E:Services: The new paradigm for development and the achievement of the MDGs

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Video recorded message by
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Distinguished Guests,

On behalf of the UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova, it gives me great pleasure to deliver this message to the 11th INFOPoverty World Conference organized by the Observatory for Cultural and Audiovisual Communication in the Mediterranean and in the World (OCCAM).

We have five years left to meet the first target of the Millennium Development Goals and are conscious that more political will, more resources and better targeted policies are urgently needed to reduce poverty. It is estimated that 53 million people in developing countries will fall into poverty on top of the 130 million who became poor due to the impact of the food and oil crisis in 2008. So how can information and communication innovations urgently respond to poverty issues? It is a loaded question but I’m pleased to congratulate OCCAM for organizing this conference which I’m confident will address a wide range of issues related to e-services and poverty eradication over the two day deliberations.

Technology has always been an important determinant of productivity in the modern economy. In that same sense, the application of information technology in public service delivery is crucial particularly at a time of economic stress. I believe that
E-service delivery can contribute to efforts to reduce poverty, increase employment and moderate impacts of the financial and economic crisis.

The potential solutions no doubt need to be innovative and geared towards pro-poor services, especially in rural areas, where the majority of populations in developing countries live. Please remember that expanding relevant learning opportunities at all levels – from early childhood through youth and adult life – and providing basic reading skills to students is one of the catalytic actions that could lift 171 million people out of poverty. It is a known fact that children whose parents have at least a basic education are 5 to 10 per cent more likely to live past the age of five, in no small part because educated mothers and fathers are more likely to consult medical professionals when they fall ill.

It should be remembered that in 2009, television had a penetration rate of 75 percent in most parts of the world but it reaches only 28 percent of households in Africa\(^1\). In least developing countries, one third of households on average have a TV compared to two-thirds with a radio suggesting that more

\(^1\) WSIS Monitoring Report, 2010.
effort needs to be made to bring broadcasting services to all households, in particular in rural areas.

Despite the exponential growth of access to information technologies, one should remember that only 18 per cent of the population in developing countries uses the Internet compared to 60 per cent in the developed world according to the UN General Assembly\(^2\). This underlying reality and preoccupation does not undermine the relevance and value of information technologies, rather it reinforces the need to roll out broadband networks, develop applications and local content, as well as place a substantial amount of additional emphasis on media and information literacy and multilingualism.

UNESCO’s overarching objective to build knowledge societies includes dimensions of social, cultural, economic, political and institutional transformation. It is centred around a holistic, multidimensional and development oriented vision based on four principles namely, freedom of expression, universal access to information, equal access to education and cultural and linguistic diversity all of which also address cross-cutting priorities such as gender equality and sustainable development.

\(^2\) UN General Assembly, Sixty-fifth Session, A/C.2/65/L.56.
Ladies and Gentleman,

I trust that we can live to be the first generation ever to bring poverty to a standstill and it is my sincere hope that the conclusions of the 11\textsuperscript{th} INFOPoverty World will take us one step closer to fulfilling that objective.

I thank you for according me the privilege of your attention and wish you a dynamic and successful conference.