



With breaking stories and
newswire products from

UN NEWS CENTRE



Connection technologies to play critical role in building sustainable future – UN



Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

6 February 2012 –

The upcoming United Nations summit on sustainable development is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to set the world on a durable track that guarantees a decent standard of living for everyone today without compromising the needs of future generations, a top UN official says.

Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, told a conference on Saturday at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, that so-called connection technologies –

such as the Internet, mobile telephones and text messages – can play a critical role in building a more sustainable future.

The conference, jointly organized by the US Department of State and Stanford University, brought together more than 400 global policymakers, development practitioners and technology innovators and was aimed at exploring how to advance sustainable development in health, environment, agriculture and other fields.

Together we can leverage the transformational power of connection technologies to build a fairer, more sustainable and prosperous world for all.

Panel sessions examined the innovation culture, and the role of governments and civil society, in fostering innovation.

The three-day conference is being held ahead of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which is slated to take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June.

Mr. Zukang, who is also Secretary-General of Rio+20, pointed out that there were six billion mobile devices worldwide, and 1.2 billion mobile Web users. In 2011, seven trillion mobile phone texts were sent around the globe. By the year 2015, 183 billion smart phone applications are expected to be downloaded.

“These benefits have been vast and profound... connection technologies have enhanced productivity by putting information at our fingertips. They help overcome disadvantages, contributing to social equity. Thanks to these tools, many more groups now enjoy access to essential information, knowledge and services.”

He said connection technologies help complement and enhance traditional education, serving as teaching aids and making it possible to access free textbooks, digital and e-publications.

“My department has projected the world population to reach nine billion by 2050. The resources of our planet will not increase during this span. If we want a future where there is economic growth, equity, social inclusiveness, and environmental sustainability... connection technologies will be critical. We owe our young people, and our children, a hopeful future, a future we all want.”

He called on delegates to advance the sustainable development agenda, through a big push in information and connection technologies. He also urged them to develop and bring new voluntary initiatives to Rio+20.

“I look forward to continued global leadership by the United States in advancing sustainable development. Together we can leverage the transformational power of connection technologies to build a fairer, more sustainable and prosperous world for all,” said Mr. Zukang.

Mr. Zukang said there was a great need to address the digital divide. Experience on the ground strongly suggests that there is a tremendous yearning among the poor – not only for ICTs per se – but also for what ICTs can make possible.

“We must give ICTs the status of basic infrastructure, similar to energy or water. The donor community should review their development policies in the same vein.”

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[Sustainable development the focus of talks between Assembly chief and French officials](#)