

## Technology and innovation can help expand education for all – UN official



3 September 2009 – Making use of the latest information and communication technology (ICT) and innovation can help countries expand educational opportunities for all in a way that also advances development, a senior United Nations official said today.

“Technology and innovation are keys to accelerating progress towards the **MDGs**, particularly in countries that are falling behind,” Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs told the Global Forum on ICT and innovation for Education, referring to the eight anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline.

The latest update on the MDGs shows that progress has so far been mixed, he noted at the event in the Mexican city of Monterrey.

With some six years remaining before 2015, some goals are on target. For example, enrolment in primary education has risen from 83 per cent in 2000 to 88 per cent in 2007, and child mortality is steadily decreasing.

At the same time, the current global downturn risks reversing some of the positive trends, he added, noting that an estimated 55 to 90 million more people will fall below the poverty line.

“Education is the foundation of a modern and thriving economy,” Mr. Sha stated. “It empowers poor and marginalized communities and enables them to contribute to economic and social development.

“ICT and innovation can open up new opportunities for both expanding the reach and improving the quality of education in developing regions, by providing practical and enabling solutions to current problems.”

He said the advent of universally accessible information, the rapid development of next generation networks and multi-lingual software, low-cost hardware, new mobile platforms and other innovations “all present a real opportunity to developing countries to employ ICT to lift the quality of education and make it universally accessible.”

The key to putting ICT to use in schools and colleges – where the main obstacles are the high cost of connectivity and computers and the lack of qualified teachers – is affordable connectivity, low-cost computing devices and applications that can be used for education and other services, he said, adding that training of instructors should go hand in hand with advances in access and connectivity.

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