSDG7), one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, aims to “ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all”. The UNSDG7 is a precursor to Pakistan’s own Clean Green Initiative and it is in conflation with both these guidelines that USF Pakistan has taken concrete measures to play its part in achieving progress without adding to the already burgeoning weight of destructive climate change.

With the goal of utilizing renewable energy wherever possible while still accomplishing its objective of providing seamless connectivity to rural and remote areas, USF Pakistan took the lead in setting up self-sustainable mobile networks with higher efficiency through solar-powered telecom towers. With 3710 cell sites installed since its inception, USF has ensured that 1842 of these are powered through solar energy. These solar-powered cell towers contribute significantly towards eliminating gas emissions in comparison to the smoke generating diesel gensets previously used in tower operations. This has additionally provided mobile operators substantial benefits from the net-metering opportunities being presented by current utility providers.

This may seem like a small step forward but it would be naïve to underestimate the impact such measures have in inspiring others to seek innovative solutions ensuring the use of cleaner energy. The ability to use solar energy while still providing broadband service access to the rural and remote populace of Pakistan also has the incremental advantage of educating them about the potential benefits of using clean and renewable energy sources.

At USF Pakistan, we strive daily to find novel ways to incorporate the latest technologies available to us in order to reduce our carbon footprint by any and every means possible. While acknowledging that the road ahead is long and arduous, we also resolve to never shirk from traveling on it no matter the obstacles we face.

We hope to inspire others, not just in the information and communications technology industry, but across the board, to follow our lead and search for ways to minimize our carbon footprint, both at an organizational and an individual level, as much as possible. Together, we can all play a part in promoting the use of clean and renewable energy sources, making Pakistan a safer and healthier place for ourselves and our generations to come.

The writer is CEO of the Universal Service Fund, established by the government of Pakistan under the Ministry of IT & Telecom.