**Technology in development**

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The development sector in Pakistan has many problems that are proportionate to the problems of human development itself. Misappropriation of funds, structural barriers, planning and coordination difficulties, slow-moving bureaucracy etc. are rife in this career path. And yet, workers of this sector—from field researchers to technocrats—bring energy and enthusiasm to the battlefield. They believe in the cause; in working for an ideal future and towards progress.

But while there are high ambitions for development and progress, there is also loss of critical information and reflection on the process of development. Development in Pakistan has become traditional, sedimentary, and formulaic. Build a water filtration plant in a low-resource village. Provide skills training to enterprising women. Take an equation and solve for x. This myopic view of problem solving is ignoring the only phenomenon in society that is crucial for and related to the development problem—technology.

[Recovering forest land from grabbers govt's priority: PM](https://nation.com.pk/26-Nov-2021/recovering-forest-land-from-grabbers-govt-s-priority-pm)

Yes; development projects have started making use of technology to improve socioeconomic indicators. Yes; education-technology, fin-tech, health-technology, and other blended innovations have started cropping up in development projects. And yes; the development sector looks to hire semi-technologically-skilled workers as a baseline. But to really move beyond the view of development as a traditional empowerment process means to reckon with the all-pervasive and disruptive nature of technology as the major driving force of progress in the world.

There are two ways to reflect on technology in the development of Pakistan at present. One is the way that technology interacts with the social fabric of Pakistan and most often shapes social and economic inequality as a fringe benefit. The other has to do with the way that technology drives the development sector in Pakistan—whether it is by determined, conscious effort or unplanned accident.

Consider social media. Unprecedented access to information, connectivity, and freedom of speech have yielded different results for scores of different socioeconomic groups. For instance, Twitter and Facebook are still commonly used as trusted sources of information in some lesser developed provinces of Pakistan. Political pressure groups mobilise through these channels and share their agendas with a wide audience.

[Stability in Afghanistan of critical importance for all SCO member states: Qureshi](https://nation.com.pk/26-Nov-2021/stability-in-afghanistan-of-critical-importance-for-all-sco-member-states-qureshi)

By virtue of its no-cost membership, social media superficially plays itself as The Great Social Equaliser—giving access and information to all. But hasn’t social media amplified social exclusion, bigotry, and hate in Pakistan? Social networking sites incite rage, harassment, and all-out violations of human rights and protocols of justice—as exemplified by the recent leaking of the Noor Mukadam videos. Social media has also become a social asset, touted by influencers and those with many followers to reinforce class boundaries and exclusion.

Social media is only the shallow murky water at the edge of disparity that technology brings to communities in Pakistan. Technology also enhances social inequality in Pakistan through its cost of ownership—the symbolic value of a Netflix membership or having an iPhone, contrasted with the struggle of those who can’t afford a 125 cc motorcycle brings to light how proprietary technology has become social capital in itself. Everyday devices and electronics are yet another site to display wealth here.

[Cop arrested over allegedly killing vaccinator in Balochistan](https://nation.com.pk/26-Nov-2021/cop-arrested-over-allegedly-killing-vaccinator-in-balochistan)

In a different vein, access to education in technology such as a degree in information technology, computer science, or data analytics gives students a competitive edge over those who don’t have the aptitude for or access to such an education. Deskilling laborers (even the degree-holding ones!) and monopolising the job market are the cornerstone features of how technology has turned the knowledge economy and labour market upside-down.

Of course, this has implications on the kinds of work that take place in the job market and subsequently, the kind of economy that Pakistan has. Still, this is a highly specialised and minority work sphere, despite many jobs having some element of technology in them.

Technology has simultaneously put Pakistan in an economic development lag, as innovation in production and manufacturing has been extremely slow compared to the leaps and bounds witnessed in the developed world. The cost of imported products is as high as the quality of locally-made products is low. How can Pakistan even hope to develop in comparison to the rest of the world when technology has widened the gap in acceleration, innovation, and breakthroughs globally?

[New LG bill to be tabled in Sindh Assembly today](https://nation.com.pk/26-Nov-2021/new-lg-bill-to-be-tabled-in-sindh-assembly-today)

In another global view, technological developments also mean that the quality of life and services available to other countries don’t exist in this one. From Uber Eats to modern vending machines to virtual assistants, none of this is available in Pakistan. The majority population doesn’t get to benefit from the ease of life associated with technology. And perhaps they wouldn’t want to—but that doesn’t mean that they don’t deserve the choice. It is not questionable—that access to technology is correlated to quality of living, despite its many misgivings including those related to social media.

The critical question is: does the multiplier effect of technology mean that some parts of the world will never be as developed as the rest of it—or can the pace and growth of technology of the future bring stability instead of conflict? For those working in the development sector, it is vital that technology be understood as the prime parallel and interconnected driver of change over social, political, and economic factors.

[Number of critical Covid patients falls below 1,000 in Pakistan](https://nation.com.pk/26-Nov-2021/number-of-critical-covid-patients-falls-below-1-000-in-pakistan)

To really capitalise on the fact that development is now so blatantly linked to technological advancement means to move beyond the routine capacity-building training and workshop style of “development” the sector operates in. It is time to conceptually embrace technology as the main feature of any process of development to first, reorient the definition of development, and second, harness this understanding to reframe development work in Pakistan.