

ABSTRACT

TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH ASIA Inaugural Session, Sixth Annual Regional Meeting of OneWorld South Asia

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Executive Summary

Since the endorsement of the Millennium Declaration in 2000, the government of Nepal has remained committed to taking the necessary efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

The country's Tenth Plan/ Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers lays down a broad framework for the implementation of medium term strategy aimed at achieving the MDGs. While MDG's provide a comprehensive framework for redefining our developmental priorities, the realization of the same in their entirety is proving to be a challenging proposition in Nepal due to many problems ranging from lack of political constancy to paucity of resources.

The MDG Progress Report published in the year 2005 that maps Nepal's progress in terms of achieving the MDGs, has highlighted the gaps in terms of programmes and policies and presented recommendations for adapting them to attain the MDGs. Together with MDG Needs Assessment study jointly undertaken by National Planning Commission and UNDP, the recommendations of the Progress Report 2005 also calls for enhanced efforts to mainstream all international development instruments and initiatives (such as Education for All, Convention on Elimination of all kinds of Discrimination Against women, Beijing +10, Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS and 20/20 Initiative for Basic Social Services) and making them even more focused towards the MDGs.

In addition, the Needs Assessment study also points towards glaring resource gaps underscoring the need to embark on more focused, wide based resource mobilization initiatives. The Needs Assessment also takes note of the fact that a poor transport network, lack of market access and limited electricity is also hindering growth, especially in rural areas where most Nepalis live.

ICTs and MDGs

One of the key observations that has emerged from debates surrounding MDGs is that it is simply not possible to attain the goals by following a business-as-usual pattern of investment and service delivery system. This is probably where technology based solutions come in. Such solutions offer great prospects of enhancing the traditional service delivery systems and lend themselves to customization in terms of meeting specific service, knowledge and information needs of target beneficiaries. ICTs offer prospects for bridging gaps in delivery of services aligned with MDGs.

Innovatively applied, ICTs based implementations can also be geared towards making up for poor transport network and lack of market access that characterize development landscape of a country like Nepal. Given the resourcefulness of ICTs, innovative strategies with embedded ICT based implementations can be devised to catalyze efforts aimed at reaching MDGs in the developing world.

Nepal has taken conscious efforts aimed at the development of ICT sector in the country. The broad IT policy framework adopted by Nepal factors in not only the prospects of economic growth that could be achieved through a robust ICT sector but also the developmental potentials

of ICTs. It is along these lines that Nepal has made conscious efforts towards bridging the digital divide by expanding the telecom access and through the establishment rural telecentres.

The commitment towards the achievement of MDGs also comes concomitant with a new political imperative reflected through people's aspirations, which emerged during the recent popular movement leading to revolutionary political changes. In a new, emergent Nepal, strategies aimed at reducing poverty and achieving MDGs will definitely take centre stage. The application of ICTs holds immense potential of catalyzing this process. What is required, however, is an innovative strategic framework that factors in transformative potentials of ICTs.
