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Meeting the Challenge of the Millennium Development Goals through the Application of ICTs for Education

During the last decade, it has been widely noted and documented that ICTs have established themselves as an indispensable element in assisting countries achieve their national development needs and priorities and specifically assist in meeting international development goals enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

However, before any critical discussion can be undertaken on the modalities of how ICTs can assist the MDGs, it must be noted that the fundamental question that has to be addressed is the development of relevant and adequate capacities of the citizens to fully leverage and capitalize on these new opportunities that ICTs provide to these nations.

The main challenge across the region is less a matter of access and distribution of technology *per se* and more a matter of creating the enabling environment and capacity building efforts that will lead to 'value' creation with ICTs for people, businesses and governments. The gap in opportunities occurring across and within countries is primarily due to differences in starting points; inaccessibility to technology and knowledge exchange; lack of appropriate policies and strategies; lack of infrastructure; and inhibiting social and cultural factors. This digital gap does not seem to be narrowing if it is perceived from a capacity perspective.

Shahid Akhtar has been working in international development for over 30 years across all developing regions of the world. He is presently Editor-in-Chief of the Digital Review of Asia-Pacific published by the international network of UNESCO Chairs of Communication, ORBICOM. Between 2001 and 2007, he was the Chief Technical Advisor and Programme Coordinator for UNDP's Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP). Prior to that, he worked with an inter-governmental organization in Nepal and, for 24 years, he was with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada.

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