On October 19, 2021, ministers of finance and planning, together with high-level government officials from the 82 HCP member countries along with private sector groups and development partners, participated in the Human Capital Project Ministerial Conclave to discuss Arresting Human Capital Losses due to COVID-19: Reimagining Service Delivery in a Digital Age.

World Bank Group President David Malpass opened the Conclave emphasizing the need to place investments in people at the center of the response to the greatest human capital crisis in living memory. He called on countries to leverage the transformational potential of technology to support scalable safety nets using mobile money payments, to advance health outcomes using telehealth and digital health, and to safeguard learning using technology-based solutions including distance learning.

Mamta Murthi, World Bank Vice President for Human Development, chaired the Conclave, covering three main themes:

1. Scalability: Of spending on human capital, notably by using technological innovations to reorganize how, by whom, and where coordinated services are delivered at the same cost or less with better results. Using systems to deliver multiple services can provide economies of scale. Improving the speed of response outlined the teacher-centered “high-touch, high-tech” approach that uses technology as an equalizer for educational opportunities and a catalyst for better learning by providing curriculum support to teachers, allowing them to focus more on the needs of their students.

2. Efficiency: Of spending on human capital, notably by using technological innovations to reorganize how, by whom, and where coordinated services are delivered at the same cost or less with better results. Using systems to deliver multiple services can provide economies of scale. Improving the speed of response outlined the teacher-centered “high-touch, high-tech” approach that uses technology as an equalizer for educational opportunities and a catalyst for better learning by providing curriculum support to teachers, allowing them to focus more on the needs of their students.

3. Equity: Of spending on human capital, notably by using technological innovations to reorganize how, by whom, and where coordinated services are delivered at the same cost or less with better results. Using systems to deliver multiple services can provide economies of scale. Improving the speed of response outlined the teacher-centered “high-touch, high-tech” approach that uses technology as an equalizer for educational opportunities and a catalyst for better learning by providing curriculum support to teachers, allowing them to focus more on the needs of their students.

Mamta Murthi, World Bank Vice President for Human Development, closed the event by reminding people that COVID-19 is a huge setback for human capital and therefore prioritizing human capital within fiscal constraints is important not only for people, but for long-term growth and economic productivity. She emphasized that technology can be part of the solution but must be well integrated within programs and sectors, fostering trust and leveraging innovation.

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• On a global scale, the Covid-19 pandemic is the greatest blow to human capital in living memory. Unless countries quickly put in place policies to prevent a further erosion of human capital, and to recover losses, there will be substantial, negative long-term consequences for labor productivity and growth. Moreover, because the pandemic has disproportionately affected poorer households, it will deepen existing inequalities and increase the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

• Yet, faster adoption of digital solutions can radically change the way services that safeguard human capital are designed, catalyzing new and efficient ways for human capital accumulation.

• Technology alone is not an effective solution; it must be coupled with trust and a people-centered approach to achieve desired outcomes.

• The crisis can be an opportunity to build on innovative uses of data and technology for service delivery, and scale them up where feasible for maximum impact. The private sector has a key role to play in fostering innovation and incubating scalable, cost-effective solutions.

• Countries need to make critical investment choices now on how to reimagine human capital service delivery in ways that are integrated, coordinated with a whole of society approach, based on three key principles of scalability, efficiency, and equity.

• Navigating this challenging period requires setting key policy priorities around investing in people, that are grounded in country context, and aim to deliver services that can withstand the unique stresses of the pandemic while leveraging the disruptive and transformative technologies area.